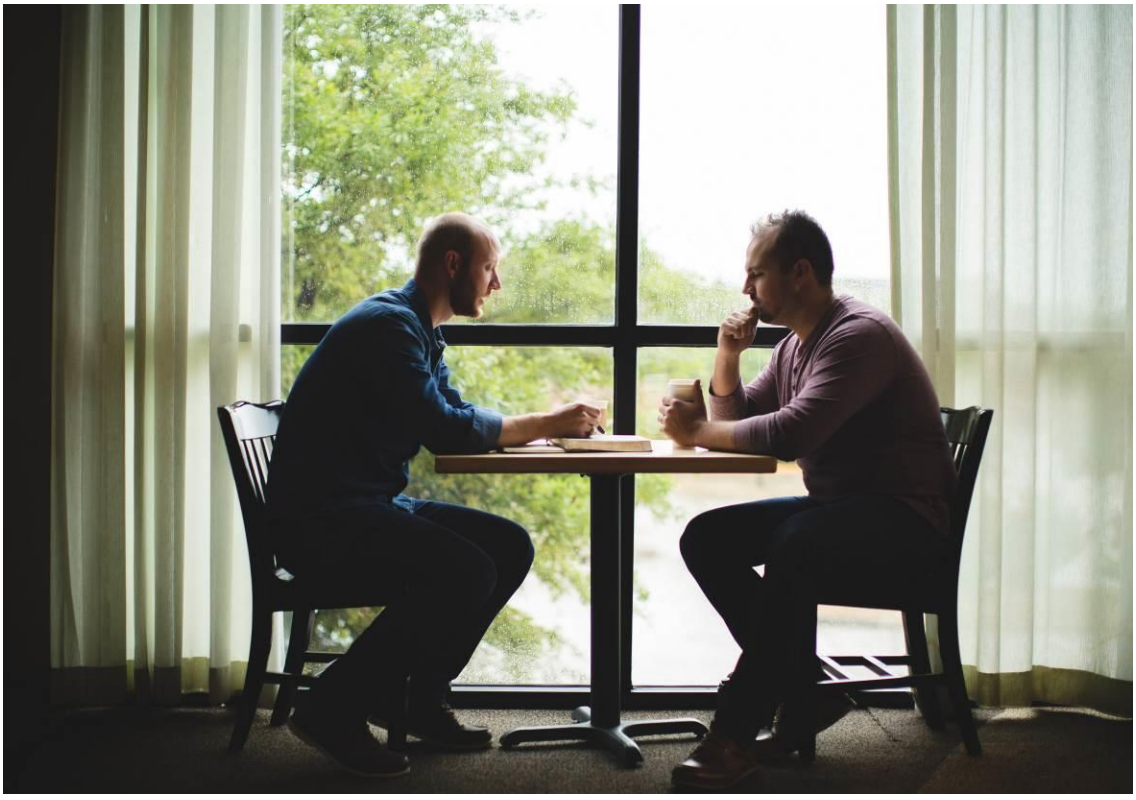
101 CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS



Questions from Christians, answers from the Bible!

with David Legge

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101 Christian Questions - Chapter 1
"The Problem of Evil"

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Well, good evening to you all! It's good to be back with you in Ards, and thank you for the invitation, and thank you for your questions. I almost hesitated there, thanking you, for I've had to do a lot of work! But it has been worthwhile, and I really honestly do mean thank you, because - believe it or not - the questions you have been asking have been questions that, from time to time, would be on my heart, and it gives me the opportunity to dig deep and to consolidate some of the thoughts and convictions that I have myself. Now, I put it down to Providence that your questions - there were over 20 questions, I know that much - they all seem to streamline very well into certain categories and themes, four in particular - and it will be four nights from Tuesday to Friday, so I have just broken them up into four.

