

Borders

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VINCENT CHEUNG

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Apologetics: When Both Sides Admit Assumptions

One of the most frequent questions raised against presuppositional apologetics is quite silly: What if our opponents do the same thing? If the Christian declares the Bible to be his foundation, and the unbeliever declares his own philosophy to be his foundation, then both sides seem to be operating on the same footing. Each begins with assumptions. Each claims to stand on a first principle. If so, does this not reduce the whole debate to a standoff? Does not each man simply dig in his heels, affirm his axiom, and refuse to be moved? The question suggests that presuppositional apologetics degenerates into mere assertion the moment the other party declares his own starting point.

This objection, though common, rests on a misunderstanding of what presuppositional apologetics actually teaches. We are not claiming that Christians arbitrarily assume their answer and therefore cannot be challenged if unbelievers do the same. The real claim is this: all reasoning depends on assumptions. Every human being interprets the world from first principles. No philosophy proceeds from pure neutrality, and no observation is free from interpretation. Since assumptions are inevitable, the crucial task of debate is to trace beliefs back to their foundations and ask whether those foundations are sound. The issue is never whether assumptions exist. The issue is whether the assumptions can support truth.

This is why the objection misses the mark. If the unbeliever announces his assumptions, he has not neutralized the Christian position but clarified the field of battle. His declaration does not produce a stalemate but accelerates the discussion. We no longer waste time on secondary disputes. Now we go directly to the roots. Once both sides have put their assumptions on the table, the question is whether those assumptions are true or false, whether they can uphold knowledge or whether they are shown to be false when examined. The work of apologetics is not to hide assumptions but to expose them and to reason about them openly.

Neutrality is impossible. No fact interprets itself, and no observation arrives without categories already supplied by the mind. Sensation gives impressions, but impressions alone are not knowledge. They contain no necessity and yield no universals. Concepts such as identity, causation, order, and time are not abstracted from sensation but precede it. All interpretation is guided by these categories, and those categories are determined by the assumptions of a worldview. This is why two people can view the same event yet understand it in completely different ways. They are not reasoning from a shared neutral standpoint but they are applying different principles of thought. The divergence is necessary, since the principles themselves shape interpretation.

Once the discussion turns to first principles, the contrast is sharp. Most systems cannot bear examination. Empiricism seeks to build all knowledge from sensation, but sensation produces only momentary particulars that cannot interpret themselves. It never provides universals or necessity. Induction, the attempt to infer uniformity from repeated impressions, assumes what it tries to prove and therefore cannot justify itself. Rationalism divorced from revelation invents principles without authority and deduces systems that refute themselves through

contradiction. Naturalism assumes the reality of logic and order, but within its materialistic framework cannot explain them. In each case, the system presupposes truths it cannot sustain. When pressed, it disintegrates into skepticism.

Every philosophy must begin with a foundation. The question is whether that foundation is adequate to support the superstructure. A sound system requires a self-authenticating axiom, one that carries within itself both authority and sufficiency, and from which a coherent worldview can be deduced. The Bible alone meets this criterion. It is divine revelation, the word of the God of truth. It provides the propositions from which theology, philosophy, and ethics can be reasoned in systematic unity. It possesses comprehensive authority, speaking not only to isolated subjects but to the totality of reality. It excludes rivals, presenting itself as the unique word of God and tolerating no equal. Because it is revelation, it possesses the authority of the one who cannot lie. Because it is comprehensive, it supplies the scope necessary for a worldview. Because it is exclusive, it stands alone as the foundation of knowledge.

This is a matter of necessity, not arbitrary preference. If revelation is denied, knowledge disintegrates. Logic, truth, and intelligibility cannot be secured. Every other principle proves self-defeating. But if Christian revelation is affirmed, knowledge has a foundation that cannot be shaken. Just as God swears by himself because there is none greater, so his word testifies to itself as the necessary starting point. Revelation stands alone as the necessary condition for thought. Without it, reasoning proves impossible.

This has direct consequences in apologetic encounters. When an unbeliever announces his assumptions, the Christian is not placed at a disadvantage. The unbeliever has merely agreed with the Christian concerning the place where the real debate must occur. His foundation may be tested, and it will fail. The Christian likewise declares his foundation openly. Both parties set forth their starting points, and then the question becomes: which of these principles is true? Which can support a rational system? Which ends in contradiction? There is no stalemate at all. It is the beginning of genuine discussion at the level where the conflict actually lies.

Presuppositional concerns are relevant to teachings inside the church as well. Christians often live and think as though they shared the assumptions of unbelievers, differing only at the level of doctrine or practice. They reason in secular categories, adopt alien principles, and attempt to place Christian beliefs on top as conclusions. But if the premises are false, the conclusions cannot stand. This inconsistency leads only to confusion and compromise. Apologetics therefore serves not only to expose the folly of non-Christian systems but also to correct the church. It teaches Christians to recognize hidden premises, to abandon foundations that do not belong to Christ, and to begin their reasoning with the word of God. It trains believers to think as Christians in every sphere, to renew their minds, and to build a coherent system on the axiom of revelation.

We do not prevail in apologetics because we happen to have assumptions, as though the mere possession of a starting point were enough. Every worldview has a starting point. Everyone has assumptions. We prevail because our assumptions are true. They rest on the word of God, the

only foundation strong enough to sustain knowledge. Scripture provides certainty, coherence, and stability. Every other foundation fails. To begin with God's word is to begin with truth itself. To begin elsewhere is to forfeit the possibility of knowledge.

When someone asks, "What if our opponents do the same thing?", the answer is that they must, for all thought rests on assumptions. Part of presuppositional apologetics is to bring our opponents to realize this in the first place. But once those assumptions are declared and tested, the difference emerges. False foundations destroy themselves. The revelation of God alone endures. Only on this foundation is thought possible, only on this foundation is truth intelligible, only on this foundation can knowledge exist. The Christian does not win by arbitrariness but by necessity, for the word of God is the indispensable principle of all understanding.

Awake, O Sleeper

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Ephesians 5:14)

The New Testament describes man in relation to God by using several metaphors that bring out the depth of his deficiency and the sufficiency of divine action. These images are not redundant, but complementary. They portray human beings in different conditions, ranging from utter inability to dull unresponsiveness. Scripture speaks of the unregenerate as dead in sin. Jesus refers to sinners as sick and in need of a physician. Paul warns believers that they can become as though asleep, and calls them to awakening. Together these depictions form a spectrum of human weakness that only the word of God can overcome.

Paul describes the unregenerate as dead in trespasses and sins. The imagery communicates more than distance from God. It portrays man in his natural state as devoid of spiritual life, incapable of movement toward God, and powerless to exercise faith. Death in this sense is not hyperbole, but a precise description of the condition of fallen man. He does not merely refuse to seek God, but he lacks the ability to seek him. He has no principle of life within himself by which he might respond. The corpse does not will itself to breathe or rise from the ground. So the unregenerate man cannot create faith in his own soul.

Since man is dead, his salvation cannot rest on any latent power in himself. It does not depend on any inducement from his environment. It cannot arise from gradual cultivation of spiritual habits. His only hope lies in God who raises the dead. Paul underscores this when he says, “But God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ.” The transition from death to life is not an act of human will, but the sovereign operation of God. The gospel, when preached, does not depend on the dead sinner for its efficacy. It is the very word of God that calls into existence the life it commands. The ministry of preaching and prayer are instruments, but the effect belongs to God alone.

This image of death strikes at the root of human pretension. It destroys every argument for moral improvement apart from Christ. It exposes every scheme of salvation by self-discipline or tradition. No philosophy or religion can animate the dead. Only the word of God can do so, and it does so with absolute sufficiency. What appears as preaching from one man to another is in reality God speaking through his servant, and when God speaks, the dead rise.

The metaphor of sickness adds another dimension. Jesus says that those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. He identifies sinners as the sick, and himself as the physician who has come to heal them. This does not suggest that the unregenerate retain spiritual vitality. It conveys the corruption and disorder that sin introduces into human nature. A body racked with disease may still draw breath, but every organ is compromised and every faculty corrupted. So sin distorts the soul, disorients its faculties, and subjects it to decay.

By calling sinners sick, Jesus exposes both their condition and their need. They stand as diseased in their perception of truth, their affections bent toward evil, and their will driven by

impulses contrary to God. The diagnosis is universal, and the cure lies in the physician himself. Christ does not prescribe a regimen of moral exercises for the sinner to perform. He heals by his presence and his word. The sinner receives wholeness from him alone, and apart from him the disease runs its fatal course.

This image carries an implicit polemic against religious pride. The Pharisees considered themselves healthy and despised those whom they judged diseased. Christ reversed their categories. Those who imagined themselves whole were blind to their corruption, while those who recognized their need were closest to healing. The imagery therefore reinforces the exclusivity of Christ. There is no physician besides him, no cure outside of his word. Sin is a terminal disease. The gospel does not offer palliative care, but complete restoration by the power of God.

If death reveals man's inability and sickness reveals his corruption, the imagery of sleep portrays a sinful state in the midst of life. Paul cites a saying to the Ephesian believers: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." The command addresses Christians who have slipped into practices that belong to darkness. They are alive in Christ, yet they live in a way that resembles the dead. Sleep depicts a condition in which sin is tolerated, the mind is dulled, and the conduct of the believer falls out of step with the light of Christ.

Applied to the believer, sleep describes compromise with sin. The Christian who has been called to walk in light and holiness may instead enter into disobedience, inattentiveness, or complacency. He has life in Christ, but he behaves as though insensible to it. Paul's command is therefore not the call to initial conversion, but to a renewal of life already given. The word of God confronts the believer in his sin, awakens him from lethargy, and restores him to the vigilance, purity, and obedience that belong to those who live in the light.

The same imagery also helps us describe another danger, the dormancy of faith. A Christian might affirm that God heals, but leave that truth unused when sickness strikes. He might agree that God works miracles, while shrinking back from expecting them. He might acknowledge the promises of God, but treat them as abstractions instead of grounds for action. In such cases, faith is present in principle but inactive in practice, as if asleep. The word of God functions as a trumpet, rousing it to action. It awakens believers to trust God for healing, for miracles, for abundance, and for the gifts of the Spirit.

This carries profound implications for the life of the church. When believers sleep in this sense, their confession remains abstract, their prayers weak, and their witness compromised. When the word awakens them, their faith becomes active. They rise to believe what God has promised, to expect what he has spoken, and to experience what Christ has secured. The awakening is therefore comprehensive. It restores them from sin, reanimates their faith, and sets them forward in obedience to the promises of God.

Taken together, the three images present a complete picture of human deficiency. The dead cannot respond. The sick are corrupted. The sleepers are unresponsive. Each condition requires

divine intervention, and each is answered by the word of God. To the dead, the word raises. To the sick, the word heals. To the sleeper, the word awakens. Preaching and prayer are the means by which the word is delivered, but the effect is an act of God.

This understanding clarifies the direction of Christian preaching and writing. Toward the world, the word functions as evangelism. It addresses the dead and the sick, announcing life and healing through Christ. Toward the church, the word functions as awakening. It calls believers out of their slumber, stirring their faith to active trust in every promise of God. In both directions, the word proves itself to be living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and producing life, health, and renewal.

Human insufficiency appears in many forms, in death, sickness, and sleep, but divine sufficiency overcomes them all. God speaks, and the dead rise. Christ heals, and the sick are restored. The word awakens, and the sleeper lives in the light. The hope of man rests in no other power. Whether in the initial act of regeneration, the ongoing cure of sin, or the continual awakening of faith, the effective cause is the voice of God.

Christian preaching and writing carry immense significance. They are never human endeavors to persuade the reluctant. They are not therapeutic exercises meant to soothe the restless. They are the appointed means by which God raises the dead, heals the sick, and awakens the sleeper. The word that goes forth does not return void. It accomplishes what God purposes, whether in the sinner who hears it for the first time or in the believer who needs to be roused again. The responsibility of the preacher and writer is to speak the word faithfully, with full confidence that God himself works through it.

The imagery of death, sickness, and sleep captures the full range of human weakness. It teaches us that salvation is always a miracle of divine power, whether in its beginning or in its continuance. It directs all glory to Christ, the resurrection and the life, the great physician, the light that shines on the awakened soul. It leaves no room for human boasting, but sets before us the sufficiency of the word of God. And it assures us that in every condition of deficiency, God has appointed his word as the instrument by which he accomplishes life, healing, and awakening.

Between Good and Evil

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" (Matthew 9:4)

When Scripture speaks of healing, miracles, and prosperity, it does so with a directness that admits no hesitation. These are not optional features of the Christian life, and they are not matters reserved for historical curiosity. They are present realities bound to God's word, inseparable from faith in Christ, and guaranteed to those who believe. Yet when these truths are raised, many retreat into evasions. They insist that the issue lies in theological interpretation, in hermeneutical frameworks, or in denominational traditions. They reduce God's acts to academic disputes, as if the promises of the Spirit were open to polite disagreement. In reality, the division is sharper. The question is not between interpretive traditions, but between good and evil.

This reframing must be made explicit. When a man denies that God heals in response to faith, he does not merely select one interpretive option among others. He accuses God of unfaithfulness, and he mocks his word as deceitful. Scripture repeatedly presents God as the one who heals the sick, delivers from affliction, multiplies provision, and performs mighty signs to fulfill his promises. To affirm otherwise is to charge the Almighty with dishonesty. It is to mutilate the gospel by severing its promises from its commands. Such denial cannot be excused as a mistake of scholarship. It belongs to the realm of wickedness.

The prophets, Christ, and the apostles never treated unbelief in God's power as a tolerable difference of opinion. They pronounced it as hardness of heart, as rebellion against the truth. When Israel doubted God's ability to give them the land, he judged them unworthy to enter it. When the disciples faltered in faith, Christ rebuked them for their unbelief. The failure to trust his power was never excused as careful exegesis. It was condemned as sin. In the same way, to think that God withholds healing and miracles today is not a cautious theological stance. It is evil masquerading as prudence.

The connection between healing and prosperity follows the same logic. God reveals himself as the one who gives life, sustains the body, and supplies abundance for his people. Faith receives him in this fullness. Unbelief reduces him to a miser who rescues the soul but abandons the body, who forgives sins but withholds bread, who redeems from guilt but refuses to heal disease. Such a distortion dishonors the nature of God, since it carves his generosity into fragments and portrays him as stingy. To deny prosperity, like denying healing, is to despise his goodness. It aligns with the spirit of the evil one, who has always sought to cast God as harsh, unreliable, and untrustworthy.

Cessationism carries this rebellion to its logical extreme. It asserts that God withdrew miracles and gifts after the apostolic age, that he abandoned the very means by which he authenticated his word and confirmed his servants. This is not only false but wicked. It suggests that the Spirit retreated from his people, that Christ left the church without power, and that God betrayed the promises he had given. Cessationism is no mere misstep in doctrine. It is as evil as satanism.

itself, for both arrive at the same result: a denial of God's works, a rejection of his Spirit, and an invitation to doubt his word. One dresses itself as piety, the other as open rebellion, but their substance is the same.

The issue, then, is moral at its core. Faith belongs to the side of good because it affirms God's character and receives his promises as true. Unbelief belongs to the side of evil because it refuses his word and calls him a liar. Healing, miracles, and prosperity are not negotiable features of Christianity. They are guarantees of the covenant secured in Christ, manifestations of his power through the Spirit. To deny them is to deny God himself. The line is drawn, and it runs clean through the religious world. On one side stand those who believe his promises, and on the other stand those who resist them. This is the true division, sharper than any contrast between denominations, traditions, or schools of interpretation.

Between good and evil there is no middle ground. Those who dismiss the promises of healing and abundance do not occupy a neutral space. They have placed themselves with the enemies of God, whether they know it or not. Their unbelief shares the spirit of satanic rebellion, because it performs the same task of obscuring the glory of Christ and suppressing the faith of his people. To recognize this is to see through the disguises of theological language and interpretive debate. What often presents itself as scholarship or tradition is, in substance, the same evil that has opposed God from the beginning.

The issue of healing and miracles is therefore decisive. It exposes the heart of man, whether he will receive God as he reveals himself, or whether he will fashion a distorted image of God that denies his power. The Scriptures leave no ambiguity. They testify to a God who heals, who prospers, who delivers, and who continues to perform mighty works in response to faith. To believe this is to stand with good. To deny it is to embrace evil. Between the two there is no fellowship. The choice belongs to every man: to align with the God who keeps his promises, or to side with the rebellion that scorns them.

Beware of Covetousness

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Jesus said, "Beware of covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He spoke this in response to someone who wanted him to arbitrate a dispute over inheritance. The request was about money, and the dispute was between relatives. Jesus took the opportunity to issue a warning that goes beyond the specific case. Possessions cannot define the meaning of life. They cannot supply its purpose, nor can they measure its value. Life is about God and love, not about piling up things. This is true, and we must keep it in mind.

However, it is also true that life does not consist in how little you have. If we misapply the statement into a defense of poverty, we commit a serious error. We turn a warning against greed into a condemnation of wealth itself. This would be as irrational as saying that because life does not consist of eating, we should think of food as unimportant, or believe it is sinful to enjoy it, or claim it is wrong to care about its quality. In reality, you will eat thousands of meals in your lifetime. Food sustains you, and you can rightly take pleasure in it. It is not the purpose of life, but it is a normal and valuable part of life.

The same principle applies to possessions. That life does not consist in them does not mean they have no place in it. Yet this is how many people have used Jesus' words, as if the only safe way to obey him is to avoid abundance altogether. Such an interpretation is not only absurd but criminal. It demands that we refuse what God is willing to give, and it condemns those who receive it.

The text does not support a gospel of poverty. Jesus knew the book of Proverbs, and in it God teaches that "the faithful will abound with blessings" and "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." Faithfulness and godliness bring health and wealth. This is not human speculation but divine revelation. Jesus himself taught that when we seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, "all these things will be added to you." Not some of them, but all. He compared God's care for his people to the way he feeds the birds and clothes the grass, and he declared that God will do "much more" for us. He said that "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," and then he assured us that God will exceed even that for his children.

Are we so pure and lofty that we rebuke Jesus for saying this? Do we imagine ourselves too far above greed to accept his words about abundance? Do we fear that agreeing with him will associate us with the so-called gospel of health and wealth? If so, then our pride has reached a level that condemns Christ himself. This is self-damning. To reject the words of Jesus is to reject him. And to reject him is to choose the path to hell.

That is the perverse attitude produced by human tradition and distorted virtue. It takes a statement meant to free us from greed and twists it into a license for spiritual arrogance. It

replaces the teaching of Christ with the teaching of man, and then enforces it as a mark of holiness. The result is what Jesus described elsewhere: "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." That pit is not a metaphor for minor error. It is the place of final judgment.

Some might ask whether we must believe in what they call the gospel of wealth to be saved. The answer is that we must believe Jesus. We must accept his words without distorting them to protect our image or to uphold manmade virtues that make us look devout. If he says God will "add all these things to you," then that is what he means. To make it say the opposite is to call him a liar. It is open rebellion against the Son of God.

The false piety of poverty is a cheap and easy deception. Anyone can be poor and claim to be spiritual. Anyone can lack abundance and wear it as a badge of holiness. It requires no faith to remain in lack. It demands no obedience to continue in scarcity. It often serves as a way to excuse unbelief, to mask ingratitude, and to condemn those who have faith to receive what God gives. This is a sin that cloaks itself in humility while contradicting the generosity of God.

Beware of covetousness. Beware of the desire to hoard possessions, but beware also of the counterfeit holiness that despises them. Neither greed nor the hatred of wealth is righteousness. True holiness receives from God with thanksgiving, uses what is given for his purposes and our enjoyment, and refuses to twist his promises into something he never said. The warning of Jesus stands, but so do all his assurances. Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, but it is lived in the abundance of God's gifts. Those who follow him must receive his whole teaching, not the fragments that flatter faithless religious virtue. To do otherwise is to walk away from him, and there is no life apart from him.

Cessationism and Ordination

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2)

Ordination in the Christian sense derives its meaning from the Spirit of God. It is not a human invention, nor a matter of ceremonial authority that men can wield at their own discretion. The biblical accounts demonstrate that when someone is ordained to ministry, it is the Spirit himself who calls, sets apart, and equips. Any attempt to establish ordination apart from the Spirit reduces the practice into a parody, a ritual that imitates form but contains no substance. This problem reaches its sharpest expression in the case of cessationism, because cessationism denies the ongoing activity of the Spirit's gifts. If their theology is true, then the very possibility of real ordination disappears.

The example from Acts 13 is decisive. When the church at Antioch ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." The church did not invent a role for these men. The Spirit himself called them out, and the ordination consisted in recognizing, affirming, and ratifying what God had already decreed. The Spirit remained the decisive factor, not the human act. Without the Spirit, there would be no appointment to recognize, and therefore no ordination to confer. The entire meaning of ordination lies in the Spirit's decision and empowerment.

Paul's letters to Timothy add further confirmation. Timothy did not merely receive a title or public acknowledgment when he was ordained. Paul reminded him to fan into flame the gift of God, which was in him through the laying on of hands. Spiritual gifts were conferred at ordination. The Spirit imparted real power through the act, binding Timothy to his calling by divine operation. If cessationism is correct, then such gifts no longer exist to be imparted. In that case, ordination becomes a ceremony without effect. It is a body without breath, a shell without life.

From this it follows that cessationist ordination is no ordination at all. At best it is a symbolic appointment to office, a public recognition of a role that lacks divine sanction. The problem is not merely that cessationists fail to replicate biblical practice in every detail. The problem is that their theology makes biblical practice impossible in principle. If the Spirit no longer calls men through gifts and power, then no one can claim to be ordained in the biblical sense. And since ordination must come from those who have themselves been ordained by the Spirit, cessationists cannot ordain anyone precisely because they themselves were never ordained. Their line of succession is fictitious, their credentials fraudulent, and their ministries the imitation of a reality they reject.

A cessationist church may confer titles, perform ceremonies, and hand down traditions, but what it produces are ministers that are half baked and half faked. They are baked because they may still know something of Scripture, preach doctrines, and carry institutional authority. They are faked because the ordination itself has no correspondence to what God instituted in the

word of God. Since those conferring ordination were never ordained in the first place, they can only reproduce the same hollowness in those who follow.

When ordination is reduced to ceremony, it becomes indistinguishable from any other social recognition. It functions much like academic degrees or professional licenses. The candidate may be declared fit for office, given a certificate, and installed in position, but nothing spiritual occurs. The Spirit has not called, gifted, or equipped. The laying on of hands becomes the mere movement of flesh. The words spoken are the traditions of men rather than the decrees of God. The whole act may impress observers, but it changes nothing in the order of heaven.

This kind of ordination remains attractive to people because it grants them recognition, honor, and career advancement. It resembles the appointment of officials in any other organization. For many, this suffices. They desire the appearance of authority without the substance. They want to be called ministers without being equipped by the Spirit. They want to represent God while denying the very gifts that make representation possible. The outcome is an institutional class of leaders who resemble the biblical pattern in outward structure but deny its inward essence.

To say that such ordination is empty is not to say that no one ordained under cessationist hands can ever serve God. A man may still rise up in faith, study the word of God, and believe its promises. God may honor his faith and grant him power directly. But in that case, the benefit comes from faith, not from the ceremony. The ordination contributes nothing. It may even deceive the man into thinking that his strength lies in his title and ceremony rather than in the Spirit of God. The ordination, therefore, is at best useless and at worst a stumbling block.

