Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Back To Basics: Confessing Jesus as Lord and Glorifying God
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1386

We're studying the great theme of spiritual growth, and really looking at the keys to spiritual growth, what are the very vital ingredients in the spiritual maturity process. In our first lesson last time we focused on the concept of the glory of God, based on our study of Second Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 18, where we see that as a believer focuses his life and attention on the glory of God, as he does that, he will be changed into the very image of the Lord from one level of glory to the next, by the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit, then, is the energy in spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is becoming more and more like Christ. And the pull that pulls us along, that gives the Spirit of God the thrust is as we gaze at the glory of the Lord. As we focus our attention on giving glory to God we are then pulled in the process of spiritual maturity. Now we closed our last study by saying we wanted to share some practical ways in which we glorify God. If glorifying God is the master key to spiritual growth, what are the other keys that make up that master key? First of all, we glorify God by confessing Jesus as Lord.

Now that's where it all begins. If my life is to be focused at glorifying God that means that initially I must focus my attention on the lordship of Christ. Now what do I mean by that? Well, Philippians, chapter 2 gives us the answer, verses 9 through 11. After the great passage on the kenosis or the humiliation of Christ, talking about how He became a man and took upon Him the form of a servant, was found in fashion as a man, “humbled Himself, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Then the Word of God says this, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, in earth, and under the earth." Now listen. "And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Now listen, the humiliation of Jesus Christ was an act of obedience to the Father. In response, the Father glorified Jesus Christ, and exalted Him, and then He calls on everything in the universe to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and then gives this closing statement, "to the glory of God, the Father." The reason then, that we are to confess Jesus as Lord, is because it glorifies God, the Father.

Now that is the basic principle of salvation. We are to confess Christ as Lord--that is salvation--for the glory of God. Now I believe that most people think that we should be saved for other reasons than the glory of God. If you asked the average person, “Why do you share Jesus Christ, why do you communicate your faith?” They'll probably say, well, because we want to keep people out of going to hell. We want them to avoid eternal punishment. Now that's a valid reason, but not the major one. The major reason for people to be saved is not to avoid hell. Someone else might say, no I, I present

Christ because of love, the love of Christ constrains me, because God loves them and because I love them I tell them about Christ. And that's a valid reason but not the main one. And someone might say, well I speak the gospel because I'm commanded to do that, I'm commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel, make disciples, teach them all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. I'm commanded, or I love, or I want to keep people out of hell; and all those are valid and all of those are biblical reasons for evangelism. But they don't come to the apex. The major reason to preach the gospel, the major reason to become a believer, is for the glory of God.

It boils down to this: To live without salvation is to deny Christ, and to deny Christ is the greatest affront possible to God. It is the one sin that is unforgivable. If a person continues in unbelief, that is an unforgivable sin. In fact that is the major sin of man. Jesus said in John 16 that He would send the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin. What sin? "Because they believe not in me." The greatest sin that a man can commit is the failure to believe in Jesus Christ. Why? Because that is to say that He is not God, He is not the Savior, He is not to be worshiped, He is not to be Lord. And to say that is to dishonor the Father. In John, chapter 5, for example, Jesus says so pointedly in verse 23, "All men should honor the Son [Listen.] even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who sent him." You cannot give glory to God unless you give glory to His Son, who is the fullness of His glory. So listen, we begin then to give glory to God when we give glory to Christ, and how do you do that? By confessing Him as Lord; and that simply means salvation. He's not talking about some second act. You don't say, well uh, I've taken Him as Savior but later on I'll make Him Lord. No, no, those aren't two distinct things. When you are saved you confess Christ as Lord; that is salvation. In Romans 10:9 and 10 it says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

In other words, salvation is a matter of confessing the lordship of Christ, that He is God, that He is sovereign, that He is Lord, and that is a personal application of that reality. Somebody asked me not long ago if I was a lordship salvationist. I wasn't sure of what that was. I thought you were supposed to stand on a corner and play a trumpet or beat a drum if you were one of those. But that isn't really what he meant. A lordship salvationist, he meant, is somebody who believes that you must believe that Jesus is Lord to be saved. He said, “Do you believe that way?” I said, “I don't know any other way to accept Christ. He is Lord, and I accept Him on His terms, not mine.” I don't redefine Jesus as something less than He is, and take Him that way. “Is He Lord?” I said to this person. And he said, yes. I said, “Then how do you take Him? You must take Him as He is.” If you confess Jesus as Lord, it is to the glory of God.