There were a number of questions on certain themes, sometimes only one question, but it would need a whole night to consider it, so tonight we're looking at 'The Problem of Evil'. If you don't even know what that is, well, thank the Lord for that - but you will by the end of this evening, and it's something that we all need to consider and face. Tomorrow evening we're going to consider some questions regarding what's the best way to learn the Bible - that's a very broad and general question, but we'll try to tie it down as far as we can. Another question tomorrow evening is regarding personal assurance which, of course, is very much connected to the word of God; and someone was looking to know the differences between, for instance, backsliders, false professors, carnal Christians, and things like that. Thursday night we hope to look at the subject of marriage, and divorce and remarriage, and there were a few questions concerning that. On Friday evening are going to look at the afterlife, and there were a number of questions about heaven, whether or not we will know one another in heaven; and about hell, whether or not people in hell can see people in heaven, and vice versa - and various questions like that.

Now, let me say: don't think that if you come along and it sounds like there's a controversial subject, that you will be offended. I will deliberately attempt, as far as possible, being true to the truth, not to offend anyone and to explore these questions with the word of God, and finding answers within - but there will be a wee bit of work for you to do as well, and to come to your own conclusions regarding some of them.

Now, tonight is a big one - and I deliberately started with a big one, because I had yesterday all day and today to deal with it - and this is 'The Problem of Evil'. Now, there are four questions that were asked that relate to the problem of evil or, as theologians call it, 'theodicy' - that's just a fancy word for a theological attempt to explain the existence of evil. How can we believe that there is an Almighty God, and yet at the same time evil, suffering, pain and sin exists? The question often goes: if there is such an all-powerful, omnipotent God, how can He allow suffering and pain to be here?

Now, the four questions were: one, if God knew the outcome, why did He create Lucifer in the first place? Now, we could spend all night on that one alone. The second: why do good things happen to bad people? The third: how do you explain to unbelievers why God allows tragedies that kill thousands of people? The fourth question, which, I was cheating a wee bit, breaking it

up into a number of questions, first of all was: give some practical guidance how to come to a position of being able to say, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord'. Their second question was, when I can find it: explain various facets of God's sovereignty - i.e. how God's will is worked out in the world. The third aspect to this person's question was: if you believe that God is sovereign in all things, does that label us 'Calvinists'?

So, I will deal with these one by one - but I believe that they all come together to help us really understand this great issue and, indeed, I think, understand our God a lot more. That is the main objective, isn't it? We don't want to be sat here like in a lecture or a class, and just learn the answers off pat to some difficult questions. We want to know God more, and we want to come closer to Him. So, perhaps before we delve into this, let us pray - I know we have prayed already, but you can never pray enough, and we want to ask the Lord's help and the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Lord Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth, and that's what we need tonight.

Abba Father, we acknowledge that You are the Living, the Eternal, the Almighty God. We acknowledge that through Your Son, the Lord Jesus, we can enter into Your most immediate presence by His precious shed blood. We thank You that all of heaven is at our disposal - and so, Lord, we ask for the mighty presence of the Holy Spirit to be manifest in a very definite sense in this gathering tonight. Lord, we don't want this to be just 'question time', we want this to be a holy time where we encounter the Living God, and our minds, and our hearts and spirits, are illumined by Your presence. Lord, what difference and what benefit could a meeting like this be if we don't encounter the Living God. So, Lord, we want to be enriched tonight, we want to be helped. Deliver us from being puffed up with knowledge, but our lives remain unchanged and untouched by Your hand. So, Lord, we call upon You now in the name of the Lord Jesus, Lord, to move, and to help. We don't want to create unnecessary questions in people's minds if they didn't already have them, but we believe that these are questions we will encounter, whether young or old, eventually. We will call upon our resources for an answer, and we pray that this session would be a help in that regard. We pray that even if there are those who are doubting their God, or who have not yet come to faith in Christ, we pray that tonight they would be helped to that position. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The problem of evil, or as I used the technical term 'theodicy', has become perhaps the greatest dilemma for both believers and unbelievers alike. If you haven't already thought about, you will encounter it, perhaps even by someone who will question you about it. From time to time in our own individual experiences, every one of us asks the question: why? Now, it's not wrong to ask the question 'Why?', and it's not wrong to explore this whole area of evil, suffering and pain. But just a little word of warning before we embark on this: however deep we delve, we must be realistic in our explorations. It has to be said in the world at large, with many of the discoveries that we're making technologically and scientifically, but also in the church with the advanced knowledge that we have in theological matters and the resources that are available to the church today that never have been before, there is an insatiable desire to know everything about everything - and that is utterly impossible. Unchecked, that insatiable desire to know everything about everything will eventually lead to frustration, and perhaps even despair, if you can't face the fact that it is impossible to know everything about everything.