The reality is that God deals with his people by faith and by his Spirit. Where faith takes hold of his word, the Spirit acts in power. This is the essence of ministry. No ritual substitutes for it. Cessationism removes the Spirit from ordination, and so it eliminates ordination altogether. It leaves behind only a hollow form, a ritual gesture that deceives both the one who performs it and the one who receives it. The ordained person may go forth to preach, but if he accomplishes anything by faith, it will be in spite of the ordination rather than because of it.

The seriousness of this cannot be overstated. Ordination is meant to anchor ministers in divine calling, to connect them to the Spirit's gifts, and to empower them for their work. To strip ordination of this power is to mutilate the institution beyond recognition. A cessationist ceremony might as well be a graduation, a party, or an inauguration. It signifies nothing that heaven recognizes. It cannot be appealed to as a confirmation of God's calling. It does not impart gifts. It does not summon the Spirit's power. It leaves the minister in the same condition as before.

This hollowness reflects the wider emptiness of cessationism. A theology that denies the Spirit's activity has already severed itself from the living presence of God in his church. It must then substitute ceremony, ritual, and human invention for divine reality. Ordination becomes a telling example of this. What was once the moment of divine commissioning becomes a stage

for empty gestures. The participants congratulate themselves on carrying out a venerable tradition, but God has not spoken and God has not acted. The gulf between the appearance of ordination and the reality of ordination widens until there is nothing left to compare.

Real ordination cannot exist where the Spirit is denied. Scripture shows that ordination rests on the Spirit's call and empowerment. Cessationists themselves have never been ordained, and so they cannot ordain others. Their ceremonies are invalid from the root upward, a chain of imposture that produces nothing but hollow officeholders. True ordination remains inseparable from the ongoing activity of the Spirit, and only those who depend wholly on him and on faith in the word of God stand as ministers in the biblical sense.

Covenantal Apologetics Without God

Covenantal apologetics presents itself as an apologetic grounded in covenant theology. It insists that every defense of the faith must take account of man's covenant relationship with God, and it frames its method in terms of covenant obligations, responsibilities, and categories. Its advocates fill their discourse with covenant vocabulary and argue that this sets their approach apart from other methods. But if it is a covenant, why are you the one doing all the work?

In a covenant, God commits himself to act. It is God fulfilling his word, and man receiving promises and privileges that rest on divine performance. To call something covenantal means that God is present and active. But in the form of apologetics that parades itself as covenantal, man speaks and God is silent. The theologian fills the stage while the covenant God is absent from his own defense. This is no covenant at all. A covenant that exists only as human rhetoric is a forgery.

The false version makes obligations the center. It portrays the covenant as a system of duties imposed on man, and it celebrates the labor of man in fulfilling them. It shifts the weight of apologetics to man's words, man's categories, and man's cleverness. It leaves God behind the curtain, waiting to be described but never appearing in person. This is covenantal apologetics only in name. In truth, it is covenantal rhetoric, a method that exalts human effort and ignores divine presence.

When God spoke to Abraham, he declared blessing and made him a blessing to the nations, rather than summoning him to lecture about covenant terms. When God made covenant with David, he pledged an eternal throne and a kingdom to come, instead of assigning a theory. When Christ came, he fulfilled all that had been promised, instead of introducing another schema or a mere intellectual framework. Every covenant includes divine privilege and human duty. Every covenant rests on God's performance together with the response of man's effort. Covenant apologetics must therefore testify to what God has done and what God continues to do, rather than to the diligence of scholars who imagine that covenant exists for their debates.

The book of Acts shows what covenantal apologetics truly is. In Acts 13 a sorcerer named Elymas opposed the gospel as Paul spoke to the proconsul. Paul announced the judgment of God, and the man was struck blind. The covenant God himself entered the scene, silencing opposition and vindicating his servant. The proconsul believed, astonished at the teaching and the power of the Lord. This was the defense of the faith in covenantal form, not through abstract framework but through the presence of God who fulfilled his word, judged his enemy, and confirmed his messenger.

In Acts 5, Herod accepts the praise of men as if he were a god, and God strikes him down. Here the covenant is defended not by a theologian but by God himself. He had declared that he would not give his glory to another, and he enforced that word by judgment. This was apologetics in the truest sense, for God made his covenant known by acting against a

blasphemer. A covenant defended by divine judgment is a covenant that needs no human embellishment.

In Acts 28, on the island of Malta, Paul gathered wood for a fire, and a viper fastened onto his hand. The people watched, expecting him to swell up and die, but he shook it off and suffered no harm. They recognized that a greater power was at work, and their astonishment opened the way for him to heal many on the island. This was covenantal apologetics in plain sight, for the covenant God preserved his servant, displayed his power over death, and confirmed the gospel through miracles. The defense of the faith was carried forward not by argument alone but by the intervention of God who acted before all eyes.

These accounts reveal that covenantal apologetics means God breaking into history with demonstration. It means his promises fulfilled, his judgments executed, his word confirmed by miracles, and his Spirit bearing witness. To call something covenantal while leaving God absent is to deny the very meaning of covenant. A covenant without God acting is no covenant, and apologetics without God is no apologetics.

This is why faith must be expressed in covenantal privileges, not only in obligations. Faith is covenantal only if the sick are healed and signs and wonders occur, because the covenant God has committed himself to do these things. Faith is covenantal only if resources are shared between God and men as the covenant God provides wealth and power for his people. Faith is covenantal only if prophecies and miracles accompany it, because the covenant God reveals and acts by his Spirit. Where these are missing, the covenant has been denied. Where man does all the work and God does nothing, there is no covenant, and there is no apologetic.

A covenant is a contract, and a contract requires performance from both parties. If the contract is with God, then his performance is guaranteed. His resources, his power, and his presence stand behind every word. To claim a covenant without his action is fraud. To defend the covenant with nothing but human speech and effort is forgery. The true covenant means that when God's people speak, he confirms, when they act, he empowers, and when they suffer, he vindicates. A covenant without God's power is no covenant at all.

The so-called covenantal apologists betray themselves by their own method. They speak as if the covenant is purely a framework or an obligation, as if the defense of the covenant rested on their skill, as if the covenant God were silent and impotent, if not altogether dead. They call their approach covenantal apologetics, but they have ejected the covenant God. Their work is an elaborate pretense, a discourse without demonstration, a defense without reality. It is not covenantal apologetics but covenantal rhetoric, and it exposes itself as empty and fraudulent.

True covenantal apologetics restores God to the center. It is God answering with truth and reason, God fulfilling his promises, God striking down his enemies, God confirming his servants, God healing the people, God revealing by his Spirit, God sharing his abundance among the saints. It is the presence of the covenant God, not the vocabulary of covenant theorists. It is not the repetition of covenant terminology, but the performance of covenant promises.

So we return to the question. If this is a covenant, why are you the one doing all the work? If your apologetics consists of talk with no power -- no God -- then you have no covenant and no defense. All you have is a religious framework that makes you appear sophisticated to the unlearned. The covenant God defends himself, and the covenant God confirms his word. Where he is present, there is covenantal apologetics. Where he is absent, all that remains are phony scholars and their empty words.

Creator-Level Potential

Faithless religion appeals to the creator–creature distinction in a way that reduces all theology to weakness and ignorance. They insist that because God is the Creator and we are creatures, the implication is that human beings can only confess inability and incomprehension. In applying the distinction this way, they define the entire relation between Creator and creature by creaturely limitation rather than by divine ability. This inversion exposes their unbelief. Instead of magnifying the Creator, they confine him to creaturely limitations. The result is a theology in which both God and man are placed on a creature-level plane, stripped of divine power, and bound by the constraints of human thoughts and abilities. What is presented as reverence is in fact an assault upon the Creator’s nature and all his dealings with creation, for it denies his freedom to reveal and denies his capacity to act beyond the categories of created existence.

A correct understanding of the distinction does the opposite. To say that God is the Creator is to affirm that he is not defined by the same constraints that mark created existence. He alone has absolute power and knowledge, and he alone determines what is possible. By the gospel, he has explained himself in words that we can fully understand, and he has offered his power to those who believe. This disclosure overturns the assumptions of faithless religion. The relation between Creator and creature is no longer defined by what seems inherently possible within the created order, but by what is possible for God. When the Creator makes himself known and grants his power through faith, the believer participates in a realm of potential defined not by creaturely weakness but by divine strength.

The Faithless project creaturely limitations onto the entire relation between God and man. Instead of defining the distinction by God’s ability to disclose himself and empower his people, they define it by man’s inability to comprehend or be enhanced. Their so-called God-centered theology is in reality self-centered, because it evaluates God’s word through human limits and imposes those limits on everything he has said. God is no longer the one who sets the terms of knowledge and possibility, but those terms are dictated by the creature’s weakness. They preach frailty as if it were devotion, but it is in fact rebellion. True humility accepts what God declares about himself and about us, no matter how it exceeds our natural categories, because the measure of truth is the Creator’s word, not the creature’s ignorance and cowardice.

God's word breaks us out of this feeble and stupid religion. He confronts the faithless tendency to center theology on man, measuring truth by what seems possible to human experience, while constantly lying about being God-centered. It betrays a pagan or reprobate mindset to define the relation between Creator and creature by what man can do or understand, as if secretly believing that there is no Creator at all. When we submit to the word of God, we recognize that the Creator does not conform to the creature’s boundaries. Instead, he defines the relationship by his own ability, projecting his reason and power onto the believer through faith. The logic of revelation reverses the assumptions of unbelief: God is not reduced to man, but man is lifted into the sphere of God’s action. To receive the word of God is to think his thoughts after him and to share in his power.

Scripture declares that all things are possible for God, and it also says that all things are possible for the one who believes. This assumes the proper application of the creator–creature distinction. It does not erase the difference between the two but defines the relationship: God possesses all power in himself, and the Christian possesses all the power of God, not in himself, but by faith in God. In other words, God is not diminished by the relationship, but the Christian is elevated by it. The relation is defined not by the creature's inability but by the Creator's ability. The potential of the believer is not measured by what is natural to man, but by what belongs to the Creator. To understand this is to escape the cycle of weakness preached by the Faithless and to enter the life that corresponds to the truth of God.

When the relation is defined by the Creator's ability, possibility is redefined for the creature. To think according to revelation is to participate in divine potential, because God's word is reason and truth. When the believer receives it, his mind is aligned with the Creator's thoughts, and this intellectual union is also empowerment. The measure of life is no longer creaturely weakness but the Creator's determination. In knowledge, this produces superhuman wisdom and certainty, because truth from God does not rest upon fallible inquiry but upon infallible revelation. In action, it extends the horizon of possibility to everything God is and everything he has spoken, whether that concerns the forgiveness of sins, the healing of disease, the advance of the gospel among nations, and all other miraculous and spectacular expressions of his being and power. God makes all that he is accessible to the Christian through faith.

The Faithless recoil from such confidence, regarding it as presumption. But their recoil only confirms their error: they continue to define the relation by the creature rather than by the Creator. In their theology, God is overruled by man. Why? Because the truth is that there is only man in their theology. They have never believed in God, so their beliefs never rose above the level of man. Thus they confine theology to the endless rehearsal of human weakness. Whether they use the word "God" or "man," they are really just talking about themselves. The gospel of Jesus Christ replaces this human religion with a revelation from another world, from the Creator himself. It establishes the relation in its proper terms: God is absolute, and man is elevated by faith in him. The danger is not that we think too highly of God's revelation, but that we refuse to think according to it. Faith agrees with God. And the believer rises to commune and partner with him.

The true creator–creature distinction magnifies God and elevates man. It places God above all, revealed in Jesus Christ, and it places man in him. Man in this state does not remain in ignorance and weakness, but he is one with Reason and Power, seated at the right hand of Majesty in Christ. Faithless lunacy leaves both God and man on the same plane of futility, but revelation restores the proper relation. Faith receives revelation as truth to be known and as power to be lived. To confess that all things are possible for God and all things are possible for the one who believes is to confess the meaning of the gospel itself. It is to declare that possibility is not measured by human capacity but by divine determination, and that in believing God's word, the creature participates in the Creator's own potential.

Even a Whiff of History

And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” (Matthew 15:22)

The woman came to Jesus with a desperate plea for her daughter. She was tormented by a demon, and no one could help her. She was outside the covenant God made with Israel, but she approached the Lord of heaven and earth. He told her the bread was for the children, meaning the blessings of the covenant belonged to Israel. She accepted the statement without offense, but refused to leave without her miracle. Even the dogs, she said, eat the crumbs that fall from the table. Her faith did not demand the whole loaf. A crumb was enough. She believed that even what fell incidentally from the Lord’s power would drive the demon from her daughter, and she received her request.

This bread was not meant for her, but she received from it all the same. She was refused to her face by the Son of God, but she would not turn back. She was treated as an intrusion by the disciples, but she overcame their dismissal. She had no written covenant as Israel did, no prophet sent to her people, and no priest representing her nation before God. But she recognized the truth about him and trusted that his power and mercy were available to her. She saw in Jesus what others around him failed to see, and she acted on it.

Now look at the church today. We are in the covenant. The gospel is declared to us without restriction. Every promise of God is ours in Christ. We have the word of God in writing, the Spirit within believers, and preachers who claim to speak for God. But multitudes insist that miracles no longer belong to us, that the power of God is a thing of history. They say the works of Christ were only for the apostles or the prophets before them. This is a disgrace. We have been told “yes” in every way, but many speak as if God has withdrawn his hand. That woman had no covenant, but she received what covenant children now refuse. She was an outsider, but her faith brought her inside. Those who have been made insiders by the blood of Christ often live as though they were excluded.

This attitude is unbiblical, anti-gospel, and anti-Christ. The gospel remains alive, not a relic of the past. God’s power is present among his people, not confined to an earlier century. The word of God portrays Jesus as Lord who saves and heals. It does not depict him as one who worked only in history and then withdrew. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Spirit poured out in the Book of Acts remains with the church and continues to work among us. The kingdom stands and advances upon the earth.

Consider this for the sake of argument. Even if the claim were true that this is not the era of miracles, it would still be possible to obtain them by faith. That woman did not belong to the covenant people. She was excluded from the table, but she still ate. She showed that faith works in every period of history because it takes hold of God himself, who does not change. Faith can reach God in any period in history. Faith can disregard covenants and dispensations to take what it wants. Jesus acknowledged it right here.

With all our advantages and all our knowledge, we should be able to say, "Lord, even a faint trace of your power, even a whiff of your history, can work a miracle. The mere remembrance of your glory is more than enough to shake the heavens and the earth. A corner torn from a page of the Bible with several words about your deeds would be enough to slay demons and raise the dead. It would be enough to destroy cancer and wipe out heart disease."

Why is this not happening? Because Christians have followed the lead of faithless religion. They have chosen dead human heritage and abandoned the living Christ. They have condemned and cursed the gospel, and turned Jesus into a lecturer whose works are admired but absent. If Jesus can save the world, why is the world not saved? Because he has not been preached as he is, with the same message, the same boldness, and the same power that he gave to his disciples.

The mere memory of Jesus is enough to heal the sick. The mere mention of his name is sufficient to cast out demons. A single story about him can save the most wretched sinners. Even a recollection of what he did two thousand years ago can ignite miracles now. The woman's daughter was healed because she believed in crumbs. We have been given innumerable warehouses bursting with bread.

Today is the day of miracles. Not fewer than in the days of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, but more. Greater works are meant to follow the foundation. The kingdom is meant to advance. The age of the Spirit is the age of increase. This is the era of God, the era of faith, the era of miracles.

Unbelief has always marked those who perish. It condemned the wilderness generation when they refused to enter the land. It limited the works of Christ in Nazareth. It will condemn the religious people that reject his power today. Faith has always marked those who receive from God, in every era, in every nation, under every circumstance.

The woman outside the covenant saw in Jesus what the covenant children of her time could not see. She saw bread in him and would not leave without it. We have more than she had. We have his death and resurrection accomplished. We have the Spirit poured out without measure. We have his commission to preach the gospel to every creature with signs following. If she could believe for crumbs, we should believe for a feast.

Our knowledge of Jesus is not mere history or memory. It is not meant to sit in a display case. It is the living heritage of the saints, to be carried into every place, confronting every sickness, overturning every work of the devil. Faith does not admire the works of God from a distance. It takes them into the present and refuses to be denied. If the woman could take what was not meant for her and receive it, how much more should we take what has been freely given to us?

For those who hear and believe, even a whiff of history will be enough. The glory that once filled Galilee will fill their own homes. The power that once set a little girl free will set free their

sons and daughters. The Christ who once walked the earth will walk into their lives, bringing with him everything that belongs to the kingdom of God.

Extrapolating Faith

And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:7–11)

The disciples once forgot to bring bread, and on the journey Jesus said to them, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” They assumed that he was talking about their mistake, and began to whisper that he must be rebuking them for having no bread. But Jesus confronted them with a sharper rebuke. He reminded them of the crowds that had been fed by a few loaves, and the baskets of fragments that remained afterward. Then he asked them why they were still talking about bread at all. The problem was not bread. The problem was their unbelief.

The disciples’ error lay in treating food as a real problem in the presence of Christ. Faith would have dismissed the matter altogether. After seeing thousands fed with a few loaves and fish, their reasoning should have been settled. Food would never again be an issue where Jesus was concerned. If he said anything about bread, it must have meant something beyond the literal. But because they had not settled this point by faith, their minds fastened on the wrong concern. They failed to recognize that when God has acted in a certain way, faith requires us to extrapolate. The miracle proved that food could never be a threat, so his words about leaven must have referred to something else. Their failure was not only in misunderstanding, but in refusing to let faith guide their interpretation.

This exposes a crucial principle about the miracles of Christ. If the miracle of feeding the multitudes had been nothing more than a spectacle to show off the identity of Jesus, then the disciples would have had no reason to expect it again. They could only admire it as a past demonstration of power without application to future circumstances. Faith would have no basis to expect bread for tomorrow. But Jesus did not allow them to think this way. He rebuked them because they did not assume the miracle was repeatable. His correction proves that miracles were not arbitrary signs meant for one-time authentication, but demonstrations of divine power meant to form the foundation for expectation.

The feeding of the crowds was not random or occasional. It was not a sovereign display in the sense that it might happen or might not, without connection to anything else. It rested on God’s nature and power, which never change. It rested on the compassion of Christ, which never fails. For this reason, Jesus expected the disciples to conclude that if he fed the crowds once, he would do it again whenever necessary. The problem was not that food ran out. The problem was that the disciples failed to reason from God’s character to God’s action. They treated the miracle as an isolated event, when in fact it was a revelation of the kingdom that would govern every future situation.

The miracle of multiplying bread also demonstrates that miracles are useful in themselves. They do more than point to Christ; they feed the hungry and heal the sick. When Jesus supplied bread, he did not merely show that he was the Son of God. He gave people food to eat. When he healed the blind, he did not merely symbolize light and truth. He gave them eyes that worked. To think of miracles as if they were only symbolic acts of authentication empties them of their direct and practical meaning. The usefulness of miracles is the reason they happen. God heals because he intends the sick to be well. He multiplies bread because he intends the hungry to eat. He delivers because he intends his people to be free. The effects are the very outcome God intends to bring. Miracles are performed for the benefits they give, and faith is meant to expect those benefits whenever the need or desire arises.

This is why Jesus once told the disciples, "You give them something to eat." He did not mean that they should find a store or bake more bread. He meant that they were to participate in the miracle. They carried the loaves to the people and watched as the food increased in their hands. The miracle extended through them, not apart from them. This shows that miracles are not locked to Jesus alone, as if they were unique events tied only to his personal ministry. They were signs of the kingdom and gifts of God's power that he intended to extend through his followers. To treat them as one-time proofs, or to relegate them to the past, is to contradict what Jesus himself expected. His rebuke shows that he held them responsible for assuming that the miracle could be repeated and applied.

Faith reasons from what God has done to what he will do again. If he has healed before, then he heals again. If he has provided before, then he provides again. If he has forgiven before, then he forgives again. Faith does not regard the acts of God as rare interruptions of the world, but as revelations of the order of the kingdom. The disciples should have thought, "Since he multiplied bread yesterday, food can never be a problem today." Anything less than this was unbelief. Their reasoning should have been carried forward by what they had already seen. Instead, they halted in fear and exposed how little they had learned.

This principle applies to all believers. When God has acted once, faith applies it to every future need. It does not treat his promises as uncertain or his acts as unrepeatable. Miracles are to be expected, not just admired. They stand as the manifestation of God's rule, and they must never be treated as exceptional events. The believer who has seen God's work in the past should never face the future as if it were blank and unpredictable. Faith assumes that the same power will act again, because the same God remains present. Whether the need is food, healing, guidance, or deliverance, the logic of faith is the same. God has done it, therefore God will do it. His word assures it, and his nature guarantees it.

Jesus' rebuke of the disciples was therefore a lesson in faith and in reason. They were supposed to conclude from the feeding of the crowds that bread could never again be a concern. Their failure to do so was a denial of the very lesson the miracle was meant to teach. The one who has seen Christ act must think in terms of application, never isolation. Miracles are both proof and provision. They reveal who Jesus is, but they also give what people need and want. Faith

grasps both sides and extends them into every circumstance. This is why Christ rebuked his disciples, and why the same principle confronts us today. To think that God's power was only for then, or only for one situation, is unbelief. To reason from what he has done to what he will do again is the logic of faith.

Four Days to Resurrection

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. (John 11:43-44)

Lazarus lay in the tomb for four days. The stone sealed him in, the mourners accepted the finality of death, and the sisters felt the delay pressing on them. When Jesus arrived, he approached a situation that already smelled of decay. Four days had passed. The scene carried a message that the process had finished and nothing further could be done. Jesus answered it with a command. He called the man by name, and the dead man walked out. This is how the glory of God appears. He chooses a moment that looks finished and then speaks in a way that rewrites the end of the story.

If God raised Lazarus after four days, then believing that Jesus rose after three should be even easier. The source of both is the same. The Father works, the Son speaks, the Spirit gives life. Lazarus did not raise himself. He received an act of God executed through the word of Jesus. Jesus did not negotiate with the grave. He treated death as a servant and ordered it to release the man. The point is simple. God does the work. Time and decay do not bind him. We can expect God to act instantly, but even when there is delay, there is never defeat. Any delay will only provide a theater where faith can behold the power that governs time itself.

People act as if they must protect reverence for Christ by shrinking the expectation of power in the church. That instinct insults Christ, because it forgets that the miracles belong to him in every case. Those who resist the promise of greater works should consider Lazarus. God raised him after four days, and God raised Jesus after three. The same worker acted in both cases. Length of time establishes no difference. It exposes the error of treating Jesus' earthly experience as a ceiling. Lazarus's four days shattered that imagined limit while keeping all honor with Christ who commanded the grave. Greater works remain his works, extended through his people. The increase magnifies the worker, not the instruments. The only reasonable conclusion is that the days mean nothing to God. If four days did not hinder him, three days could never stand in the way. The church expects increase in scope and reach because the living Christ acts across nations and generations. Faith draws its confidence from the worker, not from the previous catalog of outcomes. If he chooses to do what no prophet has seen, faith agrees at once, because faith believes the worker.