Now, simply stated, no one has the capacity to go beyond that in spiritual maturity; no one can glorify God until they start right there. That's the touchstone, that's where it all begins. Let me take this a step further for those of us that are Christians. I believe that if Christ is Lord in our lives; if we have received Him, and we're born again, and He rules. And He does rule, by the way, all our lives. It's only a question of whether we obey it, not whether He rules. And as He rules in our lives we must

keep in mind that the preaching of the gospel is mainly so that He may rule in other lives for His own glory. In other words, the great sin of man is to live and not glorify God. Henry Martyn, who was a great missionary in India for many years, when he first went there went into a pagan temple and he saw all these people worshiping their pagan gods and he burst out the backdoor. And with tears in his eyes he ran from the place and he came to his place of abode and he took out his diary, and he wrote these words in it, “I cannot endure existence if Jesus is to be so dishonored.” In other words, the great reality in his life was that he couldn't tolerate somebody who didn't glorify Christ. In Romans, chapter 1, Paul says that we preach obedience to the nations, for the sake of the Name. He says, we don't preach the gospel for their sake, we preach the gospel for His sake. Third John, chapter 7, he says we go out preaching for the sake of the Name. Same thought. Not for their sake, for His sake. So that He might be acknowledged as Lord, and that's where it begins. If you're not a Christian, you've never confessed Christ as Lord, there is no capacity within you to live to His glory. It's an utter impossibility, cannot be done, because that's where it all begins. You cannot say, I deny Christ, He is not my Savior, He is not my Lord, and then proceed to try to grow spiritually or proceed to try to glorify God in another way. You are slapping God in the face at the very most vital point. If you dishonor the Son, you dishonor the Father. So glorifying God then, begins as Paul says in Philippians 2, with confessing Jesus as Lord to the glory of God, the Father. And so we say that salvation is a necessary beginning for spiritual growth. The fact is you can't grow until you're born.

Now, second truth: The second thing that I want to share with you along this line is this; we will glorify God, firstly by confessing Jesus as Lord, and secondly by aiming our lives to obey His lordship. Secondly, by aiming our lives to obey His lordship. When we allow God to clothe us with the purple robe of His righteousness, He is glori-fied. When we open our hearts and receive His Son, He is glorified. When His Spirit takes up residence in our lives, He is glorified. When we call Jesus Lord, He is glorified. But then there's a second corollary. Having received the Lord, we are to respond to His lord-ship. The key verse I want you to understand; and this is First Corinthians 10:31, it says this, "Whatever you do, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." Now, you have confessed Jesus as Lord, to the glory of God. Now, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, or whatever it is, and by the way, eat-ing and drinking is simply symbolic of the most mundane, menial func-tions of life. Even something as minimal, as routine, as ordinary, as com-mon, as constant, as eating and drinking should have as its focus the glory of God. And so that would really give us grounds to back up and do a few messages on how to eat to the glory of God and how to drink to the glory of God, because it starts even at the most minimal level of life, the routine things, and it ascends from there. No matter what you do, do it all to the glory of God. The idea, then, is that that becomes a pervasive attitude; no matter what I do, it is to the glory of God that my focus must be made.

Now certainly this is the way that Jesus lived. In John, chapter 8, and in verse 50, Jesus says this, "I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth." Back in verse 49, "I honor my Father." Jesus said, I'm here for one reason, not My glory but His glory. And that's really what we're saying. You're going to grow spiritually; you're going to focus on His glory when that becomes the

pervasive element of your life. Now what does a hypocrite seek to do? What do men seek to do? Oh, they seek to steal the glory of God, and in its place substitute their own. Matthew, chapter 6, for illustration's sake, we find in verse 1, the Lord says, "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, [that is, your giving] to be seen by them; otherwise you have no reward of your Father who is in heaven." In other words, if you're trying to put on a production so everybody'll think you're spiritual, you're not going to be rewarded. "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, (Watch this.) that they may have glory from men." What always stands in the way of glorifying God is us seeking glory from men. That's just what we read, didn't we? In the Old Testament, where Jeremiah says, "Don't be proud, give glory to God." So, if I am to aim my life at this, if I am to submit in obedience to the lordship of Christ, there will be an attitude of hum-ility, there will be the death of pride. We must beware of self-wor-ship. We must aim always and only at God's glory.

