

Christian Living (EFCA STATEMENT)

8. We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

Introduction

Good morning family, I'd like to start by reading you something from Dallas Willard.

*Read *The Spirit of the Disciplines* pg. 22, "As for the conservative side...")

By a show of hands, how many of you think he's onto something?

Then meet me in 1 Peter, 1:13-25.

The Text: 1 Pet. 1:13-25

13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for

“All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

So what do you think, when you hear that? Does it all sound foreign to you? Mysterious? Out of reach? “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” How are we doing with that? “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth.” Does that describe your experience? Like something you know or are coming to know--a work in progress?

The disturbing thing about reading the Bible, is that if you pay *any* attention you notice a glaring difference between what the Bible says about Christian living and how Christians in fact live.

I mean, think of the Christians you know. Is it obvious that they're Christians or would someone be capable of mistaking them for something else? Could they just be a nice person? Or a hard worker? Or a thoughtful parent?

Because that's sort of what goes on here, in Connecticut and many other places. nonChristians don't think Christians have any sort of special qualities that they themselves can't have by other means. If they did think that, they would be here. But they're not. Most of the folks who gather in this church have already been Christians for some time. And most people in the U.S. do not regard the Church and its message as their hope, the place to turn to for sound advice, let alone life change. And we can't just blame them for that. *Oh these pagans, their so lost, why don't they see how wonderful we are? Sin is blind. *sigh* We might well ask if *we* are missing something. I mean, do we actually lay hold of all that Jesus has to offer? Or do we shrink back from his promises? Do we actually believe in the gospel for ourselves, in a way that helps with worry, grief, loss, transition, finances, nutrition, gardening, work, rest, play, conflict, communication, and

planning? Is our gospel just a ticket out of this world or is it the key to turning this world upside down?

Does the Jesus thing, work? Does it work? Because I suspect that if it did, we'd be much more comfortable talking about it, and we'd be refreshed by how much it changes life day to day, and I'd expect that others would be asking you, "How do you do it? How do you live like that?"

When we see the gap between Bible and practice, the temptation is to either diminish what the Bible says or to embellish what we say about ourselves.

So what *is* Christian living? And how dare Peter put things so simply?

The Point

O.S. Today, we will hear the 3 rhythms of the Christian life. For each of them I will give you both an image from the Bible, and a question for your own Christian living.

First look with me at VERSES 22-23.

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God

Peter works backwards...

- If you want to have sincere brotherly/sisterly love, you've got to have a pure heart
- To have a pure heart you must obey the truth (i.e., the gospel and more broadly the whole truth)
- To obey the truth you must be born again through the hearing of God's living word

Working forwards... to live the Christian life you

Listen to the Word of God, and you will be born again.

You **obey the truth**, and you will become pure.

And you **love God and everyone else** to his glory (1 Pet. 2:12)

It sounds so simple! And yet, are we receiving the fullness of it? Are we enjoying what God has to offer us? Do we accept it simply, like a child, taking God at his word, and letting him live in us on his own terms?

I want to challenge you this morning on all three fronts, and turn each of these into questions. And I would encourage you to write these down.

Am I really listening?

What is my next step of obedience?

What am I willing to let go of in order to love people more deeply?

First,

Listen to the Word of God

Someone once said, “God gave us mouths that close and ears that don’t, that must tell us something.”

When you hear God’s word... receive, take it in, soak in it, dwell in it, let it abide and move in you. Jesus often said something to this effect: “Everyone who has ears to hear, let him _____.”

Listen. Perhaps it sounds obvious, but it’s possible to come to church, to hear the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the Bible, the counsel or encouragement of your friends, the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit, and not be moved. In fact, it’s not only possible, but it’s the path of least resistance. If you aren’t really present, no one will make you present. God is here, but you might not be, even while your body is here.

The promise is that everyone who hears, who listens, who receives the everlasting seed of God’s word into their heart, is filled with new life. Initially, we call that being born again. But the word of God is also likened to our life source throughout life, to our food, to bread, to a seed that grows and grows and grows until it yields fruitfulness. Does the word of God live and *abide* in you? Or does it fade and disappear in you? How many sermons, bible studies, exhortations, encouragements have gone in one ear and out the other?