Unbelief is often rooted in self-worship. Its confidence is small because its object is small. Faith turns toward God alone. It judges every situation by his character and by his promises. Faith opens the mind to possibilities that history has never recorded. The Lord may do something unprecedented in our experience. He may surpass what we have read. He may multiply a sign or enlarge a mercy beyond the pattern we expected. None of this exalts man. The honor belongs to the one who acts. The instrument never becomes greater than the hand that wields it.

Faith has its own language, but it is not rigid. Some misunderstand and think the main task is to avoid negative statements. They become superstitious about words and anxious over every sentence. Scripture teaches something sharper. The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. The answer is to fill the heart with the word of God until faith naturally comes out in speech. Words then bend toward promise and expectation. This does not require a nervous refusal to acknowledge present circumstances. Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus had fallen asleep because he wanted them to think about resurrection as easily as waking a friend. When they misunderstood, he stated plainly that Lazarus had died. His confidence remained intact. He preferred to cast the situation under the light of power, but he could also name the present condition without surrendering expectation.

Follow the same pattern. When a person lies sick, we can say that he is sick, and in the same breath say that God heals. When a family carries debt, we can say that the burden exists, and also say that God prospers and that the future will not look like the present. A pattern of speech that centers on present circumstances is an unmistakable sign of unbelief, so this offers no cover for it. The confession that governs the mind should always point toward the outcome promised by God. We do not train ourselves to fear certain words, as if syllables control providence. We train ourselves to live inside the promises until they set the tone for every observation. Faith keeps a forward posture. It treats the current state as material for God to work on. It never grants finality to a condition that God has spoken against.

Martha warned about the odor. She knew what four days means for a body. Jesus redirected her attention. He told her to believe and to look for the glory of God. Four days provided the stage on which that glory would stand out. When the stone moved and the command went forth, no one could pretend that a miracle had not occurred and that the whole thing had been a huge misunderstanding. God had acted. The command created what it required. The voice of Jesus produced obedience in a man who could not hear. Every difficulty that piles up in your sight only enlarges the place where the word will display itself. Faith refuses the counsel of sight and then watches the counsel of God prevail.

When we bring a man to Christ, we do not say that we saved him. We carried a message and announced God's command. He granted repentance and faith. When a person recovers from sickness after prayer, we do not say that we healed him. We obeyed the instruction to pray and to lay hands. God gave life and strength. The same applies to every sign and every answer. If anyone insists that greater works would turn attention toward men, he has already shown that his eyes are fixed on men. The church should speak in a different way. We speak as people who have met the worker of miracles. We point to him and repeat his words until the result appears. We accept that he can enlarge the work far beyond anything we have handled before, because his arm reaches farther than our imagination.

Confident and relaxed perseverance grows from this understanding. Do not retreat because the case looks old or the delay has lengthened. Four days announced the end of hope for Lazarus, and four days set the moment for the command to land with resurrection power. Keep praying and speaking in faith. Keep moving toward the tomb with Jesus. The schedule belongs to him.

The grave does not own the clock. Every hour lies open to the voice that called the world into existence. A believer who holds this outlook becomes steady. He rejects the tyranny of appearances and treats reports from the senses as material for the Lord to overrule.

Unbelief has no excuse in the presence of a Christ who calls himself the Resurrection and the Life. People tried to destroy him and discovered that death cannot hold the one who authors life. The rulers canceled his breath and then saw him return with the keys in his hand. Since he lives by his own power, he can impart that life whenever he wills. If the grave could not hold Lazarus after four days, it could never hold Jesus after three. The grave surrenders to him. Demons and diseases obey him. History takes its shape whenever he speaks.

Glory in Christ's Suffering

The Bible glorifies the suffering of Christ. It portrays his pain as the decisive act of redemption, the culmination of divine wisdom and the revelation of God's eternal plan. His suffering was foreordained, announced by the prophets, and accomplished with deliberate obedience. To glory in Christ's suffering is to recognize the cross as the center of God's work in the world, the place where salvation was secured and victory over sin and death was achieved. The apostles returned to this theme repeatedly, exalting not only the fact of Christ's resurrection but the death by which it had been secured. His triumph over death had meaning because it confirmed the power of his suffering to reconcile man to God.

When the New Testament speaks of the suffering of Christ, it marks it off as unlike any other. His agony was not the common pain of men, which may arise from disease, accident, or natural decay. His suffering was priestly and judicial, a bearing of divine wrath in the place of others. Peter pointed to the wounds of Christ as the source of healing. Paul pointed to his death as the ground of justification. The writer of Hebrews showed that his obedience unto death fulfilled the entire sacrificial system. In every case, Scripture glorifies the suffering of Christ because it was the ordained means of redemption. His suffering was effectual and victorious.

When the apostles exhorted believers to share in Christ's sufferings, they did not suggest that human pain could supplement redemption. They never implied that affliction carried the same dignity as the cross. They spoke instead of the opposition faced by those who confessed Christ, and of the trials that arose from fidelity to his name. Paul wrote of filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. He did not mean the cross was unfinished. What remains is that the world is still persecuting Christ, and it does this by persecuting his church. In this way believers share in his sufferings, not by adding to redemption, but by bearing the hatred that is still directed at him.

This biblical pattern is corrupted when self-centered religionists turn attention away from Christ to themselves. They boast of their personal hardships, as if these carried spiritual value. Their afflictions may have arisen from poverty, poor judgment, or the ordinary troubles of life, but they parade them as though such things united them with Christ. They glorify their own suffering instead of the suffering of Christ. By doing so, they confuse personal hardship with Christlike suffering, and they corrupt the gospel by shifting glory from the Son of God to the wounds of men.

The counterfeit is destructive in two ways. First, it robs Christ of his unique honor. The cross becomes a backdrop for human drama, and the suffering of the Son of God is displaced by the spectacle of men boasting in pain. Second, it produces a distorted faith in which misery is treated as if it were holy. People imagine that their defeats, failures, or hardships carry divine approval and spiritual value. They look to their pain for validation instead of to Christ for salvation. The result is a false gospel that celebrates despair and calls it devotion.

Christ's suffering was never meaningless. It was directed by God, charged with redemptive power, and crowned with triumph. Human hardship, unless endured for the sake of the gospel, carries no such character. It may draw sympathy, but it does not glorify God in itself. To confuse the two is to strip the cross of its distinction and to cheapen discipleship. A believer may suffer illness, financial loss, or grief. These experiences are real, but they do not in themselves resemble the suffering of Christ. And in most cases, they are the results of faithlessness or foolishness. Only when affliction arises from faith in the word of God, from confession of the gospel, and from loyalty to Christ does it carry the mark of sharing in his sufferings.

The religionist who boasts in his pain without the gospel shows that he does not appreciate the cross. He treats hardship as if it sanctified him by its mere occurrence. But affliction does not justify, and trouble does not sanctify. Christ justifies, and his Spirit sanctifies. Pain has no power to make a person holy. Only persecution for the gospel has meaning, because it shows the world's hatred of Christ and the believer's loyalty to him. To teach otherwise is to replace the gospel with a counterfeit in which misery becomes the center of devotion and human weakness replaces divine triumph.

The true glory of the gospel proclaims a suffering that accomplished redemption and a resurrection that sealed eternal life. It points to a cross that cannot be repeated, and it summons believers to glory only in what Christ has finished. The task of the Christian is not to parade his wounds, but to exalt the one who triumphed through wounds. Paul recounted his afflictions, but his glory always pointed away from himself to the grace of God. When he described his weakness, he magnified the power of Christ that sustained him. When he recalled persecutions, he glorified the gospel that advanced through them.

The distinction, then, is between Christ-centered glory and man-centered glory. The Bible glorifies the suffering of Christ because it is the center of salvation. False religion glorifies the suffering of man because it is the center of pride. The former produces faith, thanksgiving, and perseverance. The latter produces despair, hypocrisy, and self-exaltation. To preserve this distinction is essential for maintaining the gospel and exposing its counterfeits.

The believer who glories in Christ's suffering stands with the apostles in declaring that salvation was complete and victory secure. He confesses that no human pain could add to the cross, and no personal hardship carries spiritual merit. He knows that Christ's wounds were sufficient, and that his own afflictions, if joined to the gospel, are occasions to honor God rather than himself. In this way the gospel remains in unshakable contrast to all self-centered religion. It leaves no room for human boasting, even in suffering, but directs all glory to the Son of God who suffered once for all and rose in triumph.

God and Mammon

“You cannot serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

The verse stands as a simple law of the human soul. It does not plead or argue. It states a condition that governs every choice that concerns wealth and possessions. The first thing the text does is refuse compromise. A human heart will arrange its loyalties. That arrangement will determine what the life looks like. This is true for preachers and bakers, for the man who prays at dawn and the woman who balances the household books. There is no exception. There is no clever partition that makes fidelity to God compatible with secret devotion to mammon.

Material needs are undeniable. People need food, clothing, shelter, means to provide for children and neighbors, streams of cash for sudden repairs and predictable obligations. These needs are facts. The existence of need does not excuse divided service. It exposes the necessity of identifying the true source. If money is treated as a separate domain that answers those needs apart from God, then money becomes the source in practice. When a house of prayer refuses to believe God for wealth while the same people borrow confidence from banks and budgets, the result is not spiritual prudence. The result is dual allegiance where the visible master claims the heart.

A great temptation shows itself as holiness. Religious people will speak as if faithfulness to God requires a refusal to believe God for abundance. They will say that to seek money from God is worldly. They will appear to perform spiritual duties with zeal but treat material provision as a realm for education, labor, and strategic planning. That posture appears holy because it carries a moral edge. But it is nothing but hypocrisy. If God will meet the soul and mammon must meet the body, allegiance divides. The one who thinks he is too holy to ask God for abundance may appear to serve Jesus on Sundays but take orders from mammon the rest of the week. But if we know that the person serves mammon, then we know that he does not serve God, because Jesus said a man cannot serve both at the same time. In other words, if a man does not trust God for material things, he is surely serving mammon; otherwise, he would already be dead.

Ask the logical question that the text requires. If God is our God, who else ought we to expect to take care of us? Turn the question toward the alternative and it collapses. To look to men for ultimate provision is to trust hands that fail. To look to oneself for ultimate sufficiency is to idolize a finite mind. To look to Satan for provision is to ally with him at the root. Each of these alternatives is either impotent or traitorous. God was declared Lord and Provider. The obligations of worship include trusting God where wealth is concerned. Refusing that trust is apostasy.

Consider outcomes. When a person places primary loyalty in money, the promise that follows is narrow. The world can offer a measure of wealth. It will deliver that measure by its own rules. The servant of mammon secures an arrangement that yields only what the world can give. That

is a limited prosperity. Even that limited yield may fail. Money obeys circumstances. A fortune can vanish. A scheme can crumble. Serving money gives the illusion of control while exposing life to the volatility of fallen systems. The servant of mammon will discover that having money is not identical with the good life. The pursuit of money produces an appetite that swallows meaning.

The person who serves God receives a different economy. The primary gift is salvation and the righteousness that belongs to those who believe. That gift is decisive and final. It stands as the foundation for everything else. Jesus taught that God cares for sparrows and counts the hairs of a human head. The same teacher promised that God will give the things that pagans want to those who seek the kingdom. This is a guarantee embedded in the life and teaching of Jesus. To trust God for spiritual realities and to refuse trust for material realities is to split the testimony of the gospel. The promise of prosperity flows from the same character that accomplishes redemption. God cares for his own people. That care includes abundance for work and family.

Some will recoil at such a statement. Faithless critics will say that it is dangerous to claim that God guarantees anything. They will insist on a vague pietism in which God's blessing is uncertain and promises must be neutered by caveats. This posture amounts to a refusal of Jesus' plain words. To resist the promise of provision and prosperity is to accuse Jesus of exaggeration. Those who take that road present themselves as cautious disciples while they undermine the very Lord they claim to follow. Their caution is proof of a divided heart. They honor the appearance of loyalty while denying the force of Jesus' teaching.

That contradiction produces a particular breed of counterfeit Christianity. These men and women want the social identity of the church without the trust that the gospel calls for. They will critique believers who openly ask God for wealth. They will call faith confession presumptuous. They will attribute motives to the faithful that reveal a failure to read Scripture. These critics are not friends. They are enemies of Jesus even while they claim to follow him. Distinguish between opponents who oppose openly and those who hide opposition behind pious phrases. The faithful know where solidarity stands. A friend is one who repeats Jesus and lives by him. A counterfeit distorts the language and betrays the teaching.

The choice remains unavoidable. A single allegiance shapes life. To serve God involves believing that the God who saves also cares for material needs. Faith confession for spiritual realities and faith confession for material realities belong together. It is a single faith in God. The kingdom has both edges. To insist that God supplies the soul and the world supplies the body is to invent a gulf that Scripture does not authorize. The man who trusts God for wealth will find his steps arranged. The person who thinks that God does not promise these things, so that he looks to mammon to sustain him will find that he has never truly followed Jesus at all.

God Is Not Your Excuse

The prophets revealed God as the sovereign ruler who commands and governs all things. Their announcements about divine sovereignty were not invitations to retreat from responsibility but calls to obey and believe. When Isaiah declared that the nations are like a drop in the bucket before God, the point was not to encourage despair about human weakness but to magnify confidence in divine strength. When Jeremiah proclaimed that God raises and tears down kingdoms, he did not give Israel permission to languish in unbelief. The prophets did not use God's sovereignty as a shield for passivity. They held it up as the highest reason for bold action and relentless faith.

In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ appeared as the perfect revelation of God. He explained God with words and deeds, showing what the Father is like. In him the sovereignty of God is not abstract, but embodied and active. Jesus never permitted excuses. When people pleaded weakness, he demanded faith. When they trembled in fear, he commanded them to believe. He exposed every form of resignation as unbelief. His works of healing, his authority over demons, and his power over nature did not portray divine sovereignty as an excuse but as a fact that leads to trust and obedience. If God rules all things, then no one has grounds to say that faith is optional.

Excuses often present themselves as piety, but they arise from pride. The person who says "I will believe, but God is sovereign" thinks he is showing reverence for divine rule, when in reality he is protecting himself from the exposure of unbelief. Excuses are psychological maneuvers to soften the shame of cowardice. Instead of admitting to doubt, a man disguises his weakness with theological language, appealing to God's sovereignty as if it were humility. This is deceit. The excuse does not lessen the guilt of unbelief, but compounds it. For unbelief is one sin, but unbelief plus hypocrisy makes two sins. The excuse-maker does not only fail to believe, but he also corrupts the doctrine of divine sovereignty to justify himself.

Faith is a spiritual power. It generates inner strength and endurance, and it propels the mind into an outlook of confident expectation. Optimism is not natural temperament but the form that true faith takes when confronted with the future. It is the conviction that God's rule guarantees the triumph of his promises. Pessimism, on the other hand, is not a harmless mood. It is satanic. To look at God's sovereignty and respond with gloom is to deny his nature. Pessimism makes the devil the effective ruler of one's thoughts. If your view of God produces despair, then the god you serve is Satan. Most religious people serve Satan.

Scripture offers contrasts that reveal the perversity of excuses. Daniel faced the threat of death in Babylon, but he prayed with thanksgiving and trusted in God's authority. David met Goliath with a declaration that the Lord of hosts would give him victory. Paul endured prisons, shipwrecks, and plots, yet he wrote letters that radiate strength, joy, and anticipation. These men faced trials greater than most believers will ever see, but they responded with optimism that was supernatural. They did not say "I will try, but God is sovereign." They possessed

certainty precisely because God is sovereign. Their lives make every excuse today look disgraceful.

One of the most insidious forms of excuse-making is the false piety of “but God is sovereign.” People will say, “I expect healing, but God is sovereign.” Or, “Yes, Jesus promised this, but God is sovereign.” The formula sounds holy to the foolish, but it obviously empties faith of its meaning. It uses divine sovereignty as a weapon against God’s word, twisting his rule into an alibi for unbelief. The person who speaks this way has canceled his own expectation. God’s sovereignty becomes the excuse to avoid believing, the shield to guard against disappointment, the refuge for a cowardly heart. Yet the very sovereignty invoked here is the reason faith must be absolute. If God rules, then his promises are sure. If he is King, then his word is unbreakable, and optimism is the only rational stance. To hide unbelief behind divine sovereignty, as almost all those who affirm the doctrine have done, is to turn God against himself.

Supernatural optimism is not a marginal trait. It is the paradigm of faith itself. Faith expects good from God as a settled worldview. To believe is to look ahead with certainty that God will act according to his word. Optimism is not cheerfulness of personality, but a rational and spiritual posture grounded in divine sovereignty. By contrast, pessimism is not simply the mark of a darker temperament. It is the expression of a rival worldview. It assumes that evil will triumph, that God’s promises will fail, that faith will be disappointed. This is the mind of Satan, not of God. To adopt pessimism as one’s framework is to confess allegiance to another lord.

God’s sovereignty is the most powerful reason for optimism, the strongest foundation for faith, and the surest ground for joy. To reduce it to an excuse for unbelief is perverse. Excuses are born of cowardice and sustained by pride. They turn divine majesty into a cover for sin. They disguise doubt as reverence, when in truth they are insults against the God who rules. The prophets and apostles did not live this way. Jesus Christ did not teach this way. Those who live this way are enemies of faith and allies of Satan.

God Save the Church

You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. (Revelation 3:1)

The church is often regarded as the place of salvation, the visible community of those who have passed from death to life. But Christ himself spoke to a church and declared it dead though it had the reputation of being alive. His words expose the reality that the church, which claims to hold the message of salvation, stands in need of salvation itself. The gospel must be preached not only to the world but also to the church, because many within its walls have never believed in Christ.

This truth overturns cherished assumptions. Many imagine that evangelism is for outsiders, while the church requires only teaching and nurture. But in fact, evangelism is necessary inside the church as much as outside it. The church contains multitudes of unsaved people who have never known Christ, who remain sinners under judgment, who are sick in body and soul, who are impoverished in faith and in life. They sit under sermons, sing hymns, and recite creeds, but remain strangers to the grace of God. Far from being the safest place, the church can be the most dangerous, for religious traditions multiply bonds and intensify blindness.

The condition is worse because the unsaved in the church are usually the hardest to reach. They assume they are already saved, knowledgeable, and spiritual. They take pride in their familiarity with theology, their training in seminaries, or their service as pastors, deacons, and teachers. They trust their heritage, their rituals, or their denominational pedigree as if these guaranteed their standing before God. They rely on their church attendance, and what they consider kindness and good deeds. To confront them with the gospel is to pierce their pride, and they resist it with greater force than a pagan who has never pretended to believe. When Jesus preached, it was the religious who opposed him most fiercely, and the same dynamic remains.

The pride of religious people produces not only resistance but outright hostility to the truth. Professors of theology may teach the history of doctrine while remaining strangers to Christ. Pastors may labor in ministry while never having been converted. Sunday school teachers may instruct children without believing the message they recite. Church members may sit through countless sermons, sing in choirs, and serve on committees while having no living faith in Christ. They cloak their unbelief under the guise of knowledge, activity, or respectability, which makes them more dangerous both to themselves and to those who follow them.

Their misplaced trust takes many forms. For some, the church itself becomes the object of faith, as if belonging to the institution meant belonging to Christ. Others cling to ideology, whether theological or political, and measure their standing with God by their loyalty to these systems. Still others rely on heritage, culture, or relationships, assuming that family traditions or social ties can substitute for faith, just because these occur in a religious context. These objects of trust give a false sense of security but cannot save. They are idols that obscure the face of Christ.

In contrast, some outside the church hear the word of God and believe, even with little exposure to formal religion. They may have no denominational ties or institutional heritage, yet they exercise genuine faith in Christ. Meanwhile multitudes inside remain unsaved, worshiping the church instead of the Lord. This irony offends religious sensibilities, but it is why the church is powerless and why unbelievers perceive hypocrisy within its walls. The gospel is sometimes clearer to those outside than to those inside, because outside there are fewer distractions of tradition and pride.

This reality confronts the church with a hard truth. It is not enough to maintain the forms of religion. And it is especially moronic if your religion is in fact something like a historic heritage or a political ideology. God has no respect for your heritage or ideology. He only respects faith in Jesus Christ. To say that the church is full of unsaved people is mere observation. It should not even be controversial. It is the reason church services are void of life and power, and why sickness and poverty reign in places where abundance should abound. The world mocks a church that does not resemble Christ. In fact, in many places the world has more of Christ than the church, because some in the world believe, only that they remain outside rather than join churches that care only about politics and morals, and that by their unbelief and cessationism crucify Jesus over and over again before their eyes.

The gospel must therefore be preached to the church as much as to the world. Evangelism is not limited to overtly hostile environments or distant regions. The gospel must be introduced, perhaps for the first time, to pulpits and pews, seminaries and classrooms, ministries and denominations. The same message declared to pagans must be declared to pastors: repent and believe in the gospel. The same call that confronts atheists must confront theologians: abandon your pride and trust in Christ. The same summons that rescues the drunkard must rescue the deacon who has never believed.

This strikes at the heart of religious self-assurance, and so it is offensive to many. They protest that the church is the community of the saved, that to question this is divisive or heretical. Yet this very protest reveals the depth of their unbelief. In Jeremiah's day the people cried, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord," as if the temple itself guaranteed their safety. Today many echo the same error, crying, "The covenant of the Lord, the covenant of the Lord," as if covenant or church membership could save them. But the covenant will not save them, because they do not believe the covenant. To resist the gospel is to resist Christ, no matter what religious vocabulary surrounds it. The message may be harsh, but it is merciful, because it confronts the church with the only hope of salvation.

The alternative is to remain under delusion, to preserve the reputation of being alive while remaining dead. That is the condition Christ condemned in Revelation, and it is the condition that must be exposed today. The church must hear again that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, not in their heritage, ideology, or institution. Anything less than genuine and exclusive belief in the Son of God leaves a person condemned, no matter his religious background or knowledge.

When Jesus declared a church dead though it had a reputation of life, he was not announcing the end but calling for repentance. He revealed the truth so that the church might abandon its illusions and turn to him. That same mercy still confronts the church today. It is a message of judgment, but also of hope, because the one who exposes death is the same one who raises the dead to life. He speaks to those who falsely assume they have salvation, calling them to faith. He tears down idols of tradition and ideology so that his word may take root.

The church must preach the gospel to itself with fresh urgency. Its members, its teachers, and its leaders must test themselves to see whether they are in the faith. Do they trust in Jesus, or their historic theologians and traditions? Are they cloaked with the righteousness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, or draped in human creeds and credentials that cannot save? They must cast off the worthless reputation of piety and seek the reality of Christ. The gospel is not only for the world but also for the church, and Christ saves wherever he is truly believed.

God-Centered Rebellion

There is a kind of devotion that prides itself on being centered on God, and yet it bypasses him at the very moment he directs attention to where his heart is turned. A person may speak endlessly of his commitment to God, but when God stretches out his hand toward suffering people, the one who boasts of devotion turns his face away. This shows that he is absorbed in the image of God-centeredness rather than in God himself. It is a counterfeit piety that exalts the posture of reverence while dismissing the voice of God.

The language of being God-centered has become a badge of superiority. It gives the impression of a lofty devotion, but it often hides a refusal to listen. Those who embrace this pose convince themselves that they are absorbed in God's greatness, but their thoughts remain inward. They imagine that their devotion rises higher than others, but in reality they are trapped in self-absorption. Their claim is that God has become their reference point, but the evidence shows that they have made a showpiece of their reverence, parading it as if it were the substance of faith. What they defend is the idea that they are God-centered, and this becomes a shield for indifference, cruelty, and disdain toward others.