Now what does that mean? To say that I submit in obedience to His lordship, to say I aim my life at that, to say whether I eat or drink or whatever I do I do it all to the glory of God, just exactly what does that mean? Well, let me say it this way, and I'll just give you a few sub-points right here. First of all, it means that you will give God glory no matter what the cost. No matter what the cost. Now that's a pretty heavy statement, but that's the essence of what it means to submit to His lordship, to aim your life at His glory. You will glorify Him no matter what it costs. In John 12 and verse 27, Jesus said this, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." What should be My prayer as I anticipate the cross? God, bail Me out? This is the hour for which I came. "Father, glorify thy name." And "there came then a voice from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" God, He says humanly, I'd like to get out of this, this is an incredible price to pay, pain, anguish, sin-bearing; but Father, glorify Your name no matter what it costs Me. See? Now that's what it means. As you learn to live your life, content to do God's will at any cost, content to glorify Him no matter what the price, you'll be fulfilling that second great principle of spiritual growth, that second great key. You'll be unlocking that area of obedience to His lordship.

Let me give you another illustration by having you turn to the end of the book of John, John chapter 21. And here we run into this situation with the apostle Peter. We'll be coming back to this very same incident in our story because it illustrates several great truths of spiritual growth. Peter has been earmarked by God since before the foundation of the world for very important functions. Peter is to be the key to the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts. He is the key in the apostolic preaching of the cross as the church is born in Jerusalem and moves out around the world. He is to be a dynam-ic and gifted leader. And so it's very important that he be firmed up, rooted, set in place for the task to which God has called him. But unfortunately, Peter is a little flaky, to put it in a contemporary term, and it's very hard for Peter to make a commitment. He's got all kinds of verbiage; he just doesn't hang in there. Every time he was given a test he flunked. If he was a seminary student he would have long been gone. And yet the Lord knows that this is a very needed man. And so even though he has a, He

has helped Peter in the past, He's gone out of His way to show him His power, to walk on water, He has fed him at the point of the feeding of the five thousand, he was there at the transfiguration, he has heard the great confession, and really it came out of his own mouth but from God's heart, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter has been on some tremendous adventures with Christ, where he has seen displays of power even in the garden as the soldiers came, and when Jesus spoke they all fell over backwards like dominoes. I mean Peter has seen some great things. Amazingly enough, he's even seen the resurrected Christ in the upper room, and by this time of John 21, had a personal audience with the resurrected Christ. And yet, after all of that, he's still flaky, he's still. I think he felt inadequate. I think he looked at himself and said, Peter, every time you've ever been given a test you blew it. Who's to say you're going to pass one now? And Jesus said to him, Peter, you go into Galilee and go in a mountain and wait. And He was testing him. And wait till I come, He said. Don't go anywhere; just stay there.

Well, Peter is there in chapter 21 but he's getting an itchy tunic, and he's not going to be able to sit on the side of that hill much longer. He was kind of a hyper guy to start with and it's kind of tough to just sit up there and wait. He's been waiting and waiting and waiting and Christ hasn't appeared, and so finally he says in verse 3, "I'm going fishing." Aorist tense; final action. I'm going back to what I used to do. I never did believe myself in this ministry deal anyway; I've bombed out every time I've had an opportunity; there's one thing I can do and it's fish; and I'm going back. And he was the leader, of course, and so all the other six guys like a bunch of rubber ducks came down the same hillside and said, we're going, too. So they all waddled down and got in a boat. Peter was the leader. That's the whole point, God wanted to use him. What happened in verse 3: "They entered into the boat," the Greek says, which may indicate they went back and picked up Peter's own boat. He was going back to his old profession and they were all going with him. They were all his fishing buddies. But if there was one thing they couldn't do was fish, because the Lord had rerouted every fish in the Sea of Galilee so they couldn't catch them, to get His point across.

So they fished all night and caught nothing. The Lord appeared in the morning, He had a confrontation with Peter, checked out his love, and we'll get to that text later. And then when Peter told Him three times he loved Him, He comes back with this in verse 18, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst where thou wouldest." Now just stop for a minute, Peter. You've pretty much had it your own way; you called the shots, put on your own belt and went where you wanted to go. “Girding up yourself” was a picture of preparation for a journey. Whenever you wanted to do what you wanted to do you did it. "But when you shall be old," that's going to change, "you will stretch forth your hands." And that very phrase is used in extra-biblical literature to speak of a crucifixion. You're going to stretch forth your hands, "somebody else is going to gird you, and take you where you don't want to go." Verse 19, watch it now, "This spoke he, signifying by what death he should (Here it comes.) glorify God."