Am I really listening?

Hear the Word of God, and you *will* be born again.

On the one hand, Jesus warns that if we listen superficially, what we think we have will be taken away from us (Luke 8:18b). Jesus' warning in this verse applied to the Pharisees, who thought they knew the Scriptures, but missed the Messiah of whom the Scriptures prophesied. God judged them by taking away their temple and their land in the great destruction under Titus in A.D. 70. His warning also applied to Judas, who superficially listened to Jesus' teaching, but did not apply it to his own heart. The Pharisees and Judas were not irreligious pagans. They seemed to be zealous for the things of God. Judas was one of the twelve. Yet both the Pharisees and Judas were deceived. They thought they knew God, but they didn't know Him at all because they didn't apply His Word to their hearts. In the end, they lost everything. Because there is this element of self-deception, we must be very careful here. It's easy for spiritual pride to slip in, where our knowledge of the Bible fools us into thinking that we are spiritually mature because we know so much.

Image:

On the other hand, there are those who listen are praised by Jesus, and receive something that cannot be taken away from them. And so here's an image of listening for you. Luke 10 reads...

"And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Am I listening to the voice of him who loves me? Listening is about being present, not just about being quiet. Alan Alda has said that "Listening is being able to be changed by the other person." How much more so when listening to God?

How I long to be like Mary. That powerful faith, she recognized Jesus enough to take the right posture and listen attentively to him.

The Question: Am I really listening? If yes, how can I listen just a little bit better?

Obey the truth.

Obey the gospel. Do something with what you know.

I had the privilege of traveling with Scott, Mike, and Dave this past week to the New England District conference for our association of churches, and at one point I stepped out for fresh air. Standing there was a pastor Rich Barre, many of you know him, he focuses on ministry to the homeless and those in addiction recovery in Maine. And looking out across the lake at Camp Spofford I asked him what he thought of the event so far. And he was somewhere between frustrated and laughing--kind of beside of himself. He said, you know, Steve, I'm 70 years old, and I've heard theories *up the wazoo*. But frankly, I don't wanna see more theories. When I became a believer, all I needed to know was that people are homeless and hungry. I didn't give them gospel tracts, because they can't eat tracts. I got 'em shelter, I got 'em food. I walk around with a boloney sandwich, I say "Jesus loves you." The next time I come around with another sandwich, they ask me, "Why are you doing this?" I tell them the gospel. I see 400 people come to Jesus a year. I still know friends who were with me in bible school, they can quote it upside down and backwards, but I ask 'em *what do you do?* They're still studying. They haven't done anything. Do you have any idea what would happen if Christians just did what they know?

Through most of seminary I attended CrossWay Community Church, where the teaching is pretty darn good. I was driving home from a pastoral training group with my friend Matthew, and he said to me, you know, if I'm honest, I have no shortage of quality biblical teaching. I have a shortage of obedience. How frequently do I leave church, with no intention except to perhaps remember something of what was said? How often do I hear the call to change something in my habits, to be more honest about my sin, or more deliberate with my relationships, or to ask for help, but I treat like a mere item for consideration--having no room in my life to actually respond to Jesus? Do we come to church and study the bible, and attend seminary merely to ponder? Do we expect that after 3-4 years of habitual sitting, studying, talking, that we'll just switch to doing, to embodied practice? That after this long season of living in our heads, that we will actually follow Jesus with hearts, hands, and feet?

Richard Stearns said that “It’s not what you believe that counts; it’s what you believe enough to do.” That’s the biblical view of belief in the first place. Believe isn’t something in your head or even your heart. It’s either in your hands and feet too, or it isn’t belief yet.

A.W. Tozer has written that “the Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin.”

Image:

John 21:15 “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

And Peter did.

Acts 4:18-20 records “18 So they [that is, the Sanhedrin] called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”

And he told people the truth about Jesus and the kingdom of God and he served God’s people, and tradition has it that he was crucified for it. He obeyed.