The result is a theology that despises God's own promises. When he declares healing, prosperity, and blessing, this false piety rejects them. They are quick to dismiss these promises because careless preachers have mishandled them. Instead of searching the Scriptures to know the truth, they use human error as an excuse to throw out what God has given. Their words are smooth and confident, but their reasoning exposes rebellion. To insist on being God-centered while discarding his word is to exalt one's own posture over God's authority.

This deception flourishes among those who already enjoy comfort. The voice that scorns others for seeking God's intervention often speaks from a place where needs have been met. Their security becomes the ground for their disdain. They enjoy the luxury of attacking others for insufficient reverence while refusing to face the desperation of sickness, poverty, dead-end labor, and destructive relationships. They play at being God's defenders while insulating themselves from the reality of suffering.

The Scriptures, however, present God as the reference point for all thought and action. To be centered on him is to anchor every doctrine and ethic in his revelation. If he declares a promise, reverence demands belief. If he reveals his heart, obedience requires that we share it. The one who is truly centered on God will not turn away from his compassion. The poor, the sick, and the broken are not obstacles to higher devotion but the very objects of God's concern. The law and the prophets, the gospel and the apostles all affirm that God's compassion flows toward the needy. To be aligned with God is to align with his mercy.

To be God-centered is often to center on human need, because God himself has promised to meet it. When he speaks of healing, prosperity, and blessing, he commands us to believe. When he points to the hungry, the sick, or the broken, he directs us to proclaim his promises to them. Our attention to these things does not diminish him, for in keeping his word he displays his

glory. The one who calls such teaching man-centered has despised God's command and inverted his order.

True God-centeredness identifies with the divine heart. It sees beyond abstract postures and theological slogans. It grasps that God has revealed himself not only as the majestic ruler but also as the compassionate giver. His will is not only that he be exalted in word but that his glory be displayed in action. This includes the restoration of health, the lifting of burdens, the supply of needs, and the deliverance of people from futility and despair. Any claim to God-centeredness that ignores this is fraudulent. It presents itself as reverence but denies the very character of God.

The highest display of his glory is his sacrifice for us. Religion in its counterfeit form boasts of sacrifice, of blood shed for God, of human effort expended in his service. But the gospel reveals something greater. What glorifies God is not our endurance for him but his endurance for us. What magnifies his name is not our blood shed for his honor but the blood of his Son shed for our redemption. God provided his own sacrifice. He placed his own Lamb on the altar. He absorbed the cost that we could not pay. This is the center of true faith.

God's greatness is seen in that he pays his own bill and ours as well. He does not require our poverty to enrich him, nor our suffering to sustain him. He is the one who gives, not the one who drains. The false devotion that prides itself on being God-centered imagines that God's glory depends on human contributions. It supposes that we must add to him through our self-denial and labor. But the truth is the opposite. God enriches himself by enriching us. He glorifies himself by blessing us. He shows his majesty by pouring out his abundance. He bears the sacrifice while lifting burdens from us. He cancels our debts while refusing to place his own upon us.

The appearance of reverence can be the most destructive form of rebellion. When a man proclaims that he is absorbed in God while discarding God's word, he is worse than the unbeliever who rejects openly. The unbeliever does not pretend to honor God, but the hypocrite builds an altar to himself while speaking God's name. He loves the display of God-centeredness more than the God who calls for faith. He magnifies himself in the name of God, and in doing so he secures the very judgment he pretends to escape.

Godliness Is Gain All Around

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:9)

Paul wrote about those who turned religion into a means of gain. They entered into this life for personal profit, as if piety were a business venture. The essential point is that they pursued this profit through evil methods and motives. Their doctrine did not agree with the words of Christ, and their conduct betrayed them. He called them conceited and corrupt, accusing them of stirring up envy, strife, slander, suspicion, and constant friction. Their error was not that they believed godliness brings gain, but that they treated godliness as a tool for dishonest gain. They reduced the life of faith into a scheme for financial profit, and in doing so they revealed their unbelief.

Godliness is gain, but not when the chief desire is financial profit, not when it is pursued as a racket, and not when severed from faith and love. Paul distinguished dishonest gain from true gain, and pointed to the reward that comes from God himself. To deny that godliness brings increase would be to contradict the very gospel, for God is the one who rewards those who seek him.

The testimony of Scripture is consistent and broad on this point. The book of Proverbs speaks repeatedly about the reward of righteousness, diligence, and faithfulness. Riches and honor belong to those who walk in wisdom. The fear of the Lord leads to health and prosperity. These promises are central to the wisdom of God. Jesus himself declared that if a person seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all the things that even the greedy and carnal pagans seek will be added. He assured his disciples that faith does not leave them barren but brings them into a life of abundance. Godliness is not a subtraction from life but the fullness of life itself.

It is true that Paul warned against the love of money, saying that those who long to be rich fall into temptation and ruin. But here again the distinction is clear. He spoke against craving wealth for its own sake, and pursuing it in a way that results in all kinds of evil and causes one to wander from God. In other words, he referred to someone who put money first, thus losing God, not someone who would put God first, thus gaining money. The issue was never gain through faith, but gain through greed, and even criminal means. To seek the kingdom and receive wealth as God's addition is one thing, to lust after wealth and use religion as a cloak for dishonesty, hatred, and criminal activities is another.

Paul did not describe a mere interest in money, but a fixation that pushed a person into progressively evil methods. His language was severe: temptation, snare, ruin, destruction, evils, wandering from the faith, piercing themselves with pangs. This was not the portrait of someone who merely enjoyed abundance, but of men who corrupted religion for gain, sold their integrity, exploited and devoured others, and even descended into violence and murder to

protect their idols. The love of money became a power that deformed the soul and drove a man headlong into destruction.

The opposite error has proven even more destructive. There are many who suppose that godliness is pain, that to follow Christ means inevitable loss, and that holiness consists of renouncing prosperity. They present poverty as if it were a sacrament, and treat lack as if it were the essence of piety. But this is a denial of God's character and covenant. If godliness is not gain in every way as God promised, then faith is meaningless and grace is empty. To remove gain from godliness is to remove God from godliness. The whole relationship falls apart once God is no longer the giver of life and reward. Faith, Scripture says, pleases God by affirming that he is the rewarder of those who seek him. What Paul rejected was dishonest gain and criminal method, but faithless religious people reject gain itself, even when it comes from God, since they suppose that no gain comes from God, and in doing so they reject the gospel itself.

The Lord Jesus taught that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, but he did not mean that life consists in their absence. The essence of life is found in God himself, in faith, love, and justice. Possessions are never the center. A man with much may walk in godliness, and a man with little may descend into wickedness, because godliness is measured in relation to God, not in the measure of possessions.

Jesus asked, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?" To pursue the world as the ultimate goal is folly, for the soul is of greater value than all the wealth and honor of the nations. But notice what he did not say. He did not say that losing the world will save the soul. To surrender wealth without faith does not redeem a man. Poverty in itself has no power to confer righteousness. The issues are distinct. To gain the world and lose the soul is ruin. To lose both the world and the soul is the same ruin. The only gain that matters is God himself, and from him flows every other blessing in its proper order.

To confess that godliness is gain is to confess that God himself is gain. He is life, light, wisdom, and wealth. He gives freely to those who trust him, and he adds all things to those who seek his kingdom. Godliness is not a scheme for dishonest profit, nor a badge of ascetic loss, but the reality of sharing in the abundance of God. Those who believe in him inherit both this life and the life to come. They walk in peace, in righteousness, and in the fullness of blessing.

The error lies in shifting the center away from God, whether by using him for dishonest gain or by rejecting gain altogether. Both errors miss the main thing. Both treat possessions as if they defined the essence of godliness, whether by grasping or by renouncing. Both displace God from the center. But true godliness places God where he belongs, and receives from him whatever comes, with faith and gratitude.

The gain of godliness is measured in all things, not only in possessions. It is gain in peace, in health, in wisdom, in strength, in prosperity, in joy, and in eternity. It is gain in the soul and in the world, in time and in eternity, because God himself is the giver. The gospel proclaims that

God blesses his people with every spiritual blessing in Christ and with every good thing added according to his promise, rather than leaving them impoverished.

Healing and God's Nature

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. (Psalm 103:2–3)

Scripture places healing and all blessings within the framework of God's nature, and refuses to confine them to the narrow categories invented by theologians who strain to control the truth. To speak of benefits is to speak of what God himself is inclined to bestow, and what belongs to his character and essence. Healing is a matter of God's nature rather than of spiritual gifts or extraordinary endowments. His benefits flow from his nature and never depend on a secondary arrangement of gifts, offices, or ceremonies, but flow from his nature as freely as light from the sun.

To illustrate this point, consider salvation itself. No one insists that a man must hear the gospel only from someone who carries a gift of evangelism. The gospel carries power by its own divine content, because it reveals the nature and work of God in Christ. Likewise, healing does not wait upon the presence of some charismatic specialist, nor does it depend on the operation of revelatory signs to prove Scripture. It belongs to the same redemptive reality as the forgiveness of sins. The Lord is the healer, as much as he is the savior, judge, or provider. He acts from who he is. God does not work justice only when there is new revelation that he must authenticate. Justice is who he is. And God does not provide only when it is tied to some special promise or covenant. He revealed himself as the Lord who provides and who gives the power to get wealth. Prosperity is who he is. He is not made to become something he is not by a covenant. These are expressions of his very being. He is the one who is, before all covenants and promises, and what he is cannot be canceled by human tradition or theological deceit.

A covenant at best reveals who he is. It does not make him who he is. He is who he is before the covenant and without the covenant. This perspective exposes the blasphemy of that whole framework which relegates miracles to authentication, and which ties them to a supposed class of gifts that have now expired. To treat healing only as a sign that proves new doctrine, while refusing to see it as a benefit given to man, is to think in categories foreign to Scripture. It strips God of his revealed nature, reduces mercy to a temporary emblem, and turns his compassion into a theatrical prop for a season now supposedly ended. Such teaching caricatures God instead of magnifying him. It recasts the Lord of glory into a stagehand who only healed to set the scene for apostles, and who then retired once the curtain fell. This is nonsense, and it betrays a profound alienation from the God of Scripture.

The attempt to spiritualize healing destroys itself. The New Testament refuses to allow it. Matthew refers the prophecy of Isaiah to the physical healings of Jesus, saying that he bore our infirmities and carried our diseases. To read this as figurative, as if the Spirit meant moral weakness or the stain of guilt, is to wrench the text out of the very context in which Christ's acts gave it concrete meaning. If one spiritualizes where the Bible speaks of bodily conditions, then the same liberty could be taken in reverse, and every spiritual matter could be forced into bodily terms. Words would cease to carry definition, and context would lose all function. Yet

even that maneuver would fail, because Scripture itself binds the two together. Redemption embraces both body and soul. Forgiveness and healing are united benefits that cannot be treated as alien to one another.

Jesus is the savior of both spirit and body. His suffering was a whole offering, never segmented to apply only to one part of man. The same cross that accomplished justification also secured healing. The same blood that removes guilt also delivers from the curse of sickness. To deny one while confessing the other is to mutilate redemption and present a distorted Christ. The apostles rejected such fragmentation outright. They preached a whole gospel of forgiveness, healing, deliverance, and eternal life, because the Redeemer himself is whole and undivided. Every blessing rests on his nature and work, not on the ebb and flow of human theories.

The attempt to classify healing as a temporary gift or an expired credential is more than a harmless mistake. It becomes heresy in the fullest sense. To deny the physical blessings of redemption is to deny redemption itself. It rewrites the atonement so that Christ bore sins but left sickness unaddressed, as if he died for guilt but ignored the curse, and as if he conquered death but left disease unchallenged. Such denial replaces the gospel with another, and in doing so it weakens everything it touches. It proclaims a Christ who saves the soul but abandons the body, portraying him as a redeemer who forgives but does not restore, or a Lord who justifies but leaves his people under the torment of affliction. This is a counterfeit Christ, foreign to Scripture. It is a fabrication and counterfeit. Anyone who preaches such a false gospel is by definition an antichrist.

The Faithless tell themselves that they are guarding orthodoxy, but by rejecting redemption and the nature of God, they fall into the service of Satan. They act as his mouthpieces, repeating the lie that God has withdrawn and no longer shows mercy or extends his benefits. Their doctrine inevitably implies that God no longer acts according to his own nature, or that his nature has changed. But if his nature can change, then he was never God in the first place. They function as heralds of unbelief, speaking with the voice of Satan and carrying his message. To receive their teaching is to sit at the feet of a demon, one who bears the name of theologian but speaks with the voice of the serpent. Their message replaces Christ with another savior. Scripture judges them by their doctrine. It exposes them as evil, standing as enemies of Christ and heralds of Satan.

Forget not all his benefits. To remember them is to confess what God is. He is the one who forgives sins and heals diseases, who redeems life from the pit and crowns with steadfast love and mercy. These are constant expressions of his nature, never confined to fleeting eras of revelation. To diminish them is to diminish him, to forget who he is and what he has declared himself to be. To confess them is to worship him as he truly is, to acknowledge the fullness of his character, and to receive the salvation he has accomplished in Christ.

Christian theology must reject every scheme that confines healing to the past, to gifts, or to proofs. It must recognize that redemption is comprehensive. The benefits are intrinsic to God's nature, and Christ has accomplished an undivided salvation for spirit and body. Anything less is

blasphemy. Such a distortion parades itself as orthodoxy but has no truth in it. In practice it denies the cross and empties it of power. By its very nature it betrays the Redeemer. The true gospel refuses such distortions. It proclaims the Lord as he is: the healer, the savior, the provider, the righteous judge, the eternal God whose name and nature remain unchanged. To confess him rightly is to confess healing as well as forgiveness, abundance as well as righteousness, life in every aspect as well as life everlasting. This is his nature and his benefits, and this is the Christ whom faith receives.

Healing and Man's Sin

Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. (John 5:14)

In Jerusalem there was a pool near the Sheep Gate where many of the sick gathered, hoping for recovery. Among them lay a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He believed that the stirring of the water could bring healing, but he had no one to help him reach it in time. When Jesus saw him, he asked if he wanted to be made well. The man explained his helplessness, but Jesus simply commanded him to rise, take up his bed, and walk. Instantly he was healed. Because this happened on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders confronted him, but he did not even know who had healed him. Later, Jesus found him in the temple and gave him a solemn warning: "Sin no more, lest something worse come upon you."

Most people imagine divine healing to work in this way. They suppose that God, acting out of hidden sovereignty, walks among the sick, chooses one without reason, heals him, and then walks away. The healing at the pool of Bethesda might be misread to support this delusion. A man who was not seeking Christ, who did not even know him, suddenly received healing through a direct initiative of Jesus. In truth, it was an exceptional incident, standing apart from the usual pattern of Christ's ministry.

The scene at Bethesda is striking. A multitude of invalids surrounded the pool, hoping for relief. The man Jesus healed had suffered as an invalid for thirty-eight years, and he lingered at the pool, convinced it could somehow deliver him if only he reached it at the right moment. He was passive, resigned to his weakness, and dependent on external circumstances. Jesus approached him without being asked, and commanded him to rise. The miracle was immediate and complete. But it was rare in its form. The man displayed no evident faith. He expressed no expectation from Christ. He did not even know who Jesus was. Christ initiated everything. The healing differs from the vast majority of healings in the Gospels.

When we turn from this isolated incident to the broader witness of Scripture, the difference becomes clear. Most healings occur when people seek Christ in faith. The Gospels overflow with examples. Blind men cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on us." A woman presses through the crowd to touch the hem of his garment. A father pleads for his tormented child. Friends carry the paralyzed to the feet of Jesus, tearing open a roof if necessary. In case after case, the sick or their companions actively approach Christ with expectation. In response, Jesus repeatedly says, "Your faith has made you well," or "According to your faith be it to you." The emphasis is unmistakable. Healing is tied to faith. The sick are not passive objects waiting for arbitrary selection, but active seekers who trust in Christ's power.

This does not mean that sovereign acts of healing never occur. Scripture affirms that sometimes Jesus intervened directly, as at Bethesda. But because the majority of healings take place through active faith, these sovereign healings serve as additional instances rather than replacements of the faith principle. They increase the total number of healed rather than restrict it. If anything, they confirm the abundance of God's power. God heals in response to

faith almost all of the time, and he sometimes heals by sovereign initiative, so that the streams of miracles together display the fullness of divine generosity. To imagine that only the Bethesda model applies is to ignore the thousands of other healings that follow the principle of faith.

After the healing, Jesus later confronted the man with a sobering warning: “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” These words dismantle another common misconception. Many assume that if a healing comes from God, it must be permanent no matter how the recipient lives or what he believes. But Jesus spoke differently. He revealed that healing can be forfeited. Sin can invite something worse than the original condition. The implication is that man carries responsibility after receiving healing. Christ’s gift must not be treated lightly, as if one could return to a life of sin or unbelief without consequence.

This warning was not about ordinary failings, for every believer stumbles in many ways. Rather, Jesus was addressing a lifestyle of rebellion, a pattern of sin that invites judgment. The man had lived thirty-eight years in sickness, and his condition may have been connected to his earlier conduct. Jesus healed him freely, but then charged him to turn from sin, lest an even heavier burden come upon him. Sickness is not only a medical problem but also a moral and spiritual one. Sin and unbelief can open the door to disease, while faith and obedience guard health.

Healing is a gift of God, but man’s response matters. Faith receives it, and faith preserves it. Sin can disrupt it, and unbelief can undo it. Divine sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility. On the contrary, God’s sovereignty is the reason man is accountable, for it is God himself who has declared that faith and obedience are required. To appeal to divine sovereignty as an excuse for passivity or unbelief is to distort the truth. God’s sovereignty never nullifies responsibility, but establishes it.

The pool of Bethesda is the exception, not the pattern. The usual pattern is that God commands us to believe his word and to act on it. Those who imagine that they may wait passively and hope for a sovereign touch are refusing the testimony of Scripture. They pretend to honor God’s sovereignty but actually deny it, because they ignore the way God has chosen to exercise his will. The sovereignty of God includes his command that men believe. It is never God’s sovereignty that withholds, since God never sovereignly breaks his promises, but it is unbelief that refuses the word of God.

Healing still follows the biblical principles. God sometimes intervenes in sovereign ways, but most often he expects men to seek Christ by faith. This is why the attempt to excuse unbelief by appealing to divine sovereignty is so destructive. It trains people to think that they have no obligation to believe, that sickness is inevitable, and that healing is arbitrary. The result is resignation instead of faith, excuse instead of expectation. But Jesus never permitted excuses. When people pleaded weakness, he rebuked them and demanded faith. When they trembled in fear, he commanded them to believe.

The miracle of Bethesda shows us both sides: God’s sovereign intervention as a departure from the norm, and the abiding responsibility that follows. The man was healed without seeking

Christ, but afterward Christ demanded that he live according to God's word. The miracle was free, but it was a call to walk in faith and obedience. The passage confirms both God's generosity and man's responsibility. It denies that healing is arbitrary or that it remains permanent regardless of faith and conduct. It is not that we must earn our health by our holiness, not at all. But a person is able to injure himself by hitting his head with a hammer over and over again, and that is sin and unbelief.

Healing Comes by Hearing

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

Paul addressed a people who had the Scriptures, the promises, and the history of God's acts. He traced a simple order. A man is sent. He preaches. People hear. They believe. They call on the Lord and are saved. This line explained Israel's unbelief in his day, and it explains Christian weakness in ours. Faith arises where the voice of Christ reaches the heart. The hearing is not a vague impression, but the reception of a definite message from Christ, carried by his word and pressed upon the spirit with divine power. When the word reaches a man like this, faith begins its work.

The context concerns salvation, yet the principle governs every promise that belongs to the gospel. Christ is not divided. The same Christ who forgives sins also heals the sick. He carried our diseases and took our infirmities. He laid hands on multitudes and all were made well. He gave his disciples authority over unclean spirits and over every disease, and he confirmed his word with power. This is the Christ whose word creates faith. Therefore the order remains. A man sent by Christ speaks Christ's message. The people hear Christ in that message. Faith rises to meet what Christ declares and gives its assent. The promise comes into view as present reality.

Ask the obvious questions in this order. How will a man receive healing if he does not believe? He receives it by faith. How will he believe if he has not heard? He believes when he hears the word of Christ on this very matter. How will he hear if Christians preach the opposite of what Jesus said? He will not hear Christ if the pulpit tells him that sickness may be a gift, that delay proves maturity, or that God's will is a riddle to be guessed. Each slogan silences the Lord. It replaces the Shepherd's voice with the chatter of unbelief. Then people wait, they hope in a fog, and they call this "faith," while the defined word that creates faith never reaches them.

Faith for healing comes by hearing, that is, hearing the message about Christ who heals. Do not treat this as a slogan; treat it as a method. Announce what Christ accomplished in his body. Announce what he commissioned his church to do. Announce that the Spirit applies Christ's work to those who believe. Keep the message plain. Christ heals. He promises healing to those who ask in his name and refuse fear. He commands us to lay hands on the sick. He honors faith that takes him at his word. When this fills the ear, faith rises. When faith rises, the man acts. He asks with assurance. He speaks in agreement with what he has heard. He receives.

This explains why many assemblies see little. They multiply words while avoiding the one word that matters. They offer careful qualifications where Christ offered commands. They counsel people to brace for disappointment instead of training them to hear. The result appears predictable. People absorb uncertainty. They imitate caution. They leave as they came. Then leaders conclude that healing was never central or that it ceased. The real cause is simpler. The voice of Christ never reached the hearer on this topic. Where the voice is absent, faith lies dormant. Where faith lies dormant, nothing moves.

Hearing in the biblical sense is an event. The word of Christ confronts the mind with truth that carries its own certainty. The message persuades by what it is, not by ornaments from human wisdom. A man hears this word, recognizes its source, and accepts. This assent orders his thoughts and actions. He speaks in line with the message. He prays in line with the message. He refuses the counsel of fear and the memory of failure because these do not carry the authority of Christ. The Spirit energizes this alignment. What Christ promised begins to appear in the body and in the situation because the man stands in agreement with the Lord who spoke.

Preach Christ as he is. Do not present him as a healer in theory while hedging his promises in practice. Name his deeds and set his command before the people. Tell them what he said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." Tell them that the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. These sentences carry power because they are his, and they continue to work wherever they are heard. They are enough to produce faith and healing.

The church must recover the order that Paul set before us. Sending leads to preaching. Preaching leads to hearing. Hearing leads to faith. Faith lays hold of what God gives. Interrupt this order and the result is predictable. Honor this order and the result is also predictable. If we want people to believe for healing, we must give them the word of Christ about healing. If we want them to hear, we must stop contradicting the Master. Preach the gospel as a whole, including Christ's present reign over sickness. Let the people hear him. Faith will rise. Healing will follow. This is the promise and the pattern.

Healing: Foolishness to the Faithless

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it is all nonsense. (1 Corinthians 1:20–23)

The same gospel that declares forgiveness also declares healing, and it encounters the same contempt from the same kinds of people. Just as the message of the cross seems offensive to the religious and absurd to the secular, so the announcement that Jesus carried our sicknesses provokes their mockery and resistance. Scripture declares that he took our infirmities and bore our diseases. This is not theoretical or symbolic. Christ bore them as surely as he bore sin. What he carried away no longer belongs to those who believe in him. To those who trust, this is the power of God for life and health. To those who refuse, it is dismissed as offensive, ridiculous, or impossible.