Now notice this. Peter would come to the point in his life where he would glorify God by dying. How? Because he would be willing to pay any price before he would deny the will of God, even death. Now that was news to Peter, because every other time he'd faced death, he reneged on his testimony. On one occasion, when they confronted him with the fact that he was a follower of Jesus Christ, he cussed and took God's name in vain and swore that he was not, and made an oath that he never kept. So you see this is news to Peter. But what the Lord is saying is, Peter, there's going to come a day when you will die for Me, and in dying glorify Me. Why? Because that will be My will, and you will be content to die for My sake. That's the way it was with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I live, I live unto the Lord; if I die, I die unto the Lord; so whether I live or die, I'm the Lord's." And what's the difference? I'm the Lord's.

You see, to aim my life at the glory of God now that I'm a Christian, to focus on doing whatever I do, whether it's eating or drinking, to the glory of God, means that if it has to be death for His sake, let it be, let it be. I think of the tremendous story of the missionaries throughout the history of Christian missions, story after story after story becoming one great composite story of people willing to die for Christ. I think of Hebrews, chapter 11, the heroes of the faith who are listed there who died in the great anticipation of glory and resurrection, of whom the world was not worthy. There was no price too high for them. In fact in Isaiah 24:15, Isaiah cries to the remnant and says, "Glorify God in the fires." I think of Latimer and Ridley, who were burned at the stake for their faith, singing praises to Jesus Christ. I think of Savonarola, the great preacher in Italy, who had preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the system took him and burned him at the stake. Again and again through history there have been those willing to do anything for the cause of Christ.

And I always go back to the story of John Paton, that great missionary who went to the New Hebrides. He graduated from school and he was sent to the New Hebrides with his wife, and there were only man-eating cannibals there. And they landed on that little place, that little, they had to row a dinghy, because the ship went by. It didn't even go to the shore. And they rowed to shore, didn't speak the language, didn't know anybody. All they knew, people had come there and never returned; they had become somebody's lunch. And so they got on the shore. It's pretty tough, you know, to get on the shore of a place inhabited by cannibals whose language you don't speak and figure out how you start, right? I mean you don't put a little sign that says, “Sunday school class, Sunday at 9:30. We welcome you all.” That isn't really the way you do. What do you do? You don't know the language, you don't know the people, and your threat of life hangs over your head. I remember read-ing in a, a particular book something of the story of that. And later on the chief--was of the tribe in that area--was saved and he came to John Paton. And he said to him, Mr. Paton, I want to ask you a question, he says. In those early months that you were here, he says, who was the army that girded your place of dwelling every night and pro-tected you? God's holy angels apparently even became manifest in that protecting time. But Paton stayed there. After a few weeks his wife gave birth to a baby; the baby died a few days later; she died. He slept on their graves for three or four nights to keep the natives from digging them up and eating them. He stayed there alone, and he stayed there for 35 years. He says

in his biography that at the end of those 35 years, I don't know of one native that hasn't made at least a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. He went there with all the great hopes. The only thing he ever loved really in the world was his wife and then the cherished baby. He had to sleep on their graves and all alone he stayed, but God used him because he was content to do God's will no matter what it cost him. And that's what it means to aim your life at His purposes.

If you're charting your own course; and if you're saying, Lord, here's what I'll do and here's what I won't do; if you're saying, Lord I got it all outlined here; if you're not willing to pay the price of a little bit of embarrassment; if you're not willing to pay the price in humility of being defamed and dishonored by the world; if you're not willing to pay the price of a little less possessions in this life; then maybe you'll never know what it is to be content with His will at any price; and maybe you'll never really know what it is to grow spiritually because you'll not be aiming at His glory. It's when you are consumed with His glory and not your own comfort; and not your own ease, and not your own plans, and your own will. So, if I am then to aim my life at His glory, no matter what it is, from eating and drinking to dying, it means I have to be content with that will, no matter what it costs me. Secondly, if I aim my life at His glory it means that His glory becomes so consuming that I hurt when He is dishonored, and this is a very important concept.

I can usually tell when someone is aiming their life at the glory of God, by how they react to God being dishonored. For example, David, in Psalm 69:9 looked at the temple, and he looked at the worship of Israel and his heart broke. He said this: "Zeal for thine house has eaten me up." In other words, David said, I have such a tremendous love for You, and such a tremendous hatred for what dishonors You, I concern myself with Your temple and Your presence and Your worship, so that it literally tears me up. Then in the remainder of the verse he said this, "The reproaches that fall on you fall on me." In other words, when You're dishonored I hurt.