The horizon says to us, 'Thus far and no further' - and there is a horizon to our knowledge. There's a point at which we must come, that we must be willing to accept that we must stop. Now Proverbs 25 and verse 2 says: 'It is the glory of God to conceal a matter: but the glory of

kings is to search out a matter', and that is true. God has concealed certain things that we might search them out, and there is great virtue in that. I am not despising the exercise of our brains and the endeavour after knowledge, but nevertheless we must stop at certain junctures in our search and say that there are certain things that are mysterious and, indeed, unexplainable. That applies to elements in life, the universe and everything, but especially when we encounter the things of God and God's character. Now, the problem is: people who will not believe in God or Christ, or even believers who start to doubt their faith in God and Christ because of this whole issue of the problem of evil, suffering and pain. You must be willing, before we look at the answers - and I believe there are many answers, maybe not all the answers, but many answers in the word of God - but before we even begin to look at them, you must, I believe, come to the position of admitting that you cannot know everything, you cannot explain everything, and if we could explain everything we would have no need for an all-knowing God. That's the bottom line, isn't it? We would be God ourselves if we knew everything and could explain it.

So, a little verse to begin with is Deuteronomy 29:29, and you don't need to read it, it's only one verse, I'll quote it to you - and there'll be plenty of passages that I'll be calling you to look at this evening. It says this: 'The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever'. There are secret things that we can never know. We must stop and say: 'This is mysterious, this is something that only God can know'. But there are things that are revealed, and they are revealed for our benefit and for the benefit of our children. So we want to answer these questions by the things that have been revealed, and then we have to reach a point where we're stopping - well, we leave that to God.

Alright, so let's start with the first one. The first question related to the problem of evil is: if God knew the outcome, why did He create Lucifer in the first place? Now, I need to give you a very quick history of this personality, Lucifer. God created Lucifer. He was 'the light-bearer', that's what his name means - and he was probably, as we glean all the scriptures and put them together, he was probably the highest ranking angel of the whole angelic host. But his biography goes something like this: he was not content to worship God and serve his Creator, he himself decided that he wanted to be worshipped and he wanted to be served.

Now, that's what appears to be the case when we look at Ezekiel 28, and I want you to turn with me to that portion of Scripture please. Ezekiel chapter 28, and we're going to begin to read at verse 12. Whilst there is a direct addressing by the prophet of God to the King of Tyre in this passage, many Bible scholars believe that there is a prophetic utterance here that goes back far further than this historic King of Tyre, but to Satan himself who inspired this King of Tyre in his pride. So Ezekiel 28 verse 12: 'Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold: the workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the cherub who covers; I established you: you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within you, and you sinned: therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God: and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour: I cast you to the ground, I led you before kings, that they might gaze at you. You

defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst, it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you'.

I think you can see that God's prophet is talking about more than simply a King of Tyre, he's talking about Lucifer's fall. If you turn to Isaiah chapter 14, we find the same there, this time through Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah 14 and verse 12, please: 'How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer', the name is used, 'son of the morning! how you are cut down to the ground, you who weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the farthest sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the pit'.