The religious seek human orthodoxy. They construct elaborate systems of theology to guard their authority and justify their traditions. They cling to creeds, councils, and institutions, believing that close adherence to human confession will replace the word of God and the demonstration of power. They honor a Christ who suffers but recoil from a Christ who saves and heals, because healing overturns their systems and disarms their control. They wish to confine God to doctrine that cannot act, but the word of God refuses their limitation. It speaks of a kingdom that is present in power, of redemption that touches both soul and body. Healing exposes the emptiness of their traditions. For this reason, they are offended. They would rather have endless discussions about their human orthodoxy than the immediate reality of healing through faith.

The secular seek scientific consensus. They trust the shifting opinions of self-proclaimed experts and bow to the authority of human measurement. To them, nothing is real unless it is captured by statistics and certified by institutions. They demand evidence on their terms, but God has decreed that the world will never know him through such wisdom. They call miracles superstition, even as they chase remedies that fail to cure them. They reduce life to mechanics, while their own lives slip away. They worship their data, but their data cannot save them. Healing from Christ is dismissed as nonsense because it cannot be reduced to their charts, but the believer experiences it in his own body. The unbelieving world perishes while pretending to be wise.

So when we preach that Jesus took our infirmities and carried our sicknesses, the religious are offended, and the secular say it is all nonsense. But to those who believe, it is the manifestation of what redemption has secured. The same faith that receives forgiveness receives healing. The same Christ who removes sin removes pain. Isaiah said he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, and that by his wounds we are healed. Matthew recorded that

he healed all who were sick to fulfill the word that he took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Peter wrote that by his wounds you have been healed. Scripture does not separate salvation from healing, and neither should we. The gospel is one whole, and faith embraces it as one.

What the word of God declares becomes the believer's own experience. He who trusts Christ discovers that the blood which reconciles man to God also restores the body. He enters into a life where forgiveness and healing walk together. This is not a marginal benefit but a central part of the kingdom. Wherever Christ is present, life overtakes decay. The ministry of Jesus displayed this in constant action, and his death and resurrection confirm it for the church to carry forward. Healing is not an addition to redemption but its expression. The cross carried both sin and sickness away.

The unbelieving world, however, remains divided in the same way Paul described. The religious cling to their traditions, offended by a gospel that makes their learning useless. The secular cling to their instruments, mocking a gospel that makes their wisdom irrelevant. Both groups perish because of unbelief. They refuse what God has freely given, and they waste away in body and soul. They consider themselves superior, but they are blind. They call themselves enlightened, but they grope in darkness. Their systems are shown false, but they harden themselves all the more.

The believer is different. He does not demand signs on his own terms, nor does he insist on wisdom according to human standards. He hears the announcement that Jesus has borne his sins and his sicknesses, and he accepts it as true. He refuses to place tradition or science above God's word. He receives what Jesus has done, and he experiences what Jesus has given. His life becomes the demonstration that God's word is true. He walks in forgiveness and healing, because Christ has provided both. He lives where the religious and the secular cannot live, because faith has opened the door to the power of God.

There is only one gospel, and it remains unchanged. To the religious, it is an offense. To the secular, it is nonsense. But to the believer, it is the power of God for complete redemption. The cross has carried away both guilt and disease. Christ has removed both sin and pain. There is no other gospel.

Healing: Mark of a True Church

Some professing Christians declare that it is unbiblical to organize a meeting with the expectation of healing miracles. Their reasoning is that by doing so one presumes upon God, as if his promises were too uncertain to be taken at face value. They recoil at the thought of entering a gathering with the confidence that miracles will occur. Yet this posture is itself the real presumption. It treats divine promises as if they were fragile words that may or may not be kept, and it treats the gospel as if it were merely an offer without fulfillment. Scripture demands us to expect what God has spoken, and to arrange our lives and assemblies in accordance with that expectation. To condemn a healing meeting is to condemn the practice of believing God's word.

The criticism, when reduced to its essence, amounts to saying that it is wrong to expect God to fulfill his promises. In fact, it means we should expect God to lie most of the time. This is the heart of their argument. When one declares that it is unbiblical to gather for the purpose of healing, the charge is not against the form of the meeting but against the reality of faith itself. For faith is nothing other than the expectation that God will do what he has said. To object to such expectation is to object to the essence of faith, and to set oneself against the entire framework of biblical religion. The logic of their position would mean that every assembly of believers should be stripped of expectation and drained of faith, so that worship becomes the repetition of words without the anticipation of fulfillment.

The truth is that healing is a mark of a true church as much as evangelism, and a church that does not pray for miracles of healing and experience them has no counterpart in Scripture. No one in the Bible knows such a church. Healing is integral to the work of Christ and inseparable from his ministry. It is not a peripheral curiosity or a sporadic supplement but one of the chief expressions of his redeeming power. To speak of forgiveness of sins is to speak also of the healing of diseases, for the gospel joins them as two benefits issuing from the same source. To speak of atonement is to speak of wholeness and restoration. Any assembly that excludes the expectation of healing mutilates the gospel, presenting a false portrayal of Christ's work and concealing its fullness.

The posture of those who reject healing betrays the presence of an alien spirit. It is not intellectual caution but demonic hostility toward the promises of God. They label themselves Christians, but they display no faith and no compassion. They construct a system of phony orthodoxy in which the standard of truth is not Scripture but mutual approval. They commend one another for their doubt, calling it balance or sobriety, while treating faith in God's word as fanaticism. They persecute those who actually believe, treating them as if they were the enemies of the faith. Their orthodoxy is a system of unbelief consecrated by repetition and protected by reputation, a shell that shields them from exposure while they blaspheme the promises of God.

Their accusations are predictable. They speak of "strange fire" whenever someone preaches faith and healing. Yet the fire that burns in their pulpits is the fire of hell itself. When God called

Moses, he authenticated the mission by signs issuing from a bush consumed but not destroyed. But when these men speak, their words resound with the serpent's question, "Did God really say?" They call their suspicion a safeguard, but it is the echo of Satan in the garden, the oldest attack on the word of God. They remind us that even the devil quotes Scripture, as when he tempted Christ in the wilderness, or when impostors invoked the name of Jesus in Acts and were overpowered by demons. To speak some of God's words while denying their meaning is the tactic of the enemy. These critics are content to sound biblical while undermining the truth.

The Faithless pretend to preach the gospel, but they preach the gospel of their religious heritage, not the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is only one gospel, not subject to interpretation, and it announces forgiveness, justification, healing and miracles, prophecy and tongues, faith, love, and eternal life. Claiming to preach the gospel while denouncing a main thrust of Christ's ministry and commission is the height of satanic behavior and religious hypocrisy. Their words of criticism become their own indictment. They declare that they do not expect God to keep his word, and they condemn those who say that he does. They label as presumption the very faith by which men are justified.

If we are Christians, of course we should expect miracles, and of course we should announce them. To refrain from this would be to treat God as a liar. Faith is the acknowledgment that he will act in accordance with his promises. Those who denounce healing meetings are enemies of the church and of humanity, and they should be confronted with the soul-damning gravity of their unbelief. If they persist, they ought to be considered for excommunication, because they are not harmless skeptics but agents of destruction. By denying the promises of God they align themselves with the adversary, and by discouraging faith they corrode the confidence of the people of God. Certainly no one like this is qualified for ministry or any form of teaching.

The issue, then, is not whether healing meetings are permissible but whether meetings without healing should be allowed. The former are demanded by the gospel; the latter are a contradiction of it. To proclaim Christ while excluding healing is to present another Christ, a different person than the one revealed in Scripture. To censure those who expect miracles is to censure the very act of faith in the gospel. The church cannot indulge such unbelief without destroying its foundation. The word of God compels us to believe and to announce. Those who resist are self-condemned. They prove that their piety is false. Their orthodoxy is fraudulent, and their allegiance is satanic.

Healing meetings are biblical and necessary. They are inseparable from the gospel. They bear witness to the nature of Christ's work, affirming that his promises remain active and his benefits remain available. To reject them is to strip the gospel of its reality and to deny its truth. The church must hold fast to the promise and proclaim it openly. It must condemn all who seek to suppress it. The word of God does not permit neutrality on this matter. It demands faith and confession. To preach Christ is to preach healing, and to assemble in his name is to expect his miracles among us.

Healing: Purposes and Effects

Healing stands within the gospel as a work that God has established. Scripture announces it, and redemption makes it real. It serves as more than an occasional embellishment or a marginal encouragement to belief. It flows from the same redemption that takes away sin and reconciles the soul to God. The word of God presents healing as a natural part of life under his rule. Wherever the kingdom comes, life overtakes decay. The ministry of Christ was filled with this reality. His death and resurrection confirmed it for the church to carry forward.

One purpose of healing is the healing itself. The body matters. God made the body. He sustains it. He will raise it. When pain departs and strength returns, when breath comes easily again and a person can rise from bed with freedom, these outcomes are good in themselves. They reflect God's original creation order, where health was the default and sickness had no place. A believer who receives healing receives something that God values. Relieving suffering is a form of righteousness. A father who can work free from pain can provide for his household with joy. A woman who recovers can care for her children and walk outside under the sun. Such reasons for healing are sound and proper. They express the goodness of God in ways that are tangible and memorable.

Healing also reveals God's nature. Every miracle is a display of who he is and how he acts. Power that orders the heavens turns toward a damaged body and repairs it. Mercy that forgives sin also erases its physical symptoms. Holiness removes corruption from flesh as surely as it removes guilt from the conscience. When the blind see and the lame walk, God is introducing himself. For the preacher, such moments turn the sermon into commentary on what God has just done. Theology in words stands alongside theology in action, and the hearer sees that they match. Healing makes the invisible kingdom visible.

The same act that heals the body strengthens faith. Faith rests on the word of God, and when that word is confirmed before the eyes, confidence in it awakens even more. A believer who watches God change a medical condition in a moment finds greater readiness to trust him for other matters. The connection is biblical and logical. If God commands cells to repair themselves, he can command a judge to reverse a decision or a debtor to release a claim. He can move a nation to open a door for the gospel. Jesus and his disciples preached with signs following. The demonstration of power reinforced the message and taught the audience to treat it with seriousness and expectation.

Healing mirrors salvation in a way that explains the gospel to the mind and the imagination. Disease distorts, cripples, and isolates. Sin does the same to the soul. Both corrupt what God made good. When God heals, he reverses the visible effects of decay. When he saves, he reverses the deeper cause. The paralytic who walks carries in his body an image of justification. The leper who reenters the community after cleansing experiences something like adoption into the family of God. Preachers and teachers can point to these parallels to make the truth vivid. The healed person becomes a living parable, a reminder that the God who repairs the body is also the God who makes the heart new.

This ministry reaches beyond the church. God often heals unbelievers. For them, it comes by his disposition to heal rather than covenant guarantee. It is a summons to turn to Christ and a sign that the message is true. In the gospels, many who received healing failed to follow Jesus afterward, but the miracles still testified to his identity. They left people without excuse. They made rejection more deliberate. In the same way today, a person far from God may find sickness removed in answer to prayer. That act demands a response. It says that the Savior has approached you and touched your life. It warns that to walk away is to walk away from one who has testified to you. Healing in this sense is part of evangelism, forcing a confrontation with the reality of the kingdom.

Healing is a ministry of mercy to the elect. It springs from the love of Christ for them. He healed to reinforce his teachings and express his care. He changed them completely by his power. This same ministry in the church today shows the compassion of God in action. When believers pray for the sick, they align themselves with Christ's desire for human wholeness.

Healing also removes the oppression of the devil. Scripture describes sickness as part of the works of the enemy. The Fall introduced death and decay, and Satan uses them to weaken and terrify. When God heals, he takes away a weapon from the adversary. The person who is healed stands freer to serve, to work, and to rejoice. Each recovery marks another place where the rule of Christ displaces the rule of darkness. The gospel proclaims this victory over sin and death, and healing lets people see it unfold in the present.

A church that understands healing in this way treats it as an integral part of its mission. It prays for the sick with confidence and expectation. It trusts God to answer, because Christ has already secured the blessing. When answers come, they are recorded and remembered, and they encourage others to believe. The testimony of one healing often awakens faith for another. The congregation becomes a place where the promises of God are treated as active and where his power is expected to show itself in ways that can be verified.

Healing blesses the person directly. It displays the character of God. It strengthens the faith of those who witness it. It explains salvation by analogy. It confirms the message to unbelievers and testifies against the reprobates. It acts as mercy to the suffering and as warfare against the devil's work. A church that embraces this stands in continuity with the ministry of Christ and the apostles. It declares that the same Lord who forgives sin also restores the body, and that his kingdom brings life wherever it is received. Healing, then, stands as a living expression of the gospel itself.

Oppression Is Not Leadership

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Ephesians 5:22–25)

God has established order in the family and in the church. He has assigned authority to men in these contexts, and this is not negotiable for those who claim to believe the Bible. Authority itself is good, because it reflects the order that God has built into creation and redemption. However, authority is only righteous when exercised in the way God commands. The standard is Christ. His headship over the church is the model for a husband's headship over his wife, and for elders in the church over the congregation. Christ governs in a way that serves, sanctifies, and strengthens the church.

Christ's leadership produces life. His authority is inseparable from his sacrifice. He does not oppress the church or exploit her for his own comfort. He works to present her holy, spotless, and glorious. When the Bible tells men to exercise authority over women, it is not giving them permission to satisfy their egos or to dominate for personal gain. It is commanding them to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those under their care, even at the cost of their own comfort and life.

In practice, churches that uphold the biblical teaching about male authority often carry it further than Scripture does. They attach extra rules, restrictions, and attitudes that serve themselves rather than Christ. This produces a culture of control and exclusion. It becomes an environment where men use their position to advance personal preference and to preserve status, rather than to advance the holiness and usefulness of the people they lead. When this happens, what remains is not biblical authority, but a counterfeit.

Oppression shrinks those under authority, while true leadership causes them to grow in faith and fruitfulness. Oppression fosters insecurity and dependence, while true leadership equips and strengthens. When leaders suppress gifts and limit participation, they weaken the entire body of Christ. They prevent the church from receiving the benefit of what God has given to all his people.

The authority God gives in the family and in the church is aimed at producing holiness, faith, and fruitfulness. Men in these roles will give an account to Christ for how they have used the authority entrusted to them. It is not enough to maintain control or to demand respect. The question will be whether their leadership advanced the spiritual life and effectiveness of those they led.

Women in the church are called to follow God's order, but this does not mean they are spiritual dependents, unable to think, believe, or act in ways that advance the kingdom. Women can learn theology just as men can. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to learn, and Jesus affirmed that she had chosen the better portion. Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, instructed Apollos

in the way of God more accurately. The ability to understand doctrine and to teach it is not limited to men.

Women can have faith for miracles just as men can. The woman with the issue of blood believed that touching the edge of Jesus' garment would heal her, and she received exactly what she believed. The Syrophenician woman refused to be turned away and obtained deliverance for her daughter. Martha believed that Jesus could have prevented her brother's death, and she confessed that he is the Christ, the Son of God. God honors faith wherever it is found, and he responds to it without regard for gender. Women can also proclaim the gospel, even to men. The first announcement of the resurrection came from women. They delivered the message to the apostles themselves.

When men in leadership suppress these realities, they are not preserving biblical order. They are denying what God has revealed in Scripture and what he has done in history. They are acting as if their personal rules can improve upon God's word. They are treating authority as a personal possession rather than as a trust from God.

Leadership in the church and in the home must recognize and develop the faith of those under its care. Men are called to teach women, but also to listen when God speaks through them. They are called to guide women toward maturity in Christ, not to keep them in spiritual infancy. This means encouraging them to learn, to believe, to speak, and to act as full members of the body of Christ.

Leaders who use authority to belittle or control will face judgment. God has already spoken against shepherds who feed themselves instead of the flock. In Ezekiel 34, he condemns those who rule harshly and brutally. In Luke 11, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for loading people with burdens they cannot carry while refusing to lift a finger to help. Such leadership is a disgrace to God's name and a direct violation of his command.

A healthy church culture will reflect the pattern of Christ's leadership. Authority will be exercised for the benefit of those under it. Women will be valued for their faith, their gifts, and their contributions to the mission of the church. The order God has established will be maintained, but it will be filled with the life and freedom that his order is meant to produce. The church will become a place where every member is equipped and encouraged to serve according to God's calling, without the artificial barriers that human pride invents.

Men in positions of authority should examine themselves. Are they using their role to advance the holiness and faith of those they lead? Are they following the example of Christ, who gave himself up for the church? Are they producing a culture where women are strengthened in their faith and usefulness, or one where they are weakened and silenced?

Christ loves the church and gave himself for her. He exercises authority in a way that leads to holiness, fruitfulness, and glory. Those who lead in his name must do the same. Anything else is a rejection of his example and a misuse of the authority he has given. The church does not need

men who cling to their position for their own sake. It needs men who understand that authority is a means to serve, to teach, to strengthen, and to present the people of God complete in Christ.

Politics: Expecting a Different Christ

John the Baptist heard about the works of Christ while he languished in prison. He sent his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

This exchange brings the issue into sharp relief. John focused on what God was not doing. He expected deliverance from political captivity and the overthrow of unrighteous rulers, but his expectation was frustrated. Jesus answered not by giving him hope of political liberation, but by pointing him to what God was doing in the ministry of the kingdom. The evidence of God's work was not in political reforms but in the power of the Spirit, in healings, in miracles, and in the preaching of the gospel. To be offended at this is to reject Christ in favor of another. To embrace this is to accept him as the true Christ, whose ministry is exactly what Scripture foretold.

Throughout the Gospels and Acts we see that John was not alone in his expectation. Many in Israel looked for a Christ who would restore the nation politically. After Jesus multiplied the loaves and fed the multitude, the people exclaimed that he must be the prophet who was to come into the world, and then they tried to take him by force and make him king. Their desire was to transform his ministry of spiritual power into a tool of national and political power. They saw him as a means to advance their cause against Rome, rather than as the Christ who came to establish the kingdom of God through doctrine and miracles.

Even his disciples carried this expectation. On the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion, the disciples confessed, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." They interpreted redemption in terms of political deliverance, and his death seemed to them to shatter that hope. The resurrection bypassed their expectations, for it signaled a victory far greater than they anticipated, yet of a different nature than they demanded. The apostles themselves, after forty days of instruction from the risen Lord, asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were still preoccupied with political restoration, but Jesus redirected them to the real power that would mark their mission: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses." They sought a national kingdom, but Jesus gave them the kingdom of God with spiritual authority to preach and perform miracles.

The Triumphal Entry reflects the same expectation. The crowds cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," invoking royal deliverance. The word "Hosanna" comes from a plea for salvation, and on their lips it carried the overtones of immediate rescue through a Davidic king. This expectation matched the fear of the Jewish leaders, who said, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Their anxiety was not about crowds alone, but about the messianic fervor that Rome would interpret as political and military rebellion. The entire environment revolved around Rome, and many hoped for a Messiah who would save Israel by national power.

Against this background Jesus consistently defined his ministry as something higher, spiritual, and miraculous. He rebuked Peter for “minding the things of men rather than the things of God.” The distinction he drew is decisive. The things of God are the gospel, the revelation of truth, and the miraculous power of the Spirit. The things of men are politics, national structures, and governmental schemes. Jesus was not dismissing these as worthless, but he was making clear that they do not belong to the same level as his ministry. Paul’s example demonstrates this. He used his Roman citizenship to avoid unlawful punishment, and he urged Christians to pray for kings so that there might be peace in which the gospel could advance. These were instrumental uses of politics, not a redefinition of politics as gospel. Paul never advocated elevating political reform to the place of spiritual mission.

The same principle applies to how we construct our theology. Some preaching builds itself on what God is not doing. It centers on complaints about the absence of political deliverance, filling sermons with laments about governments, policies, and national decline. This is unbelief, for it demands from Christ the role of a political liberator and then takes offense when he does not fill it. True theology builds itself on what God is doing. It takes joy in the works that Christ himself pointed out: conversions, healings, deliverances, the proclamation of the gospel. Those who build their message on the failures of politics miss the presence of Christ. Those who build it on the power of miracles see him for who he is.

The prophets addressed politics, but they did so by declaring the word of God. In Israel, politics and religion were often mingled, but the prophets never confused national identity with spiritual identity. Their standard was always revelation. When they spoke to foreign nations, they did not appeal to founding traditions or civic documents, but confronted them with God’s authority. They preached to kings and peoples alike and judged political wrongs as spiritual rebellion. Their confrontation was theological, not partisan. They were preachers, not activists.

Appealing to their doctrine of common grace and the cultural mandate, there are those who imagine that politics and culture are just as spiritual as the gospel, and that campaigning and activism carry equal weight with preaching and miracles. This is a substitution of the carnal for the spiritual. Politics can be useful if it favors the gospel, but it is never the gospel. It does not deserve the effort many expend on it. Christian identity is spiritual, rooted in Christ and his kingdom rather than in national or cultural affiliation.

When Christians attempt to capture Jesus for politics, they repeat the error of those who tried to make him king by force. They portray themselves as fighting for his kingdom, but in truth they exploit him and use him as the mascot for their ideology. They devote themselves to winning votes and securing policies, while denying or even persecuting those who proclaim healing, miracles, and the baptism of the Spirit. This is an anti-Christ perversion because it rejects the very works that define the ministry of Jesus while demanding from him a role he never assumed.

The true measure of God's presence is not political reform but divine power. Politics is human power; miracles are divine power. If we ask where God is at work, the answer is in the gospel being preached with conviction and accompanied by healings and miracles. That is the agenda of heaven. To look elsewhere is to be offended at Christ.

The expectation of a political Christ was a recurring temptation in Israel, and it remains a recurring temptation in the church. But the Christ who came is the Christ whom Scripture promised: the one who heals the sick, raises the dead, forgives sins, and proclaims liberty to the captives. He is the spiritual Christ. To demand another Christ, a political Christ, is to reject the real one and to expect a different Christ altogether. But there is only one Christ, and there is no salvation in any other.

Positive Preaching

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Positive preaching draws fire from the Faithless because it dares to describe the goodness of God in the ears of men. They label it seeker friendly, call it shallow, and accuse it of stroking emotions. This posture wears severity as virtue while it shelters an aversion to trusting God for definite good. It exalts sin above grace, defeat above promise, and suspicion above the word of God. The energy behind the criticism springs from unbelief that prefers a dim horizon. A dim horizon relieves a man from the responsibility of faith.

Positive preaching magnifies the love, grace, and power of God toward those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. It begins with the truth about man, then moves to the work of Jesus that creates a new man. It speaks about real change in a person, in a home, and in circumstances, because God acts and faith receives. The message carries the mood of its giver. A generous God speaks in abundance. A faithful God speaks with certainty. A powerful God speaks with expectation. The gospel is an announcement of victory, mercy, and provision in Christ. Preaching that sounds like this fits the subject.

It is right to speak to the crowd in language that calls them into the promises of God and to speak to the church in language that confirms those promises for those already in Christ. A preacher stands before hearers and says, "Jesus loves you," "he died for you," "God has a wonderful plan for your life," "you are valued and needed," and "you carry gifts and a purpose." To one chosen to believe, these words summon him to step across the line by faith. To the Christian, they affirm the reality he already possesses. The line is real. Those who enter by faith stand in love, purpose, and inheritance. Those who refuse remain under judgment. The same words that describe the believer's portion become a call to the lost and a testimony against the reprobate. The announcement works as both welcome and condemnation.