Now I'll tell you, I understand that a little bit as a father. You hurt my child, you hurt me. You hurt my wife, you hurt me. You hurt somebody I love, you hurt me. I've cried more in my life over things that have happened to other people I care about than I've ever cried about things that happened to me. In fact it's pretty hard for me to cry about things that happen to me; it's much easier for me to cry with somebody who's heart is broken for whom I care. And that's because I identify with them, in love. And when you have identified with God, the things that break your heart will not be the things that happen to you but the things that dishonor God. And that's the kind of mentality that really is saying I am so focused on God's glory, that what breaks His heart breaks my heart. And David said, zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches that fall on You fall on me.

And you know who quoted that verse, in the New Testament? Jesus did. Jesus said, zeal for Your house has eaten Me up, the reproaches that fall on You are fallen on Me. And you know when He said it? He said it just before He made a whip in the temple. And when He made the whip He started whipping people all through at the temple and He said, you've taken God's house, the place of His

glory, and you've turned it into a den of thieves. And He rebuked them and He blasted away at them with His whip and He overturned their tables and He chased them out. And He did it twice, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end. You see He couldn't tolerate God being dishonored. That's the mark of someone who lives for God's glory. Jesus was never concerned with His own pain, He was never concerned with His own agony, He was never concerned with His own defamation, He was only concerned with God being dishonored. Do you live your life that way? That is, aiming at the glory of God, that is, focusing on God's glory.

Number one, you don't care what it costs, and number two, you're consumed with how things affect Him. You know one of the greatest statements made in the book of Revelation is easily passed over. It is made in chapter 2 in reference to the church at Ephesus. It's a little word but it's a very, very important one. Of the church at Ephesus it was said, "Thou canst not bear them that are evil." That was one of the great characteristics of that church; they couldn't tolerate people that were evil. Why? Because they knew evil impinged upon the holiness of God and His will. I'm amazed how few Christians understand this. I am amazed how many Christians are so consumed in their own will, so consumed with their own comfort, so absorbed in their own problems, that they don't really feel the pain when God is dishonored. They feel it mostly when they are dishonored, and that's the wrong focus. But once in a while somebody gets the message and boy, is it exciting.

I remember a young girl who came to California some years ago. She came out here to live with a guy at UCLA who was a student. She was not a Christian. He was not a Christian, obviously. They were just living together. She was a high school girl. After a while he decided to kick her out. And she'd come all the way from a little town in West Virginia. And he was tired of her and so like some old, half-used rag he just threw her aside. She wandered around a little bit, and tried to take her life, and had slashed herself many times in many places on her hands and arms with razor blades, and bled, and somehow or another always been spared death. We came across this girl, had the opportunity to lead her to Christ. I'll never forget that time, my sister and myself talking with her, and she opened her heart to Christ. She said, my life is changed and I want to go back to my hometown, I want to tell my mother about Christ, and I want to tell my friends about Christ, and I want to get everything straightened out in my life. And said to her, I said, well, is there a church there that you can go to, is there somebody that can disciple you? She said, no, I don't know of a, of a church, in our little town except a Catholic Church. And she said, I really don't know any other Christians there but, but I'm going to go back and. I gave her the Bible, you know, in great fear that I'd have to leave her up to the Holy Spirit, right? Make sure He could do the job without me. So anyway, so anyway we, off she went, and I prayed for her. And she decided to attend the Catholic High School because she knew if she went back to her old high school, she had such a rotten reputation she'd likely fall into the same patterns. So she wanted to meet some new people. And well, she'd been gone three or four months and she wrote me a letter. And as I saw the letter I was deeply concerned with what it might say, fearful that she had probably wandered a, away and was writing for some counsel in the midst of a terrible situation. But this was what I read: “I hope everything is well with you. I've really begun to

put things together in the Bible. By reading the Old Testament I've been able to see how God deserves much more recognition that He's getting. I can see how He gave people so many chances and how they continued to break His heart by worshiping idols and sinning. God wanted the world to belong to Him. God also wanted Israel to sacrifice lambs and goats and oxen and things like that as an atonement to Him for sins. He is God, after all, and He had to have some payment for the terrible sins of men."