Most people actually have some idea of what God is asking them to do. If they take a moment, they know what their next step of obedience is. Because God actually speaks. Because he makes himself known in creative ways, tailored to your stubborn, evasive, wandering heart. He actually speaks through his word, through teachers, and prophets, and through your spouse and through

your children and through your friends and even through nature, says the Bible. So do something with it. And you will become pure --not only in a legal sense, accomplished by the application of Jesus' sacrifice to you, but wholly, truly, deeply pure. Pure in life. Pure in conduct. Pure in desire. Pure in motives. Pure in your imagination. *Pure*. That's what obeying the truth does. It's when you try to do the truth that you open yourself to being changed by it.

My dear seasoned evangelicals, if want to know God more, then may I suggest that you consider reading the Bible less, and actually doing the word of God more?

The Question: What is my next step of obedience?

Obey the truth and you *will* become pure.

Love people like crazy

Image:

Matthew 26:6-16 reads, *“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table.*

But when his disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.” However, knowing this, Jesus said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? Because she has done a good work for me. For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always have me. For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her.” Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said, “What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you?”

Mary gave up an expensive ointment to love Jesus. Judas gave up Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Luke 7:36 reads, *“One of the Pharisees invited him to eat with him. He entered into the Pharisee's house, and sat at the table. 37 Behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of ointment. 38 Standing*

behind at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”

Jesus takes opportunity to teach the Pharisee through this woman’s example. And he says that because of her generous, costly, undignified affection, that she **loved** much.

“God never asks us to give what we do not have . . . But he cannot use what we will not give.”

What is God asking you to give up this morning for the sake of love?

The Question: What am I willing to let go of in order to love people more deeply?

Peter let go of his security. Jesus told him that he would be vulnerable, and carried away to somewhere he did not want to go.

Mary gave up her image, precious jar, her perceived dignity, she chose to look improper, foolish, but it didn’t matter because “she loved much.”

What am I willing to let go of in order to love people more deeply?

Do I love in a way that costs me? Do I love in a way that most people consider unreasonable? Too radical? What would it look like to love someone who I find very hard to love?

Comfort. (in-group; those like me; those I agree with)

Image. (If we’re honest, most of us prefer not to be lumped in with certain types of people. So we keep a safe distance.)

Convenience.

Time.

Money.

Safety.

Love people like crazy. And God will be glorified (2:12)

Conclusion:

Well, family, this is not something out of our reach. In fact, Peter writes all of this to give us assurance. First of all, God has already paid a high price to be with you--you’re his. Our new life,

a life of listening, obeying, and loving, was secured with nothing less than the blood of Jesus and is therefore of greater value than things bought by silver and gold. Peter calls us to recognize the value of our new status as God's children. And as God's children, you'll find that as you listen, obey, and love, you're just being who you really are. Moreover he tells us that there is a grace *set before us*. And finally, the word of God that is in you, it will not fade like the flower or wither like grass, it is everlasting. So Peter is not saying, "Make it all work!" He's saying "Let it work!"

Make no mistake. The Christian life takes effort, but it is effort that is carried by God's effort. It is work born out of rest. It is doing, grounded in being. It's what we do, bubbling up from who we are.

What if, right now, you are surrounded by the powerful, unconditional love of God?

What if, right now, it's pressing in on you, seeking to fill your heart, and to set you free from sin and fear?

What if you are a blood-bought child of God, with a secure future, a grace set before you, and an everlasting power planted inside of you? Sisters and brothers, God says it's all true.

Now, let's live *as if* that's true. Will you give God your "yes" this morning?

If you believe him this morning, church, say "yes."

If you believe that his promises of love, and presence, and power, and holiness are for you, then church, say "yes."

If you mean to listen to God like someone ready to be changed, say "yes."

If you're resolved to actually do something with what you know, say "yes."

If you choose to love those around you in a way that costs you, church, say "yes."

Because Jesus has already said "yes" to you.

To shrink back from the high call of holiness is not to think humbly of yourself, but to think too little of God. Say "yes" to Jesus this morning. For a life like his, in word and deed, is exactly what he offers you.

Amen.