Once a man follows Jesus, debate ends. Every bright claim in positive preaching settles onto him as present tense. He bears a new name and a new nature. Old things pass away and everything becomes new. Statements that once sounded excessive become the most accurate description of his life. He lives loved and chosen. He stands inside a plan that overflows with wisdom and goodness. Within the body his gifts find their place, and that place matters. Promises about health and wealth arrive as gifts of grace received by faith, free from any barter or wage logic. The Father delights to give. The Son secures the gift. The Spirit makes it real in the believer's life.

Faithless voices resent this confidence because it exposes their low expectations. Low expectations feel safe for unbelief. Severity earns them a reputation for depth while it leaves people in the same prison. They trade faith for effort and measure progress by pain. They present strain as holiness and delay as God's refinement. The result remains the same. Zero progress until there is faith. The gospel produces visible advances in holy living, in relationships,

and in livelihood. Those advances embarrass a theology that prefers drought over rain. The complaint against positive preaching grows sharp when a living church displays fruit that their system cannot produce.

The complaint also claims doctrinal rigor. It says that bright promises ignore sin and judgment. In truth, the gospel addresses sin with finality and then presents the riches of Christ. The cross satisfies justice. The resurrection reveals power. The Spirit brings life. Gospel proclamation works from that finished ground. It refuses to nurse guilt as a lifestyle. It instructs conscience and then points the soul toward promise. True preaching teaches men to confess faith in God's word and to expect results proportional to God's character. A message that keeps men in the dust turns people inward and leaves them there. A message that opens the treasury of promise lifts people Godward and trains them to receive.

History records a long line of objections against this approach. Religious culture often chooses the burden of condemnation over the freedom of grace. Many preachers fear words such as "Jesus loves you" or "God has a wonderful plan for your life," as if those words endanger the hearer. Endanger whom? The reprobate already walks toward judgment. The elect stand inside love and purpose. The gospel calls the hearer into that new position. The early church lived from that call. The message went out as good news for the world and as a distinct inheritance for those who believed. The Faithless have always felt threatened by this because the fruit contradicts their bleak theories.

The promises of God carry a discriminating design. Scripture speaks of sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, a narrow gate and a broad way. The gospel offers a table set with mercy and power. The call reaches everyone who hears. Those who come sit under love, forgiveness, and purpose. Those who remain outside continue under wrath. It is the appointed order of promise and faith. Positive preaching declares the order plainly and confidently. It keeps the door open by announcing the riches inside and by compelling men to enter by faith.

The Faithless prefer a transactional deity. They craft a system that keeps score and withholds blessing until enough scars appear. The parable of the older brother exposes this instinct. He resented the father's joy because he wanted merit to rule the house. Merit would have secured his pride and preserved his control. Grace humbled him and invited celebration. Many religious critics still stand in that field, arms crossed, while the house fills with music. They speak of prudence and balance while they stare through the window at a feast they refuse to enter. Their austerity comforts the flesh because it delays the demand to believe.

Positive preaching announces the Father's house and the feast. It declares that grace stands ready to restore and to empower. It teaches generosity and service as fruits of blessing rather than prices that purchase blessing. Healing and prosperity serve as clear examples. Scripture gives plain promises about both. The believer can have health and can have abundance. These blessings come by grace through faith. They carry moral implications because a blessed man can bless others and because a strong man can work for God with wider reach. Application follows reception. Fruit follows root. The order matters because it reflects the nature of grace.

Some argue that these themes mislead seekers. The worry claims that warm words create false hope. Hope grounded in God's word is never false. The promises belong to those who have faith. Precision in preaching solves the concern. Speak to the crowd with the voice of a herald. Make the terms clear. Describe the portion of the saints with strong language that matches the generosity of God. Then call for faith. Those who believe receive exactly what was announced. Those who reject face the consequences that were stated. Honesty lives in bold promises joined to an urgent call to believe.

A church that lives from this message gains a certain posture. Confidence replaces timidity. Prayer rises with expectation. Repentance arrives as a doorway rather than a chamber where a soul takes up residence. Teaching fills minds with God's thoughts so that speech and action match revelation. Testimony fills the room because God keeps his word. The Faithless will object that such a church rests on emotions. They misunderstand the source. Joy flows from truth received. Peace comes from promises embraced. Strength comes from union with Christ. These are the marks of a mind renewed by the word and a heart filled with the Spirit.

Refuse to grant the Faithless custody over the tone of the pulpit. Unbelief has no authority to set the mood for the gospel. Speak the message as God speaks it. He delights to bless, to forgive, to heal, to prosper, and to lead. He calls men into a future prepared in wisdom. He trains his people to rule over sin and to live with power. He fills congregations with gifts and sets them in order for service that bears fruit. This is the world that opens to a man who believes. Positive preaching simply names that world and calls him into it.

The present hour demands that tone. The world hears enough despair. The church gains nothing by echoing it. The preacher who trusts God declares a bright word with clear terms and firm edges. He affirms the goodness of God with sentences that ring like promises fulfilled. He teaches men to believe and to act on what they believe. He refuses the safety of low ceilings and chooses the certainty of faith. That choice honors the message because the message itself demands that certainty. God speaks "Yes" in Christ. Faith answers "Amen" and receives.

Preaching that Brings Faith

And there sat a man in Lystra who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. (Acts 14:8-10)

The miracle in Lystra was not the result of Paul offering a prayer, laying hands, or using a special gift of healing. It was the result of preaching that created faith in the listener. The man was crippled from birth, with no natural expectation of walking. Yet when he heard Paul proclaim the gospel, something took root in his heart. Paul perceived that he had faith to be made well. He did not have faith in human skill, in medicine, or in Paul as a man. His faith was in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was this faith that Paul recognized and acted upon, and the man walked for the first time in his life.

This is the purest and most powerful model for ministry. Faith came directly from hearing the gospel, not from being worked into an emotional state, not from being coaxed into believing, and not from a staged display of spiritual theatrics. The gospel itself carried the power, and the man's response to it brought him into contact with the living Christ. Paul's role was to speak the truth and to discern faith when it appeared. Once he saw that the man had faith, the command was simple and immediate: Stand upright on your feet. The gospel had already done its work.

This is the kind of preaching that should define our ministry. If the gospel is preached as it is revealed in Scripture, it will bring faith for salvation and for miracles. It will confront the lies and limitations that people have lived under for years. It will replace resignation with expectation, hopelessness with confidence. This is why the crippled man in Lystra could suddenly expect to walk. The gospel revealed a Christ who saves and heals, and that revelation demolished the assumption that his condition was permanent.

When the gospel is altered or diluted, the result will be equally altered. Preaching that merely produces a vague acceptance of spiritual sentiments, or that leaves people in depression and passivity, is not the same gospel. A message that tells people to accept their afflictions as God's mysterious will is a different gospel entirely, with a different object of faith. It directs trust toward resignation instead of toward God's promises. It creates faith in the wrong thing, teaching people to believe that they should expect nothing from God. This is unbelief dressed in pious language.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, when preached as Paul preached it, never produces such unbelief. It calls people to believe that God will act according to his word. It demands that they take him at his promise. The crippled man in Lystra was not told to endure life as a cripple for the glory of God. He was told, by the gospel itself, that Christ had authority over his condition, and that Christ was willing to make him whole. This is why faith rose in him as he listened.

Ministers must learn from this pattern. If we want to see faith rise in those who hear us, we must preach in a way that makes faith the only reasonable response. Destroy doubts and counterarguments before they have a chance to settle in the mind. Expose the emptiness of religious clichés that excuse failure and explain away the promises of God. We must make clear that God has spoken, that his word is final, and that he will not fail to keep it.

In ministry, this approach should come first. Before we lay hands, before we pray, before we engage in any other ministry act, we should preach in a way that brings faith. If we do not do this, then our prayers might be hindered by the unbelief of those who hear us. They will not be ready to receive, because we have not confronted their doubts and replaced them with conviction. But if the gospel has produced faith, then prayer will have something to act upon.

For those who hear the gospel, the same lesson applies. Listen to preaching that brings faith. Do not waste your time on sermons that glorify doubt or that teach you to live as if God's promises were uncertain. The crippled man in Lystra would still be sitting if he had listened to such preaching. He walked because he heard the truth and believed it. Faith does not come from entertaining speculation about whether God will act. It comes from hearing what God has said and believing that he will keep his word.

God has not changed. The gospel that healed the crippled man still carries the same power. When we believe what God promises, we receive from him. When we treat his word as certain, we will see results that match his character. Faith is not wishful thinking. It is the conviction that God is as he has revealed himself, and that he will do what he has said. Preaching that produces this conviction will always be the most effective preaching.

This is the best way, because it gives people a direct relationship with Christ. The crippled man in Lystra did not need to depend on Paul for the rest of his life. His faith was not in Paul's continued presence or in some spiritual gift. It was in the Christ he met through the gospel. That faith remained with him after Paul left, because it was grounded in the word of God, not in the personality or charisma of the preacher.

Preaching that brings faith is preaching that introduces people to the Christ who is present and active. It shows them that he has the authority and the willingness to meet their need now. It leaves them with a foundation they can stand on when the preacher is gone and the crowd has dispersed. It equips them to receive from God without depending on the presence of any human minister.

The ministry that follows this pattern will produce believers who are strong and independent in their faith. They will not be tossed around by the next fad in religion or discouraged by the next wave of adversity. They will be anchored in the unchanging promises of God. And when they face various needs, whether for salvation, healing, provision, or wisdom, they will know how to approach God directly, believing that he hears them and will act in line with his word.

This is the work we are called to do. Preach in a way that brings faith. Hear in a way that receives it. Believe what God has promised, and act on it. The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and salvation includes the works of God in every area of life. To believe this is to open the door for his power to be revealed, just as it was in Lystra when a man who had never walked stood upright on his feet and walked for the first time.

Prophecy and Apologetics

If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)

One of the most striking demonstrations of divine power in the ministry of Jesus was his ability to speak directly to the hidden realities of a person's heart. This was more than an exercise in supernatural perception. It was a weapon of truth that exposed the inner man, destroying all his pretenses and defenses in a single stroke. When Jesus spoke, the mind was laid bare. Every hidden motive and thought stood naked before him, and the effect was often instant conviction and faith.

When Jesus met the woman at the well, he did not simply teach her about worship or offer her living water in abstract terms. He pierced her with the revelation that he knew her life in detail. She had no chance to control the conversation or hide her shame. He told her the truth about her past, her five husbands, and the man she was now living with. At that moment she realized she was speaking to more than a prophet in the ordinary sense. His knowledge of her life was not hearsay or guesswork. It was the omniscient gaze of God meeting her in the open daylight. She left her water jar behind and ran to tell others, because such an encounter could not be dismissed.

Likewise, when Nathanael came to Jesus, the Lord greeted him with a declaration about his character before they had exchanged a single word. When Nathanael questioned him, Jesus revealed that he had seen him under the fig tree, a detail that struck him with unmistakable force. In that moment, a man who was skeptical about anything good coming from Nazareth confessed that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel. The argument was not built through gradual persuasion or layers of reasoning, as valid as that would have been. It was a sudden and decisive strike into the man's hidden world, compelling him to believe.

This kind of prophetic knowledge also appeared when Jesus perceived the thoughts of those who opposed him. Whether they whispered to each other or merely reasoned in their hearts, he answered the words they never spoke openly. This left them exposed and humiliated before the crowd. The omniscient Christ did not need them to present their objections for debate. He dismantled them before they were uttered.

The same Spirit who operated in Christ continues to operate in his people. Paul wrote that when prophecy comes forth in the assembly, the secrets of the heart are disclosed, and the hearer will fall on his face, worship God, and declare that God is truly among them. This is not limited to church gatherings but extends to every setting where the gospel is proclaimed. When believers speak by the Spirit, the word can bypass the mental stronghold and strike at the very core of a person's being.

Jesus told his disciples that when they were brought before rulers and authorities, they should not be anxious about how they would answer, because the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say at that moment. This is not a promise of vague comfort but of precise and timely utterance, words so fitted to the situation that they cannot come from human planning alone. In such moments, the Spirit does more than give an eloquent reply. He can reveal the very thoughts, motives, and secrets of those who hear, turning the confrontation into an encounter with God.

This is why prophecy belongs fully within the work of apologetics. The defense of the faith has always been intended to operate in the realm of both sound reasoning and the supernatural power of God. Scripture presents apologetics as the full engagement of the mind and spirit, where rational exposition of truth and prophetic disclosure of the heart work in concert. When the gospel is proclaimed with intellectual force and with the Spirit's power, it addresses every faculty of the hearer, confronting him with the God who both convinces and searches the depths of his being.

Revolution, Not Reformation

No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. New wine must be put into fresh wineskins. (Luke 5:37-38)

The shortcoming of the Reformation is that it was a reformation, not a revolution. It pulled away from Rome just far enough to breathe, then stopped to build a smaller Rome. It reclaimed fragments of the truth, then enshrined them in rigid systems that could not hold the fullness of Christ. The new wine came, but it was poured into skins already cracked with compromise, and so much of it leaked away. Men called it progress, but it was only a delay in the inevitable confrontation between God and man. When you reform a corpse, you do not make it live. You just rearrange its limbs before it rots again.

If faithless ministers, if the anti-faith, anti-miracle leaders and their institutions, were ever useful to God, it was only as temporary tools for a specific moment. God can use even a Pharisee's voice to read his word, but when that moment passes, the tool is discarded. He has exploited them for his own purposes, and now their usefulness has ended. The salt has lost its flavor. It is ready to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. They are not helping the church advance; they are holding it back. And the faithful must let them go. No ceremony, no nostalgia, just let them fall into the irrelevance they have earned.

The church has recovered enough truth to leave them behind. It has reformed, then reformed again. Yet some refuse to continue past the first step, as if taking that step has earned them the right to dictate the path for everyone else. They once rejected Satan, but then refused to continue with Christ, especially when he came with all his fullness, his power, and his promises intact. But there is only one Christ. He cannot be divided into parts you like and parts you discard. To reject his fullness is to reject him entirely.

If the church is to move forward, it must treat such people as Christ treated the Pharisees, cutting them off without hesitation. They are not wounded heroes. They are rotting impediments. Their teachings are as repugnant as wet dog excrement, and that is the kindest way to put it. Leave them in their filth and keep walking. The kingdom advances not by dragging along the dead weight of old wineskins, but by carrying forward the new wine in vessels prepared to hold it.

If reformation after reformation still leaves us surrounded by so much garbage, then it is time for a revolution. We do not need another partial correction. We need a wholesale overthrow. Don't reform, revolt! This is no time for polite patience with theological criminals. If God is moving, we move with him. If men try to block the way, we shove them aside and leave them in the dust. We follow God, not men.

There will be no respectful bow to the worthless scum who teach others to doubt the word of God. We will not pretend that their faithless poison is seasoning worth preserving. They stand

with their heads inflated by degrees and titles, believing this gives them the authority to dictate which commands of God must be obeyed and which promises of God may be believed. They imagine they can police the faith of the saints. They imagine themselves gatekeepers to the kingdom. In truth, they are condemned squatters blocking the road.

To such men, the only fitting response is contempt. Take your credentials, your honorary doctorates, your theological society memberships, take the entire stack of papers that your equally stupid friends signed, and put them in a suitcase. Tie it securely around your neck, and throw yourself into the sea. That would be the greatest contribution to the church and to humanity that a faithless person could ever make. As Jesus said, some deserve a millstone and the depths.

The Lord spoke of wineskins because he knew what the new covenant would bring. It would be the pouring out of the Spirit, the explosion of life, the eruption of power that could not be contained in the dead forms of the old system. Yet men keep trying to force it back into brittle containers. They fear the chaos of life more than they hate the sterility of death. They cling to the wineskins they have patched and repatched, as if their handiwork could be improved by a few more stitches. But the new wine keeps breaking free, and they keep hating it for that very reason.

When Christ brings new wine, he demands new vessels. He does not negotiate with the old ones. He does not soften the ferment, slow the expansion, or dilute the strength so that the old forms can hold it. He lets the wine break them apart. And if you are wise, you will be found among the new vessels, not among the shattered skins littering the floor.

We are no longer in the age of cautious reform. We are in the age of decisive separation. The old wineskins have done all the damage they can do. Now the issue is whether we will remain tethered to them out of misplaced sentiment, or whether we will cut the cord and walk with God. The answer should be obvious. New wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. And it will be, whether the old guard approves or not.

Satan the Thief

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Jesus draws a sharp contrast between his mission and the mission of the one he calls the thief. The thief is a personal adversary with conscious intent, not a metaphor for abstract hardship or the general troubles of life. Satan advances with purpose, aiming to take what God has given, to injure what God has made, and to erase what God has blessed. Scripture attributes to him moral corruption and doctrinal deception, and it also charges him with the infliction of physical suffering. Jesus pointed to a woman bent over for eighteen years and said that Satan had bound her. Peter summarized the ministry of Jesus as going about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Oppression in those texts includes disease, disability, and infirmity. The thief's stealing and killing invade the body and the mind, not only the soul.

If the thief takes health, then the mission of Jesus to give life must answer on the same ground. The parallel stands by the Lord's own words. He did not set the thief's work in the tangible realm and then restrict his own gift to an invisible experience that never touches the body. The thief destroys in concrete ways, so the Shepherd restores in concrete ways. The two missions correspond in scope while standing in total opposition of purpose. To claim that Jesus came to save the soul yet leave the body afflicted breaks the symmetry he asserts and reduces his promise to rhetoric. Such a reading discards the plain sense of the statement and replaces it with a mystical gloss that evades the obvious. The text carries a direct logic, and the logic points to life that reaches the whole person.

This kind of denial does more than miss a nuance. It repeats the old gnostic instinct that treats the material world as trivial or corrupt and urges an over-spiritualized salvation. A teacher who insists that Jesus rescues the soul while ignoring the body adopts a premise foreign to Scripture and friendly to heresy. He may claim to defend piety against materialism, yet the claim aligns with a philosophy that denies the goodness of creation and empties the incarnation of meaning. Abundant life that excludes health imagines fullness where the body remains crushed, which is unreasonable and unscriptural.

The Gospels present a Lord who addresses physical suffering with authority and compassion. He touched lepers, gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and called the dead back to life. These acts expressed his message; they did not distract from it. They displayed the truth that he came to give life in abundance, not a thin survival that leaves the body to languish. Each healing showed the undoing of the thief's work. Each restoration declared that the reign of the oppressor was being dismantled and that the reign of God had arrived.

For the believer, sickness belongs on the inventory of things the thief delights to impose. Sound judgment avoids a crude inference that every illness must be a case of direct demonic possession. The Bible traces the origin of disease to the corruption Satan worked into the world, while it also records specific instances where his bondage lay behind a person's

condition. Wisdom recognizes both. In that light, the promise of Jesus to give life is a promise to reverse the thief's work in every way the thief has worked it. Health stands within the territory Christ came to reclaim, not outside it.

When Christians deny this, they do more than lower expectations. They narrow the mission of the Lord and read his words through a lens he never used. They reduce the damage the thief has caused and blur the remedy Christ has provided. Faith identifies the enemy for what he is, receives the Savior for who he is, and draws from the Savior what he came to give. The thief of health arrives to steal and kill; the Lord of life arrives to restore and multiply. Any doctrine that settles for less reads the verse as if the thief were stronger than the Shepherd and as if the Shepherd were content to leave his flock maimed. Jesus came to undo the works of the devil entirely, including the works lodged in the body.

Satan's Bait and Switch

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Cessationism is a bait and switch scam. It entices with the promise of the biblical Christ but delivers a different figure altogether, one stripped of the very features that identified him in the first place. In Scripture, Jesus taught with authority, healed the sick, raised the dead, and commanded nature and demons. He announced that his disciples would continue his works and perform even greater ones through the Spirit. Yet when a person is inducted into the cessationist church, the Christ he meets bears almost no resemblance to the one revealed in the Gospels. The power is gone, the promise is withdrawn, and the Spirit is silenced. The Jesus offered here is a neutered Christ, another Jesus, another god, and another gospel.

The central claim of cessationism is that miracles and gifts ceased with the apostles. The effect is to present a Christ who once healed but no longer heals, who once empowered but no longer empowers. Such a Christ is unrecognizable from the one preached by the apostles, who insisted that the kingdom of God consisted not in talk but in power. A Christ who now exists only as words on a page is not the biblical Christ, but an idol manufactured by unbelief. The substitution is obvious. The name remains the same, but it is in fact a switch of identities.

The Holy Spirit receives the same treatment. In the biblical record, he descends with power, fills the church with gifts, produces prophecy, tongues, healing, and superhuman boldness. He is the immediate agent of God's activity in the world. Under cessationism, however, he has been reduced to little more than a quiet presence, a background idea, an abstraction. He has been diminished until he is weaker and quieter than a cartoon ghost, a caricature that no longer resembles the power of God. This is more than error, but it is blasphemy against the nature of God himself.

The dynamic is the same as in any bait and switch scheme. The public is shown one product and then given something else entirely. Here, men open the Bible and read about a living God who intervenes in the affairs of men, who grants miracles in response to faith, who commands storms and raises the dead. But when they enter the cessationist church, they are told that such a God no longer exists. The same Scriptures that display a Christ of power are reinterpreted to advertise a Christ who is powerless, reduced to mere symbol. The gospel has been falsified, and Satan has succeeded in turning the word of God into an endorsement of his own counterfeit.

The consequences are severe. Faith for healing, prosperity, prophecy, and miracles is extinguished. Believers are left with a religion of false doctrine and human tradition, where obedience is demanded but promises are withheld. The cessationist pulpit preaches about a Christ who demands much and delivers little, a God who withdraws and diminishes, and a Spirit who neither speaks nor acts. The people who accept this exchange live by a hollow gospel, cut off from the power that God joined to his word. The entire scheme is a fraud that cloaks unbelief in the garb of reverence.

The truth remains what Scripture declared from the beginning. The gospel is word and power together. Christ remains the same, and the Spirit continues his work as he always has. To embrace cessationism is to settle for Satan's counterfeit. It is a religion, but a non-Christian religion. But to believe the word of God is to encounter the living Christ in his fullness. The real gospel delivers the Jesus who heals, empowers, and reigns, and it exposes the false Christ of powerless tradition for what it is: bait and switch, designed to rob the church of faith.

Seeds of Faith

The serpent said to the woman, “Did God actually say...?” From the beginning, the devil’s method has been to plant something in the mind that will grow against God. He did not strike Eve with physical force. He did not need to compel her with visible power. He gained access through suggestion. He took the word of God, questioned it, twisted it, and placed a seed of doubt in her mind. Once that seed took root, it developed until it controlled her thinking, and it compelled her to act in rebellion. Sin began in her mind before it appeared in her hand. This principle has operated in every generation. The devil sows, his seed grows, and the harvest is death.

The word of God describes itself as seed, and the preacher as the sower. Jesus taught that the word is sown in the heart, and that the type of soil determines the outcome. The devil’s method is to sow falsehood, and God’s method is to sow truth. You do not have to plant doubt, rebellion, or unbelief. You can plant faith. You can put into the mind what will grow into conviction, assurance, and obedience. This is the biblical way to change a person. Fill his mind with God’s word until it takes over his thoughts. Once the word governs his thinking, it will govern his actions.