Let me interject at this point that she didn't have any tapes or study books that I know of; this was just from her reading of scripture. She says further: "To think that God actually talked and was in the visible presence of these people and yet they kept on complaining and sinning. Listen, I can almost feel the unbearable sadness that God feels when someone rejects and doesn't glorify Him." What an amazing insight for such a new believer. He's God, she said, He made us, He gave us everything, we continue to doubt and reject Him, it's awful when I think of how I hurt Him, I hope I can make it up. And then she goes on at the end to say, "I have a soft spot in my heart for God now. I can feel His jealousy when I see people worshiping idols and other gods. It's all so clear to me. God must be glorified, God must be worshiped, He deserves it, it's long overdue. And I can't wait to just tell Jesus and thus tell God indirectly that I love Him, and kiss the ground He walks on because He should be worshiped. I want God to be God and take His rightful place, and I'm tired of the way people keep putting Him down." It's amazing, isn't it, that somebody so new in the faith understood the whole picture of living to the glory of God, so that you hurt when God is dishonored. Now listen, I glorify God by confessing Jesus as Lord, and then I glorify God by bending my will to that lordship, no matter what it costs me, and so that I feel the pain that God feels.

There's a third element of this second point and that's this. You aim your life at the glory of God--watch this one--when you are content to be outdone by others. Hang on to that. You can always tell somebody who's really living for the glory of God because they're content to be outdone by somebody who does exactly what they do better. That's a tough one. You know that somebody said that when Satan fell he landed in the choir loft. Now I don't really know if that's true, but, you know, every once in a while you get in the choir and everybody wants to sing solos. And when somebody doesn't get to sing the solo then everybody else begins to complain, see. "I never get to sing the so..." They're not so concerned about God being glorified; they're concerned about them being heard. I know one pastor who has so many people bugging him to sing solos that once a year on a Sunday night he has solo night. And everybody who wants to sing gets one verse and they parade across the platform, sing their verse and on comes the next one. He gets it all over with in one night.

Now that's not just true of the choir, not just true of people in the pew, it's also true of people in the pulpit. I remember two pastors having a contest to see who could get the most people in Sunday school, and the one that lost got sick and threw up. He didn't want to lose to another pastor. Jealousy is a factor in the Christian life. You know why? Because we're more concerned about who gets the credit than that God be glorified. When you can rejoice that somebody does something for the Lord

better than you do it, then you're aiming at His glory. When you can rejoice when somebody can preach better, when somebody can teach better, when somebody can do whatever you do, and do it with a greater blessing, a greater response, then you're aiming at His glory. Let me give you an illustration of this that I think is very, very, wonderful. It's in Philippians, chapter 1, Philippians, chapter 1 and this is a tremendous truth, illustrated in the life of a wonderful man that we all know and love, the apostle Paul.

Now to get you into the picture a little let me remind you of this: as Paul writes Philippians it is most likely that he is a prisoner. I remember some years ago visiting the Mamertine Prison in Rome, which is the actual prison of this time. Very possibly Paul was in that very prison. There is a circular room under the ground, and a manhole-cover type affair at the top of the hole that was lifted, and prisoners were dropped in. And they just kept piling them in there, without sanitation, an incredibly gross kind of place. Passing alongside of this hole in the ground is a steel door and behind the steel door was the city's sewage system. After forty prisoners were in that area it was time, obviously because they wouldn't have any more room to get rid of them, and so they would drown them in the sewage of Rome, wash their bodies out, close the door and start with another group. Incredible place. This is the kind of condition the apostle Paul may well have been subjected to when he wrote, "Rejoice always; and again I say, rejoice." But it was in that kind of a setting that the apostle Paul really was coming to the end of his line. I mean he'd lived all the glory years, the great adventures through *ye*, through the expan-sion of the church in Asia *mina*, Minor; and in, into Greece; and the wonder of preaching in Athens on Mars Hill; the great accomplishments in Corinth; and the blessedness of Thessalonica; the tremendous joy of the Bereans, who searched the scriptures; all of the adventures of go-ing back to Jerusalem; and traveling again across the Mediterranean; the shipwreck; the victories; and all of the things that came into his life. This, this man is summing up a great life, but he's pretty well on the shelf. You know he's really the spiritual father, grandfather or uncle of everybody who was saved in the Gentile world. He was the key. He was founding churches in his own country before he ever was called to be a pastor at Antioch and from there sent on his mis-sionary tours. I mean he had a tremendous influence like no man who, who lived at that time in the Gentile world. He was everybody's hero.