So, it is highly likely from these portions of Scripture that Satan, Lucifer as he was, this greatest of all creation of God, became full of pride and rebelled against God and His rule. Revelation chapter 12 and verse 4, which seems to be a flashback to this event, tells us that probably a third of the angelic host defected with the rebel Lucifer. Because, in heaven, Satan was unable to match the Almighty power of God, Lucifer was cast down to earth where he has operated as the devil, which simply means 'the adversary', 'the accuser', ever since. We can read about that fall in Revelation chapter 12, if you want to look at it please, with me. Revelation chapter 12 verse 7, please: 'And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought', that is Satan, 'But they did not prevail; nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world: he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ have come: for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down'. There is a future element to that, but it does seem in part to be a flashback to this event. The Lord Jesus Himself told His own disciples in Luke chapter 10 verse 18: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'.

Now that is a very, very simplistic overview of the early history of who Lucifer was. But when we think of all that, it begs the question that our questioner asked: why, why if all this happened and God, because He has foresight and all-knowledge, knew it was going to happen; why did He create Lucifer in the first place? Well, let's answer this step-by-step, and we'll get nearer to the truth. First of all, let me say that God did not create Lucifer as evil. We have already read from his history that God created Lucifer as perfect - but, just as God created humans to have free will or choice, God, it appears, created the angelic host similarly: to have choice. Now please note, however we try to understand and explain these issues, we must be very careful that we do not make God the author of sin. Now that might seem a bit far-fetched to some of you, but I have read and listened to many explanations about why the Lord should have created Lucifer if He knew he was going to sin, and basically what a lot of scholars do is they say that God planned sin all along, and in fact God instigated it, and effectively God made man sin in order to fulfil His plans.

Now that is very, very dangerous, because such reasoning goes against what we know as revealed concerning the character of God. For instance, James chapter 1: 'Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed'. None of us can point the finger at God and say: 'You made me do it!'. In some regard, none of us can point the finger at the devil and say: 'The devil made me do it',

because James said that we are all falling into sin because we are tempted from within. It's not God's fault, it's our fault! God cannot be the author of sin and, as 1 John 5 declares of God's character, God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Now, there is an element of mystery, as we're going to see, in this whole matter - but we have to be very careful that we do not lay the guilt of sin in the whole of the universe at the feet of the true, holy, and living God.

What we can say is that when Lucifer, who was created perfect, when he chose to rebel against God, he immediately became the author of sin. When Satan chose to rebel, he brought sin into the world. In fact we read that, did we not, in Ezekiel 28 verse 15: 'You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you' - firmly and squarely the guilt is put upon Satan. Now you might say: 'Hold on!', and I can understand why you're doing that, 'Foreknowledge! What about God's foreknowledge? You're missing the point, why did He allow it all when He knew this was going to happen?'. So let's get to the nub of the issue, and I want to answer this in two ways: first of all, free will and choice is the key to helping us understand this issue better, free will and choice. I've already said it: God created the angels and human beings with this ability of free will. One of the reasons is, He created us in His own image and gave us the dignity of choice, but ultimately I believe He wanted us to choose Him, He wanted us to obey Him. Right from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden you can see this element in the spiritual theme of the Bible, and it goes right throughout the whole Scripture, that of obedience. There is an element of test to the whole human and universal experience. If I could put it like this: God was instigating the experiment of the ages. He created angelic hosts, and He created human beings, and He created them with the ability to choose. God ultimately wants people to want Him.

Now, people might say: 'Well, there's a problem with that, because that makes God subject to our will and limits God's sovereignty'. Maybe you've heard that said in relation to free will, that suddenly God becomes subject to our will and His sovereignty is limited. But let me pose this to you: what if God in His sovereignty chose it to be this way? Chose it that we should have free will and, in a sense, delegated or devolved a certain amount of His sovereignty to man? 'Now, be careful', you say - well, I am being careful, but we see this right from the beginning of the Bible, because what God did is: He created the universe, and then what did He do? He said: 'Adam, now, here you go, this is your playground. You're the farmer of this big field, you go ahead and you rule it'. Not only did He say that, but He gave Adam the authority to name the animals. So, in a sense, He devolved a certain amount of rulership and dominion to man. Now, we don't want to carry that to an extreme, but in Genesis 2 in the Garden this command illustrates this as well - God said, 'Of all the trees of the Garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, and the day you eat thereof you shall surely die'. There it is, it's a test: will man choose God and obey God, or will he choose himself, his own will and, ultimately, Satan's way?