Faith begins as a seed in the mind. You can plant it by presenting God’s word in its purity, without the mixture of human tradition and the unbelief of false theology. Ask the questions that expose the emptiness of the faithless. Has that theologian really understood this passage? Where is the biblical evidence that miracles have ceased? What about the verses that describe the gifts of the Holy Spirit? What about the accounts of healing? What about the commands to lay hands on the sick? What about the passages that declare the power of faith? The false teacher wants to ignore or distort these things. You must place them in the mind and refuse to let them be removed.

When the truth enters good soil, it will grow. The seed will produce more and more faith until it fills the mind entirely. The person who was once dominated by unbelief will be filled with confidence in God. His thoughts will be occupied with the truth, and his actions will be compelled by it. This is how the power of God takes over a life, through the sowing and growth of his word.

You must do this for yourself before you can do it for others. Plant the word in your own mind. Deliberately challenge false interpretations with the straightforward reading of the text. If the Bible says that the sick will recover when believers lay hands on them, then believe it as it is written. If Jesus says that nothing will be impossible for the one who believes, then take it exactly as it stands. Do not twist it into a weaker statement. Do not explain it away by faithless religious reasoning. Receive it as seed into good soil.

Then plant the word in others. Speak the truth plainly. Confront their assumptions with the question, “What if Jesus really meant what he said?” Show them what the Bible says, and ask if

the popular interpretation matches the actual words of Scripture. Every time you do this, you sow faith into their minds. You give the Spirit material to work with.

After sowing, water the seed. Remind yourself and others of the same truth again and again. Pray over it. Speak it out. Refuse to let the weeds of unbelief choke it. The process is simple: sow, water, and expect God to give the increase. It is not human eloquence or persuasion that causes the growth. The seed has life in itself because it is the word of God. Once planted in good soil, it will grow until it bears fruit.

The devil understands this principle, which is why he sows lies. You must understand it better, and sow the truth. The seed you plant today will grow into tomorrow's conviction. If you sow faith, you will reap faith. If you fill the mind with the word of God, you will reap a life governed by the word of God.

Setback Is Not Defeat

We wanted to come to you -- I, Paul, again and again -- but Satan hindered us. (1 Thessalonians 2:18)

Paul was not wrong to desire what he desired. His plan was right, and his mission was legitimate. Yet he still faced a delay. This was not because he had misheard God, and it was not because his whole program needed to be abandoned. The apostle's words show that even a true and God-given course can encounter resistance, and that such resistance does not erase the validity of the course itself. He did not treat the hindrance as proof that his plan was false. He simply acknowledged the delay and kept moving forward in the work of the gospel.

In our own lives and ministries, we must guard against the reflex that treats every setback as a signal to give up. The fact that you meet opposition or delay is not an argument against the truth of your mission. The same God who gave you the vision is not startled by the obstacles you encounter. A hindrance along the way, even one that shifts your timing or forces an adjustment, does not mean the foundation of your work is flawed.

Some are shaken by this kind of interruption because they assumed that a good plan will always advance without difficulty. When reality intrudes, they begin to doubt everything, as if a single delay should cause them to throw away the whole design. But the apostle's example teaches us otherwise. If Paul could say that Satan hindered him without surrendering his mission, then we should be able to face interruptions without invalidating our entire outlook.

Even when a setback is partly due to your own mistake, this does not mean your mission is over. Human weakness and error can create delays, but they do not erase God's truth. In such cases, the right response is not to retreat in shame but to correct what needs correction and keep moving. Refine your approach, and continue the work. The plan may need small adjustments, but the calling remains.

There is a place for verification and improvement at every stage. It is wise to review your course and ensure it still reflects God's truth. Yet this process is entirely different from the defeatist impulse to abandon the mission. A wise builder checks his tools and strengthens his design without tearing down the whole structure at the first sign of wear.

Forward movement is the pattern of faith. If one route is blocked, find another. If timing shifts, keep preparing so that you are ready when the door opens again. The hindrance that comes today will not define the outcome tomorrow unless you let it. The plan God has given you is not cancelled because the schedule changes.

In the end, setbacks serve to prove both the durability of your mission and the steadfastness of your resolve. If the work is worth doing, it will still be worth doing after a delay. Let every hindrance become an occasion to strengthen your purpose rather than to abandon it. As Paul's example shows, the legitimacy of your mission is not determined by whether you face

resistance, but by whether it remains true to the word of God. And if it does, you press on until it is complete.

Shameless Faith

The word of God gives plain promises about healing and prosperity. It affirms that the believer can have health and can have abundance. These blessings stand as gifts of grace received by faith. They are not bargains or payment for services rendered. They do not come with hidden conditions that restrict their enjoyment to those who use them in specific ways. Healing is not reserved for those who will serve in ministry. Prosperity is not reserved for those who will give a predetermined portion to others. The promises themselves are direct and unconditional in their intent, even if generosity and service are important parts of the Christian life.

Many who preach on these subjects tend to insert such conditions almost immediately. When they mention healing, they hasten to say that God heals so you can work for him or so you can help others. When they mention prosperity, they rush to add that God gives wealth so you can give it away or fund ministry. In one sense, these are valid applications, because those who are blessed are in a position to bless others. Yet when this is the first or constant qualification, it begins to sound like an apology for desiring the promise itself. It turns the blessing into a transaction where its value is judged by how well it can be used for something beyond the person receiving it.

This instinct reveals embarrassment rather than faith. It suggests that the desire for health or abundance needs to be excused or justified before others. The preacher or believer feels compelled to explain that they want the blessing for “good reasons,” as if faith in God's word were insufficient. This betrays a deeper problem, a reluctance to believe that God's promise is a sufficient basis for desire and request. When the believer stands before God asking for what he has promised, there is no need to dress it up as a tool for some other purpose before it is acceptable.

The Gospels are filled with examples of blessings given directly to the person, without the condition that they be immediately converted into instruments for others. When Jesus healed the sick, the healing itself fulfilled his will for them. The person who had been blind could now see. The person who had been lame could now walk. They could go on to help others, but the miracle was complete before they took their first step of service. God's gifts are inherently good and complete for the one who receives them. They have value in themselves before they are ever passed on.

To treat every blessing as valuable only when it benefits others is to undermine the grace of God. If God only healed so that the healed person could serve someone else, then his intention would never land on the individual. The blessing would always be for the next person down the line, and the first recipient would simply be a tool in a chain of usefulness. This is foreign to the character of God, who delights in doing good to each one he loves. He blesses each one he blesses. From there, he may also bless many others through them, but the blessing terminates on the person first.

Faith receives the promise without shame. It says, "I receive healing from God because I want to be healthy. I want to feel strong. I want to live free from pain and weakness. God created me as a human being with these desires and needs, and he made provision for them." This is agreement with the way God made the world and the promises he gave. Likewise, faith says, "I receive prosperity from God because I want to live well. I want to enjoy the provision he has given for food, shelter, beauty, and abundance. He knows these needs and has declared his will to meet them."

There is wisdom in separating the subjects of receiving blessings and serving others with those blessings. Both are true, but they are not the same conversation. When the two are confused, the teaching becomes a gospel of future works. The believer begins to think that the blessing is given in exchange for what they will do later, rather than as a gift received by faith today. This robs grace of its purity and moves the mind away from trusting the promise itself. The gospel teaches that God heals because he is merciful, because healing is part of redemption, and because faith receives what he has provided.

Once the person is healed, they are in a better position to serve. Once they are prospered, they can give more freely. These things are true, but they come after the blessing is received. God does not exploit his people like tools to be discarded when the job is done. He blesses them because he loves them. He takes pleasure in their restoration, their well-being, and their joy. When that joy overflows to others, it becomes an extension of the original blessing, not its replacement.

This distinction guards the believer from sliding into a mindset of constant justification. It allows them to stand before God with an open hand and a direct request. They can say, "You promised healing, and I believe you. You promised prosperity, and I believe you." This kind of faith is shameless. It does not dilute the promise with human conditions. It treats God's word as final and trustworthy. It expects to see the goodness of God in the land of the living, and it receives without embarrassment.

A gospel that demands constant justification for receiving God's promises is a gospel of suspicion. It trains believers to question their motives every time they ask for something God has offered freely. This suspicion erodes faith. It teaches the believer to stand before God with half a mind, one eye on the promise and the other on their own performance or intentions. Faith that stands on grace fixes both eyes on the promise, because grace makes the promise secure.

When God blesses, he means for that blessing to rest on you first. He does not need an excuse to do good to you, and you do not need to invent one. Once the blessing is yours, you can share it freely, and this is good. Yet it is even better when the sharing flows from fullness rather than from a condition you had to meet before you could receive anything at all. Faith receives, enjoys, and then gives. That is the order of the gospel. That is the way of shameless faith.

The Command with a Promise

Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. (Ephesians 6:2–3)

The fifth commandment is remarkable because God attached to it an explicit promise. He did not merely tell his people to honor their parents. He added the assurance that their days would be long and secure in the land he was giving them. The word of God here reveals more than a rule for conduct. It establishes the principle that long life is a divine gift promised to those who live in fellowship with him. From the beginning, the promise of life and length of days has accompanied God's instruction.

This promise carries forward across the covenants. It was not confined to Israel in the wilderness, nor was it abolished in the new covenant. Paul cites it to Gentile Christians in Ephesians 6, calling it "the first commandment with a promise." He is not merely rehearsing history but affirming continuity. What God declared at Sinai, he reaffirms to the church in Christ. The promise of long life remains. The gospel does not erase it, but strengthens it, showing that God's generosity extends even to the smallest details of human existence.

The testimony of Psalm 91 confirms this. There the Spirit promises that the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will be satisfied with long life and kept safe from destruction. Plague will not approach him. Disaster will not overwhelm him. Instead, he will call upon God and be answered, delivered, and honored. The psalmist does not present this as a temporary benefit, but as a standing word for those who trust God. Long life is described as a crowning blessing for the faithful.

When Paul reapplies the promise in Ephesians, he does not confine it to the land of Canaan. He speaks broadly of life itself, declaring that it may go well and that believers may enjoy long life on the earth. This shows that the promise has been expanded, no longer tied to one nation in one land, but extended wherever God's people live. Long life belongs to the Christian even more than it did to the Israelites. It belongs to the one who trusts in Christ.

The permanence of this promise also matches the teaching of Jesus. He said that not the smallest letter or stroke of God's word would fall away until all is accomplished. He warned that those who diminish any part of God's instruction and teach others to do so will be regarded as least in the kingdom of heaven. Even if the world exalts such a person as a scholar or leader, heaven calls him small. When it comes to the promises of God, we must never diminish them. Long life is still promised, and the word of Christ requires us to uphold it in full strength.

The same pattern appears in the other promises Christ gave. He declared that those who believe would lay hands on the sick and they would recover. He promised that prayer offered in faith would receive what was asked. He assured the disciples that the Spirit would give them words, that prophecy would build up the church, and that divine power would accompany the

preaching of the gospel. These promises remain as real as the promise of long life. God does not speak idly. His word carries both command and promise, and his promise remains firm.

Some minimize these words, acting as if such promises expired with another age. They boast of being faithful to Scripture while discarding its most generous assurances. They build a name for themselves while treating God's word as small. But the Lord himself says they are small, no matter how great their reputation. To deny that long life remains promised is to contradict Scripture. To deny that God still heals, answers prayer, and empowers the believer is to contradict Christ. Their denial cannot overturn what God has spoken.

For those who receive the promises, the effect is plain. They live in the assurance that their lives will not be cut short by accident, plague, or premature death. They expect God's hand to sustain them and to satisfy them with years. They call upon the Lord and find him faithful to answer. They see health restored, prayers fulfilled, and power supplied. Their confidence rests not in wishful thinking but in the word of God that has been confirmed again and again.

Long life was promised at Sinai, celebrated in the Psalms, reaffirmed by Paul, and secured in Christ. God continues to attach life and health to his word. His people are meant to know this, confess it, and expect it. Scripture does not hold out vague hope but concrete promise. To live in faith is to live in expectation of this very blessing.

The promise of long life is bound up in the very nature of God's word, which gives life to those who hear it. The one who trusts him will be satisfied with years. The one who calls on him will be delivered. The one who stands on his word will live long upon the earth. This is the testimony of Scripture before Christ and after Christ, confirmed by apostles and prophets, and fulfilled by the God who cannot lie.

The Delightful Cruelty of Abandonment

“God gave them up to a debased mind.” (Romans 1:28)

Paul described a principle of divine judgment that has been true since the beginning and remains true today. When men refused the way of God, he did not merely tolerate their rebellion. He acted in judgment, handing them over to the very path they had chosen. This abandonment was judicial and deliberate. The sinner rejected the truth, and God confirmed the rejection by giving him over to a debased mind. The effect was that the man's own choices and convictions became instruments of destruction. His sins produced their own punishment, and his unbelief generated its own ruin. The principle was that of sowing and reaping: what a person sowed, that he also reaped. God governed this process, making the consequence inseparable from the cause.

Paul applied this in Romans to the matter of immorality. He wrote that men exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and that God therefore gave them up to impurity. The judgment fit the crime. Their corruption of thought produced a corruption of conduct, and that corruption became its own penalty. Moral corruption always carried consequences within itself. The defiled body bore its own scars. Diseased desires brought their own torment. Disordered relations sowed chaos into families and societies. God's judgment did not need to wait for the end of time. It worked in the past and still works in the present as the principle of cause and effect, showing that sin contains its own destruction. To be given up to immorality was to be condemned to misery.

This principle extends to every refusal of faith. The man who rejects God in any sphere of life finds himself abandoned to his own falsehoods. When he refuses to believe in healing, sickness becomes his portion. When he denies the power of God in evangelism, his ministry shrinks into a barren program, more performance than reality. He insists that miracles belong only to the past, and God confirms him in his unbelief, making him reap the harvest of weak churches and fruitless preaching. His congregations fill with hypocrites. When he resorts to politics instead of the power of God, he receives his judgment in the form of endless frustration, because his methods cannot achieve what only God can accomplish. He gathers followers who are impressed with the organization, but their hearts remain unconverted. They cling to ideology instead of faith, and the church itself becomes little more than a political club. What passes for intellectualism in such an approach turns out to be shallow and false. It produces hearts that are hard and blind. God's judgment works by handing them over to the very schemes they have chosen.

The irony of this divine abandonment is sharp. The very thing the Faithless claim as their strength becomes the mark of their ruin. A man who trusts medicine instead of the promises of God reaps a life of fear and sickness. A man who trusts politics inherits the strife and futility that politics always produces. A man who bows to human intellect and reputation gains an intellect that leads him further from the truth. God punishes them by giving them exactly what

they want. This is the delightful cruelty of his judgment. He lets them have their idols, and the idols destroy them. The measure they use becomes the measure they receive.

The reverse holds true for those who believe. The gospel is described as the power of God to those who believe, while to those who perish it appears as weakness. The difference lies not in the gospel itself but in the response. The same word that saves some condemns others. To unbelievers it appears as folly, incapable of addressing their supposed sophistication. To those who trust in God, it stands as the solution to all things, sufficient for this life and for eternity. The principle works in both directions. Those who refuse the power of God are confirmed in defeat. Those who receive the power of God are confirmed in victory. God allows no neutrality. He hardens the faithless in futility, and he strengthens the faithful in hope.

God gives up the Faithless not only to immorality but to debased thought itself. Their systems of doctrine reflect their rebellion. They produce seminaries and churches filled with elaborate rationalizations for unbelief. They deny miracles, and their theology decays into barren and incoherent intellectualism. They scorn healing, and their doctrine withers into empty consolation. They despise the Spirit, and their pulpits thunder with moralism and politics. These events are judgments of God rather than accidents of history. He gives them up to a faithless theology, and the results bear witness to the punishment. Their works fail. Their churches shrink. Their disciples remain worldly. They literally, physical die of degrading diseases. Their theology produces no power because their minds have been handed over.

The same word that explains their ruin explains the blessing of those who trust God. He does not leave believers to reap destruction. He confirms their faith by causing it to flourish. The one who believes the word of God for healing receives healing. The one who trusts the Spirit for power in evangelism sees the Spirit at work. The one who rejects politics as the means of change experiences miracles that no government can produce. God gives them up to the path of faith, and the path of faith bears its own fruit. It produces health. It produces deliverance. It produces wisdom and joy. It produces abundance. It fills churches with happiness and preaching with conviction. It creates disciples who know God rather than those who merely know arguments, and false arguments at that.

The contrast could not be greater. God gives the unbeliever up to a diseased and defeated mind. He gives the believer up to a mind renewed by truth and empowered by his Spirit. The unbeliever reaps frustration. The believer reaps fulfillment. The unbeliever inherits hypocrisy and futility. The believer inherits righteousness, peace, and joy. The unbeliever finds his own theology confirmed as false. The believer finds his faith confirmed as true. In every case, God governs the process, handing men over to what they have chosen. He makes unbelief its own punishment, and he makes faith its own reward.

Paul's phrase, "God gave them up," carried enormous significance. It was a judicial declaration that God himself acted to confirm men in their paths, rather than a passive description of human decline. The sinner wandered into ruin because God actively delivered him over to it. This was the judgment of God in history, and it continues to operate through the choices of

men. The sinner sows unbelief and reaps corruption. The believer sows faith and reaps life. The law of sowing and reaping reveals the hand of God behind every outcome.

This principle excludes compromise. Those who trust in medicine and politics above the promises of God find themselves abandoned to the very weakness they prefer. Those who place their hope in fallacious philosophy rather than divine revelation discover their intellect enslaved to falsehood. The law of God works without exception. The gospel, which is the power of God to those who believe, becomes the instrument of judgment to those who refuse. In this way God shows his justice and his truth. He confirms the unbeliever in futility and the believer in strength. He gives them up, and they inherit what they have chosen.

The Dividing Line

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10:38)

When Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, he did not begin with speculative philosophy or moral exhortations. He did not summarize Jesus by speaking of social causes or political reform. He introduced the gospel with a sentence that cut through every false idea and went straight to the heart of Christ's ministry. He said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, and that Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. The introduction is deliberate. Jesus Christ is the healer, and Satan is the oppressor. Healing is good, and sickness is evil. This is the dividing line.

Peter chose this as the starting point of his message because it was the starting point of Christ's ministry. It is the point of first contact between heaven and earth in the life of Jesus. When the Spirit came upon him, the immediate result was healing, deliverance, and freedom from satanic oppression. This stood at the center of Peter's message. It expressed the gospel as he delivered it, the gospel as God designed it, and the gospel that must still be proclaimed today. The ministry of healing is the introduction of Christ.

The words themselves draw the line for us. Jesus did good by healing. Satan oppressed by sickness. Every preacher who identifies with Christ must stand on the side of healing. Every preacher who excuses or endorses sickness identifies with Satan. There is no middle ground. Jesus did good, Satan did evil. Jesus healed, Satan oppressed. To teach otherwise is to invert Peter's words and to pervert the gospel itself.

The passage says that healing is good. This simple truth is an indictment against countless pulpits and seminaries that have polluted the church with lies. They have said that sickness is from God, and that it is a gift to sanctify. They have claimed that healing has passed away, or that God sometimes heals, sometimes does not, according to a mysterious plan that cannot be known. But Peter did not preach any of these things. He drew a line, and they are on the wrong side of it. They do not preach Christ, they preach against him. They do not identify with his work, they oppose it. In doing so, they side with the oppressor.

The identity of Christ is that he is the healer. Peter did not say, "Jesus was anointed, and he went about teaching morality and calling for cultural reform." He said Jesus went about healing the oppressed. That is the introduction of Christ. When people claim to introduce him today, but they neglect his healing works, they are introducing another Jesus. They are replacing the anointed Son with an idol of their imagination. The true Jesus, the one who came from God, is known as the healer.

Sickness is evil. It is never a gift. It never belongs to the believer. It is described in the same terms as demons. In Matthew 8, the Gospel groups together Jesus' power over both. He drove out demons and healed the sick. The text presents disease and demons as one reality of

oppression, both destroyed by the atonement that runs from prophecy to gospel to apostolic witness. The cross carried both sin and sickness, both demons and disease, and both were crushed by Christ.

If demons are evil, then sickness is evil. If demons are to be expelled, then sickness is to be healed. No preacher would dare to say that we should embrace demons as a holy act of worship to God. Such a preacher would be exposed and expelled as a blasphemer. Yet countless preachers have said that we should embrace sickness as a gift in an attitude of humble submission to the will of God. They say that to lie under the torment of disease is an act of piety, that surrender to pain is a sign of holiness. They are false teachers. They must be identified as enemies of Christ, because they promote the work of Satan and resist the work of Jesus.

Just as healing is good, and sickness is evil, the same can be said of preachers. Preachers of healing are good, and preachers of sickness are evil. Those who proclaim the healing ministry of Jesus continue his work on earth. They enforce his victory over disease and affirm the will of God. Those who oppose or neglect healing are working against the gospel. They stand with the devil. The dividing line runs through every church and seminary, and every Christian institution. Whether it is a small congregation or a global denomination, the line is the same. Either they preach Jesus the healer or they preach Satan the oppressor.

If sickness is evil like demons, then our attitude must be the same toward both. Should we tolerate demons? Should we encourage believers to invite them in as if they were gifts from God? No, we cast them out. Then how can we tolerate sickness? How can we present it as a blessing, or encourage believers to accept it? Those who teach such things are as wicked as those who would urge us to welcome demons. And if that means we must remove over ninety percent of our faculties and libraries, then so be it. If that means entire seminaries must close down, then so be it. Stand with good or stand with evil. Preach Christ the healer or preach Satan the oppressor.

Consider also the way the apostles introduced Christ. In Acts 2, the gospel was announced with prophetic powers. In Acts 10, it was announced with healing miracles. At every stage, the gospel was introduced by the supernatural. This was the way of God. The Spirit came with tongues of fire, with prophecy, with healing, with miracles. These were the credentials of Christ and his apostles. These were the signs of the kingdom and marks of the true church. Yet how do many introduce Christ today? They speak of politics, of history, of morality, of cultural issues. They wage wars over abortion, homosexuality, and social decay, while they neglect the ministry of healing and the supernatural power of the Spirit. They introduce a cultural Christ, a Christ of political ideas, a Christ without the Spirit and without power. This is not the Christ Peter preached.

If we are to be faithful, we must introduce Christ the way the apostles did. We must present him as the one anointed with the Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil. This is how the gospel should begin. If we begin with sin

alone, we miss the fullness of redemption. If we begin with social issues, we miss the kingdom entirely. But if we begin with healing, with power, with the supernatural, then we present the Christ who came from God, and we mark the dividing line that separates him from Satan.

The gospel begins with a confrontation. Jesus heals, Satan oppresses. Jesus sets free, Satan enslaves. Healing is good, sickness is evil. Those who stand with healing stand with Christ. Those who stand with sickness stand with Satan. This is not a secondary doctrine or marginal debate. It is the gospel itself, and the dividing line drawn by Peter when he introduced it. To be on the wrong side is to reject the gospel at the very beginning. To be on the right side is to stand with Jesus the healer, the Christ of God, anointed with the Spirit and with power.