In fact when he came to preach a sermon he could preach all night if he wanted and they loved it. A guy would fall out of the window and die and they'd just go downstairs, raise him from the dead, go back up of that one and preach the rest of the sermon. I reminded somebody one time, you know, that Paul preached all night; even when people, you know, died, he kept on preaching. And they said to me, well when you can raise them from the dead you can keep going, too. But anyway, Paul was so beloved by everybody that, that they listen, and when Paul came to town they embraced him. When he left town, Acts 20, the Ephesian elders fell all over his neck and kissed him and wept all over him because they wouldn't see his face anymore, and they loved him so much.

Now in, I'll tell you something, you know living in the world of that kind of acceptance, and living in the world of that kind of affection, living under that kind of love would be a tremendous experience, wouldn't it? Tremendous, to be so beloved, to be so accepted, to have everybody doting on you and sending you love gifts, such as even the Philippians sent him. Oh, he was beloved. But you know what was hap-pening? He was getting on the shelf now, and a new breed of young preachers was coming behind him. And man, they were capturing the fan-cy of the people, and they had little nuances, and new ways. They had learned all of the best of what Paul had and maybe advanced a little bit in technique. And you know they were the sharpshooters of the new era, and they were moving in behind Paul, and now Paul's a prisoner, he can't move, he's lost his mobility. And these guys are attracting the attention of the crowds, and the people are beginning to dote on them and they've forgotten those old fellows that have passed along, the apostles and, and Paul. Those are memories.

You know I, I often meet an old man like that. I remember meeting a dear old man of God in the Midwest and he was ninety-six. He hadn't been able to preach for about fifteen years, but He'd preached from the time he was twenty till he was about eighty-one. And he sat in the congregation and he listened to me preach, with his old Bible. And he kind of shook and his teeth didn't work too well; they clicked a lot, but I don't know whether they chewed very good. And nobody even knew who he was and he was very obscure, an old black suit and a string tie, and he had to wonder about all the glory days and all the great years when he was a shining sword in the usefulness of the Lord.

Well Paul was kind of in the, in the shelf kind of time of his life. And it wouldn't be long before he’d lay his head on a block, and an axe head would flash in the sun, and sever it from his body, and it'd be over for him in this world. And along behind him were coming these young men; and as young men are prone to do, to find their own place in the sun they invariably criticize the generation ahead of them. Well, you know, those old boys didn't really have it, they weren't up, they weren't with it. And they were saying things like, well you see Paul's a prisoner because, you know, the Lord just kind of gently shelved him. I mean he wasn't contemporary, he may have blown it in his life, we don't know all the things that went on, and there's a reason the Lord stuck him away like that. And so Paul says, concerning them, in verse 14, "And many of the brethren in the Lord, becoming confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Some people, you know, now that they see I'm a prisoner, they have become more bold. They're saying, if Paul can be a prisoner for Christ so can we. He's our model, he's our example. In other words some are still following me, some still believe in me. And boy, they're becoming bold, even though I'm a prisoner.

But some, verse 15, “preach Christ of envy, and strife." What do you mean, Paul? Well, some are out there preaching Christ, but it's out of envy. In other words, they're envious of what God has done in my life. They're envious of my reputation, they're envious of my place in the church, they're envious of the love that I have, and so they create strife in the Body over their envy. Verse 16: "They preach Christ contentiously, not sincer-ely." They want to add affliction to my bonds. It's not enough that I'm a

prisoner, but they're taking shots at me and they're double hurting me. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine young men coming along and taking shots at the, at the apostle Paul? I can. It's easy for a young man; it's easy to think the sun rises and sets on you, and the old generation that faded away, what do they know? That's why God lifts up the hoary heads, that's why God talks about elders, because there is something they know that young men need well to learn. They don't have all the answers. The longer I live the fewer answers I am sure about, and the more I look to the wisdom of the old. But they were preaching Christ and knocking Paul. But what's his attitude? I love this, verse 18: So what? “Notwithstanding, every way," I don't care how they preach, "whether it's pretense or truth, Christ is preached; and in that I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." In other words what Paul is saying: Look, if Christ is preached, who cares what they say about me? Isn't that great?

I'll tell you something, people. That is a level of spiritual maturity. When you confess Jesus as Lord, that's the beginning. When you bend to His lordship, to the point where you are content to give Him glory no matter what it costs, when you begin to feel the things that dishonor Him, and when you don't mind being dishonored if He is honored, you are aiming your life at His glory. And you are moving toward maturity. Now this is where it has to begin, with a life of obedient submission to Christ. Could I in-vite you to look with me at First Peter for a moment, and maybe we can sum this up in First Peter 4 and verse 14, First Peter 4 and verse 14. Just listen to this great thought. And remember that Peter is writing to some believers who are really going through it. I mean, they are being persecuted, they are being tried for their faith; it is tough to endure what they're enduring. They are suffering. They are being confronted by people who want to know answers about what they believe. Verse 14, "If you be reproached for the name of Christ; blessed are you, happy are you." Now wait a minute. Most Christians wouldn't experience that happiness. Most people, if they're reproached, even for the name of Christ, get angry, get reactionary, retaliatory, vengeful. You can't do that to me. I've seen people on the job be reproached for the name of Christ. I've seen athletes on professional teams be reproached for the name of Christ. I've had people mock me for the name of Christ. Can I say, I'm happy, I'm happy? That's what Peter says, you should be happy. That's a special blessing. That means Christ is visible enough for you to be reproached for Him. Look what he says, "For the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." In other words, if you are so living your life in obedience to His will that the world can't tolerate that kind of living; then believe it, the Spirit of glory is evident in your life, you are obviously living to the glory of God. Isn't that great?

Now if the world can take you, and you just flow with the system, you're not aiming at His glory, you're not progressing. On their part, verse 14, "Christ is evil spoken of, but on your part he is [What?] glorified." You know, he says, when you're reproached, they may speak evil. That's their view. His view is He is being glorified. And you know something? That's nowhere better illustrated than in the cross. While it looked like hell was having a carnival, and Jesus was bleeding, and they were mocking, and spitting, and reproaching, God was being glorified. For Jesus Himself prayed, “Father, glorify Me.” And He was anticipating the cross as a part of that glory. In John 13 He said, I'll be glorified, and He was pointing to the cross. But verse 15 says, this is important, First Peter 4:15, "But

let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody." Good grief, how did a busybody get in there with a murderer and a thief and an evildoer? But what he's saying is: Look, if you're going to suffer (verse 16) suffer as a Christian. "And let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf." You ought to be glad to suffer along with Him, to bear the reproach of Christ.

People, listen, it's that simple, and I'll just boil it down as we close. If I want to grow spiritually--and if I don't want to grow spiritually there's a good question of whether I'm really saved. Because I think one of the characteristics of life is that it reproduces, it matures, it progresses. If I have confessed Jesus as Lord and I'm redeemed, I'm born again, I'm alive spiritually, now I want to grow beyond that point. Then I aim my life at that growth, I focus on that growth from the viewpoint not of how am I going to grow, but how is God to be glorified. And as I am content to be outdone by others as long as He's glorified, as I am content to bear His own anxieties and reproaches, as I am content to suffer no matter what the cost, I will be living to His glory. And the sum of what it means here is very simple: what it means is you're going to run head on into the system. You cannot grow spiritually and be comfortable in the world; it can't happen.

Now by this I don't mean you got to be some kind of obtuse character that can't fit into anything. I don't mean by that you've got to be less than charming. I don't mean you've got to be obnoxious. But what I mean is that if you live a Christ-like life you will bear the reproach of Christ. Now listen, we live in a day when everybody wants to make Christianity easy. The Bible always wants to make it hard. We live in a day when everybody wants to make Christians lovable. God wants to make Christians reproachable. Why? Because they are confrontive, because they cross the system, they fight the system, they antagonize the system. You see Christianity must be so distinct that it points out sin before it can bring about a remedy. That's why we don't want cheap grace, easy *believism*, love Jesus and you're okay. We want to confront an evil world, and there's a reproach to bear. One writer said it beautifully, and I close our study with this. He said: Let my candle go out, if in that the Sun of Righteousness may rise, with healing in His beams.

Let's pray together. Our Father, as we have shared again these great truths of living to Your glory, we have realized that the focus of spiritual growth must be placed in this very area. Father, may we realize that there is no magic formula to spiritual growth, there is no little secret, it isn't some instantaneous thing, it isn't some divine zap. But spiritual growth is a process of focusing on Your glory until we are drawn into Your very likeness. It all begins when we come to Christ and submit to His lordship in obedience no matter what it costs. Our prayer, Father, is that we might begin there. And then move us on Lord as we take in our hands more of the keys to spiritual growth, to unlock what You have for us in maturity in Christ, and He'll praise You. In His blessed name, amen.

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