The Lord Delivers

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34:19)

David knew what it meant to be surrounded by danger. He wrote this psalm after he escaped from the Philistines by feigning madness. His life was on the line. He had been hunted, betrayed, and marked for death. When he said that the righteous face afflictions, he was not thinking about small frustrations or minor irritations. He was not referring to a rude neighbor, an unfriendly colleague, or a disappointing turn of events. He was describing the threat of destruction, the assaults of enemies, the plots of men who wanted him dead. Scripture records his experience so that we understand what God means when he speaks of afflictions. God's word does not exaggerate and it does not trivialize. When the psalm says many are the afflictions of the righteous, it sets the stage for the deliverance of God from the most severe trials that life can present.

But trouble is common to man. It is not the case that the wicked are exempt from afflictions. They also suffer calamities, disasters, betrayals, sicknesses, famines, and wars. What distinguishes the righteous is not the absence of affliction but the certainty of rescue. The wicked have no such hope. When they fall into trouble, there is no promise that God will act for them. Their cries are wasted breath, and their despair is the just reward for their unbelief. The righteous, however, have the assurance that every affliction becomes the occasion for God's intervention.

The psalm does not say that the Lord might deliver. It does not present deliverance as a possibility or a vague hope. It declares that the Lord delivers the righteous from them all. To question this is to side with unbelief. To hedge one's faith with timid qualifications is to deny the plain teaching of Scripture. Many preachers have built their reputation on this denial. They tell the church that God afflicts his people, that he ordains misery and withholds rescue. They reverse the gospel by declaring as heresy the promise that God delivers, and as orthodoxy the idea that he inflicts. In most churches it has become respectable to preach that God abandons his children, though they do not dare say it in these words, while it is branded as scandalous to affirm that God delivers them. This is the work of Satan within the church. It is the establishment of a counterfeit gospel that replaces divine promises with demonic lies.

The true gospel is that God delivers. He saves not only in the sense of eternal life but also in the immediate circumstances of this world. His power extends to the whole person. He delivers from sin, and he delivers from sickness. He delivers from hell, and he delivers from hunger. He delivers from judgment, and he delivers from poverty. To restrict the promise to hidden temptations or unseen spiritual dangers is to distort what David confessed. David was delivered from death itself, and the same God rescues his people today.

The promise reaches into the physical and the material. It reaches into the body when pain or weakness seeks to consume it. It reaches into the household when resources are depleted and

daily bread seems uncertain. It reaches into the workplace, the city, and the nation when violence or betrayal threatens peace. The same God who forgives sins also heals diseases. The same Christ who redeems the soul also multiplies loaves and fishes. The psalm proclaims that the Lord delivers the righteous from all afflictions, and this includes every sphere of life where afflictions can strike.

This is the faith that Satan despises. He will tolerate religion that bows its head under misery. He will even promote a gospel of resignation that calls affliction a blessing. What he cannot abide is the faith that believes God's word, that confesses his power, and that receives his rescue. Therefore he fills the pulpits with voices that contradict David, that call unbelief humility, and that slander the promises of God as presumption. But the verse is still there, and it cannot be erased. It cannot be reinterpreted into silence.

Faith embraces this. It does not speculate whether God will intervene. It confesses that God always intervenes. The psalmist is not offering an uncertain hope but a declaration of fact. Deliverance belongs to the righteous. Those who put their trust in him will never be put to shame.

The message is as clear today as when David first wrote it. The church must decide whether it will believe the word of God or the doctrines of demons. It must choose between a gospel of deliverance and a gospel of despair. To believe the true gospel is to confess that afflictions may come but God rescues his people from every one of them. This is the promise of God, tested in the crucible of danger, proven in the life of David, confirmed in Christ, and offered to all who believe.

The Lord delivers the righteous person from all afflictions. This is the word of God. It cannot be made to say the opposite. The good news is that the Lord delivers. Even when the righteous fall into the gravest situations, including the threat of death, the Lord comes to the rescue each time.

David had been hunted and nearly killed, so he spoke from personal experience when he said that the righteous face afflictions. Most believers will never encounter such dangers, and not nearly as many. Their lives will not include assassination attempts, imprisonment, or the constant threat of death. But the verse still belongs to them. It stands as an "even if" argument: even if your life should descend into such peril, the Lord delivers. His word is not empty exaggeration. It is a guarantee that covers every situation, from the smallest to the most severe.

The Old Prophet and the Word of God

For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, "You shall eat no bread nor drink water there, and do not return by the way that you came." (1 Kings 13:17)

The account in 1 Kings 13 tells of a young prophet sent from Judah to Bethel with a charge from God. He was commanded to deliver his message against Jeroboam's altar, then to depart without eating or drinking in the city, and not to return by the way he came. The command was precise. Nothing was unclear, and nothing required addition. The young prophet understood what God had said, and his task was to obey.

As he left Bethel, an old prophet pursued him. He invited the young man to his house. When the young prophet repeated the command of God, the older man contradicted him. He claimed that an angel had spoken, authorizing him to bring the young prophet back for a meal. The Scripture gives a plain verdict: he lied. Yet the young prophet accepted the deception. He returned with the older man and ate in his house. As he did, the true word of God came again, this time through the very mouth of the deceiver, declaring that the young prophet would die for disobedience. On his way home, a lion met him and killed him. The beast did not consume him or the donkey that carried him, but stood beside the body. This unnatural restraint showed that the death was not an accident but divine judgment.

God holds his people accountable to his word, regardless of competing claims. It is no excuse to say another prophet contradicted what God had already spoken. Even if the one who contradicts appears reputable, seasoned, or angelic, the verdict remains the same. The young prophet's disobedience, provoked by deception, ended in death because he placed a man's word above God's.

The old prophet represents the enduring temptation to elevate human tradition and religious authority above the word of God. He shows how a figure draped in the cloak of religion can lead others to destruction. He also shows how quickly people abandon what God has said when pressured by the appearance of spiritual authority. The young prophet had direct instruction from God, but he surrendered it when confronted with the claim of religious seniority.

This temptation did not end in Bethel. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for breaking the command of God for the sake of their tradition. He said that their worship was vain because they taught human commandments as if they were divine. Paul warned the Galatians that even if an angel from heaven preached another gospel, they must not believe it. He repeated the warning to remove every doubt: to heed a message contrary to what God had revealed is to be cursed. Peter reminded believers that they possessed the prophetic word fully confirmed, and that no prophecy of Scripture comes from human will. To abandon that word for the voices of false teachers would be to follow the path of destruction.

These witnesses stand together with the account in Kings. They all insist that God's word is supreme. No prophet, no angel, no council, no creed, and no long history may overturn it.

Whoever contradicts the word of God, whether in the name of orthodoxy or in the name of innovation, must be condemned as a liar. The authority of the church is nothing when it speaks against the authority of God. The name of tradition is nothing when it competes with the name of Scripture.

This is where many today fail. They claim to guard the church by defending historic doctrines. They adorn themselves with the robes of tradition and present themselves as guardians of orthodoxy. They quote confessions, councils, and theologians as if these carried equal weight with Scripture. They pressure believers to conform, promising safety in continuity. But when their teaching deviates from the word of God, they are no different from the old prophet in Bethel. They contradict what God has said, and those who listen to them walk toward judgment.

The question for every believer remains the same as it was for the young prophet: will you obey what God has spoken, or will you follow the voice of human authority? The cost of disobedience is clear. To ignore God's word in favor of tradition is to invite destruction. The lion may delay its appearance, but the judgment is sure. On the other hand, to remain with Scripture, to cling to the direct instruction of God, is to live and prosper. His word is the measure of safety, and to abide in it is to flourish under his blessing.

A prophet may arise, or a council may convene, or a tradition may insist, but if they contradict the word of God, they are false. The issue is not the age of the teaching, the volume of its repetition, or the number of its adherents. The issue is whether God has spoken. Those who promote contrary doctrines deserve no respect. Their self-proclaimed orthodoxy is worthless. Their pretended authority deserves scorn. They must be damned, for they corrupt the word of God and mislead those who hear them. Their place is hell, and their words bring death. The church must not flatter them with honorific titles or dignify their traditions with reverence. To do so is to repeat the young prophet's mistake, surrendering to deception at the expense of life.

The young prophet's corpse lay by the road with a lion and a donkey beside it. That strange tableau was a monument to the danger of listening to human voices above God's. The same warning confronts us every time we face the demands of tradition against the plain teaching of Scripture. The danger is not ancient history. It presses on us now. To heed the word of God is to live. To heed the old prophet is to die.

The Poor Worship Mammon

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus said this to people who were not rich. He was not standing before a gathering of wealthy merchants or landowners. He addressed an audience that was largely poor by economic standards. Yet he spoke to them as those who could fall under the mastery of mammon. This means that the worship of money is not a sin limited to the rich. It is a snare for the poor as much as for anyone else, and in many cases, it is the poor who bow to mammon most often.

There are more poor people who worship mammon than rich, if only because most people in the world worship mammon, and the poor far outnumber the rich. They strive to survive, to get more, and to secure their lives by their own power, by methods that bypass trust in the word of God. They measure their days by the pressure of needs and the pursuit of means. It is still idolatry, even if the idol is pursued in desperation rather than in luxury. A rich man may serve mammon from the seat of ease, and a poor man may serve mammon from the floor of need, but the master is the same.

There is only one escape from the service of mammon, and it is not poverty, frugality, or public displays of self-denial. There is no deliverance from idolatry in pretending to despise money while slaving for it. There is no freedom in changing the kind of work you do, even to something that appears more noble or less materialistic, if you are still fixated on human effort to supply what you need. Only faith in the promise of God delivers a person from mammon. Only by believing that God himself will provide, even to the point of adding wealth, can a person refuse the slavery of mammon without pretending.

Those who reject the truth that God will prosper his people do not escape mammon. They embrace him. They set aside God's promise to prosper them and replace it with human ability, human connections, or what they consider luck. They replace the word of God with their effort and education, the promise of God with their strategies and investments. They may disguise it as wisdom, responsibility, or prudence, even what they call Christian faith, but it is the worship of mammon.

If you do not serve the true God, you will serve another. There is no middle ground where you serve both or neither. If you do not believe the true God to sustain and prosper you, you will depend on some other source. If you reject his word that says he will add all these things to you, including what pagans chase, you will live by another promise. The idol may be education, skill, relationships, or opportunity. The pattern is the same: there is an object of trust, a promise attached to it, and devotion to that promise. In the biblical sense, this is a false god.

The gospel of prosperity, when defined by Scripture, is not a scheme for greed but a confession of God's character. It affirms that he delights in the good of his people, that he gives what they need and desire for life and godliness, and that he adds material wealth without making it their

master. It teaches that God does not abandon his children to scarcity and anxiety, forcing them to scrounge from the hand of the world. It insists that abundance comes from the blessing of God, not from the blessing of mammon.

Those who reject this gospel of prosperity are not choosing spiritual purity over material desire. They are choosing mammon over God. They are rejecting one master for another, denying one message in order to follow another. They call it holiness or humility, but it is still service to mammon. The pretense may fool others, but the choice of master is plain before God.

To worship God is to receive him as the source of all things. To believe his word is to trust him for the whole of life. This includes money. There is nothing noble about claiming to trust God while depending on the systems of mammon for daily bread. There is no holiness in refusing to believe God for abundance while hoping that the world will grant enough to get by. True worship places every need and desire in the hands of God, and believes that he gives it as surely as he gives breath and strength.

The poor who believe God in this way are rich in the truest sense. They refuse to bow to mammon, whether in luxury or in desperation. They labor, but they do not labor for mammon. They receive, but they do not receive from mammon. They rest in the promise of the God who provides and prospers. They have faith that God will deliver them from poverty and give them the power to get wealth, and in doing so they prove that no one can serve two masters. They have chosen their master, and he is not mammon.

The Power of Love

Christians have been trained to speak of love while avoiding any serious talk about power. In their minds, love is the pure thing, and power is the dangerous thing. They think they are honoring God by exalting love and keeping power at a distance, as if the two were in tension with each other. This has produced a distorted and unbiblical faith. It sounds noble to the religious and ignorant, but it is destructive. What results is a church that talks about love while refusing the means by which love fulfills its purpose.

Love without power is love that cannot act. It becomes the posture of one who wants to be thought of as compassionate, but who will not endure the responsibility of doing something real. The mind takes satisfaction in the image of being loving, while leaving the other person in the same misery as before. The sick remain sick, the poor remain poor, and the lost remain lost, but the Christian feels good for having expressed concern. Such love is not love at all. It is selfishness cloaked in religious language, a form of self-worship disguised as piety. It honors the self-image of the so-called loving person, while dishonoring God by denying what he has given to bring help and deliverance.

Not only does power belong to God, but God is power. Scripture does not present power as a tool God happens to use, but as his very being and identity. To be ashamed of power is to be ashamed of God himself. To mock power is to mock the one who is power. Those who say that power is unnecessary, or who dismiss it as a minor matter, do not appreciate the God they claim to worship. They create an idol that they call love, strip it of power, and then bow to it as if it were the true God.

The gospel itself shows that love and power are inseparable. It is not only the love of God to save, but the power of God to save. If the gospel were only love, it would be nothing more than divine sympathy, unable to rescue anyone from sin and death. The gospel is effectual because the love of God is the power of God in action. The cross is the decisive act by which God secured eternal redemption. The resurrection is the event by which God publicly displayed the triumph of his Son. To call this merely love without emphasizing power is to strip the gospel of its very essence.

In the Scriptures, the God who loves is the God who works wonders. His love is revealed in mighty works that accomplish his purpose. He creates the world by his power, saves his people by his power, prospers them by his power, and heals the sick by his power. To love God is to love him as he is, which means to love his power. God acts with power because he is power. Just as there is no God without power, there is no love without power.

Yet in many churches, miraculous power is treated as suspect. Some say it is a distraction from the true message, as if the miracles of Jesus were a distraction from his preaching. Others accuse those who expect God to heal or deliver of being carnal, as if the holiness of God and the power of God could be opposed to each other. This is more than ignorance, but blasphemy. It is to speak of God's works as if they were the works of men, to suggest that his deeds

resemble the corrupt motives of this world. Such people have learned to speak evil of the things they do not understand.

Miraculous power is not an accessory to the Christian life. It is an expression of the life of God himself. The Holy Spirit lives in the believer not as a principle or idea, but as almighty power. The early disciples turned the world upside down by the preaching of the word accompanied by signs and wonders. Paul confronted the Corinthians with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith would rest not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God. This is the only biblical pattern.

Powerless love is alien to the Scriptures and alien to God. It is a counterfeit that keeps its hands clean by refusing to do anything by faith. It poses as humility but is in truth a rejection of God's nature. The love of God is the power of God in motion. It produces actual effects to benefit people.

Those who love God must love his power. They must desire it, honor it, and refuse to be ashamed of it. They must condemn the false teaching that treats power as inferior to love, or as if it were some optional part of the Christian life. If God is power, then the believer's love for God will necessarily love his power. To divide the two is to tear apart the nature of God himself. The God who is love is the God who is power, and the God who is power is the God who is love.

If the church is to represent Christ faithfully, it must proclaim both equally. It must declare the love of God in terms that reveal the power of God, and the power of God in terms that reveal the love of God. This is not a matter of theological heritage or denominational style. It is a matter of truth. To offer one without the other is to offer something less than the gospel, less than the God of the Bible, and less than the hope he has given to the world.

The Preacher Himself

A common idea circulates among Christians that the best preaching happens when the preacher fades into the background and allows the Bible to speak for itself. The statement appeals to people who equate humility with self-erasure. It appears pious, but its logic is fatally flawed. Follow it to its conclusion, and the result is absurd. If the ideal is to remove the preacher as much as possible, then the best sermon would be the playing of an audio Bible. The recording would contain only the words of Scripture, without the minister's personality, opinion, or interpretation. By this definition, it would surpass the work of any human preacher.

God has commanded the preaching of his word, not the replacement of preaching with a mechanical reading. He has appointed men to deliver the truth in person. He has designed the act of preaching to include the man who preaches. The preacher is part of the process. The act involves a living voice, a thinking mind, and a believing heart. An audio Bible may contain the pure text of Scripture, but it is not preaching.

Preaching is more than a neutral transmission of information. The Bible is the source and the authority. The sermon must conform to it in every way. Yet preaching itself is a living act in which the truth is brought through a man to an audience. God works through the preacher as well as through the text. The preacher does not erase himself from the message. His faith, his understanding, and his obedience all shape the way the message comes forth. The sermon is biblical in content, but it is also personal in its expression.

This has always been God's pattern. The prophets spoke the word of the Lord as men who had stood in his counsel. The apostles preached what they had received from Christ, but they spoke it as men who had lived the truth. God's design is not to bypass the man, but to prepare and use the man.

A defective view of preaching produces defective practice. A man who treats himself as irrelevant to the sermon will approach the pulpit as a detached messenger. He may work on the sermon text, but he will neglect the work on himself. His preparation will be academic, his delivery mechanical. The deficiency runs deeper than style or tone. His own life will hollow out the message. Such preaching may inform, but it will not pierce. It may be accurate in words, but it will lack the spiritual and miraculous power that God gives when a man preaches out of personal faith and obedience.

The content of the sermon itself suffers when the preacher is unprepared as a man. Scripture remains perfect, but the way the preacher selects, explains, and applies it depends on his own knowledge and faith. A shallow man produces shallow preaching. A carnal man produces compromised preaching. The hearers receive less than what the Bible contains because the preacher himself has less than what the Bible offers. The man is the vessel through which the word flows, and the quality of the vessel affects the flow.

The path to stronger preaching runs through the improvement of the preacher himself. Grow in the knowledge of Scripture, and the content will deepen. Grow in obedience, and the authority will increase. Grow in faith, and the preaching will carry the Spirit's power. Every advance in holiness, wisdom, and maturity strengthens the message. The sermon becomes an overflow of what the preacher has believed and proved. It is not a recital of facts from a detached mind, but a declaration from a transformed life.

Paul told Timothy to watch his life and his doctrine closely. Both matter, and both are connected. By guarding his own life, Timothy would guard the truth in his preaching. By holding to sound doctrine, he would safeguard his own walk with God. The two cannot be separated without damaging both. The preacher's life reinforces the sermon, and the sermon reflects the life.

God calls preachers to be more than repeaters of sacred syllables. He calls them to be men shaped by the truth, men whose voices carry conviction because they speak as those who have believed. The goal is not to erase the preacher from the sermon, but to so transform him that his whole being becomes a faithful instrument of God's message. Through such preaching, God brings repentance, faith, obedience, and miracles. The word comes with both explanation and conviction, both knowledge and power.

The best preaching, then, does not happen when the preacher disappears. It happens when the preacher appears as the man God has made him to be, a man filled with truth and alive with faith. An audio Bible indeed delivers the word of God, and it could benefit all those who hear it, so that conversions and miracles can occur. But it is not preaching. God has chosen men to speak, and he works in the man so that the message is both biblical and living. The preacher himself must become the sermon.

The Range of Revelation

The Bible does not entrust its vocabulary to human guardians. It uses words in the ways that serve its message, even if theologians attempt to restrict their meaning to a single channel. Few words show this more clearly than “revelation.” Those who boast of precision have often mutilated the term by forcing it into one narrow usage, then using their definition as a rod against others. The irony is that they forbid even the Bible to speak freely. They confine the word to a meaning of their own choosing, and in doing so they silence the very text they pretend to honor.

The Greek word *apokalypsis* and its related forms appear across the New Testament with a range of uses. It stretches across Scripture itself, spiritual illumination, prophecy in the church, God’s actions in history, and the final unveiling of Christ. The same root holds them together, showing that revelation is disclosure, the uncovering of what was hidden, whether in words or in deeds. This elasticity destroys the false orthodoxy that would reduce the word to one meaning and banish all others.

Revelation sometimes refers to that which became Scripture. The book of Revelation opens with the phrase, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants” (Revelation 1:1). This was not mere perception but divine disclosure committed to writing. Paul also insists, “I did not receive [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Again he says, “The mystery was made known to me by revelation” (Ephesians 3:3). In each case the word refers to content directly imparted, received as a word from God, and then inscribed as Scripture. This is the sense that theologians latch onto, and it is legitimate. But it is not the only sense.

Revelation also means God granting understanding to his people. Paul prays that believers would have “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17). He uses the very word that theologians reserve for Scripture, but he applies it to the church’s continuing knowledge of God. Jesus also said, “You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25; see also Luke 10:21). Paul again affirms that “these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:10). These passages show that revelation extends into the ongoing life of the church, as God discloses truth to those who believe. Charismatics often speak of “revelation” in this way, where others might prefer the word “illumination.” Far from being wrong, they are closer to the biblical use than those who condemn them.

Revelation appears again in the context of prophecy. In the Corinthian assembly Paul writes, “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation” (1 Corinthians 14:26). He adds, “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent” (1 Corinthians 14:30). Here revelation is a spontaneous disclosure from God that never became Scripture. It was revelation nonetheless. This is devastating to the false orthodoxy that insists revelation ceased with the close of the canon. Paul recognized revelation in ordinary church gatherings, where God spoke in ways that were genuine though not preserved as Scripture.

Revelation also describes God's actions in history. Paul writes, "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith" (Romans 1:17), and "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness" (Romans 1:18). These are not entries in a text but disclosures of divine power and judgment in the world. He also says the mystery "was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations" (Romans 16:25–26). Again, the word carries the sense of God uncovering what was concealed, not limited to the inscribing of Scripture.

Revelation finally describes the eschatological unveiling of Christ. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they will obtain relief "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Peter speaks of "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5), of faith that will result in praise "at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7), of grace that will be brought to believers "at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13), and of the church rejoicing when Christ's glory "is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13). In all these, revelation is not the writing of a book but the disclosure of Christ's glory at the end of the age.

From the giving of Scripture to the enlightenment of the mind, from prophecy in worship to the display of God's justice, from the present unveiling of the gospel to the final revelation of Christ, the Bible uses the same word family. It refuses to flatten meaning into one narrow sense. Theologians who restrict "revelation" to Scripture alone create an artificial definition that contradicts the text. They think "new revelation" must mean additions to the Bible, which is false. "New revelation" in the sense of God continuing to speak to his people is biblical. The word has range, and to flatten it is to distort it.

This exposes the theological error. Many who imagine themselves sophisticated commit the mistake of freezing a word into one meaning, then imposing their definition on Scripture. They forbid the Bible to speak in its own language. They commit the very crime they accuse others of: twisting words and corrupting meaning. When revelation is restricted to Scripture alone, in defiance of the Bible's own usage, the result is unbiblical and anti-gospel. It reduces God's present activity to silence and turns revelation into a relic of the past.

The debate between illumination and revelation shows the same inversion. Charismatics often use "revelation" to mean what others call illumination. Academics attack them for confusion. But in fact the charismatics stand closer to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17 than the academics who scold them. The supposed experts insist on false precision while becoming blind to the text. Their learning has made them fools. Sometimes you may accommodate their usage to avoid distraction, but you must never surrender the biblical word to them. Their ignorance does not earn the right to redefine Scripture.

The word belongs to God. He has used it in Scripture with deliberate breadth, covering his written word, his disclosure to the church, his works in history, and his final unveiling in glory. The attempt to restrict it is rebellion against God's vocabulary. It is another form of the same arrogance that boasts in wisdom but blinds itself to truth. Let the Bible define its own words.

Let God's revelation continue to be recognized in all the ways he has ordained, until the last and greatest revelation appears when Christ comes from heaven.