So you might say: 'Well, if God gives us free will, it makes God subject to our will and it limits His sovereignty' - but what if God in His sovereignty has chosen to do it this way? I believe He has, and I believe the Scripture bears this out. I'll tell you this: I believe this glorifies the sovereignty of God in a far greater way than if He had made us robots and forced our hand on every regard, and put our arm up our back to behave in the way that He wishes us to. The reason being: He has given us, as human beings, choice. Even when we go and make the wrong choice, the great glorious aspect to God's sovereignty is this: He still is able to work out His purposes regardless of the wrong choices that we make! Now that's great! That's glorious! Here's a lesson to learn in regard to this, and there's always going to be an argument and a tension about God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility and free will, and

I'm not going to solve that one that has been fought for centuries tonight! But the great challenge is to keep the dignity of man's free choice and free will untainted and undefiled as God created, and yet also keep God's complete sovereignty intact. Now that's mysterious, but nevertheless that's what the Bible teaches - and, if I can put it in this way, God will never force our choice, but we can never thwart His plan. God will never force our choice, but we can never thwart His plan - and that is the mystery of the sovereignty of God and man's free will.

Now, someone will say - I hope you're saying it, and you haven't fallen asleep already - 'But why?', here it is, this old question again, 'But why did He press the play button in the first place when He knew how it would play out? I mean, why?'. Well, here's the second answer to this question I believe - if God knew the outcome, why did He create Lucifer? Not just the issue of free will and choice that He gave angels, and He gave us that option, but secondly: His eternal purposes answer this. God has eternal purposes, and God has a plan. Let me say quite clearly: it's not 'Plan B', it's 'Plan A'. What I mean by that is: God didn't get taken unawares one day when the devil decided to try to usurp His authority in heaven, and then Adam and Eve suddenly took of the fruit, and all of a sudden God's plan was messed up and He had to instigate a salvage, rescue plan ad-hoc as it were, and suddenly devise a way of salvation. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that God has always had a 'Plan A'. Ephesians 1 verse 11 says that He works all things according to the counsel of His will. Now, we put our hands up and we say we cannot understand His ways, and the Bible says His ways are past finding out - but from what God reveals of Himself in His holy word, we know Him well enough through His revelation of Himself to know that whatever He does, whatever His plan is, it is all for the glory of His Son. We have that in black-and-white, that it was by the Lord Jesus that all things were created, and for Him all things were created.

So God's plan has always been to glorify Himself and to glorify His Son, and He created the worlds not only through Jesus, but for the glory of Jesus ultimately. So God's great plan is to glorify Christ, and also God's plan is for the good of those who love Him and choose Him, and ultimately it is to conform us who believe in Him to the image of His Son. Now there's an element of mystery there, because God gives us the choice - and we chose that which was wrong - but God knew we were going to choose that which was wrong, and whilst God is not the author of sin, God has always had, before the foundation of the world the Bible says, a plan to glorify the Lord Jesus, and to redeem a people for Himself, and to conform those people to the image of His Son. You must hold both those truths, because both those truths are in the word of God. I can't reconcile them completely, and neither can you by the way!

But having said that, here's something for you to consider: could man have ever known divine love, divine mercy, and divine grace if God, before the foundation of the world, had never a plan? There is mystery there, that's why Wesley put it:

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?'

'Love so amazing, so divine'. Now, I think, whilst we can't answer all the issues regarding this, I think the motivation for the question 'Why? Why did God create Lucifer if He knew what he was going to do? Why is there so much suffering and pain in the world?', that that question is motivated by another question. It's this: why did He let it all happen when sin has cost humanity so much? That's really the underlying question, isn't it? But you see there's a problem with that question, and here's the problem: why are you focusing on the cost to humanity, when we could equally ask the question, what about what it cost God? What about

all the pain, the suffering, and the sin that the New Testament tells us, in that wonderful final revelation of God to us, that Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, the Creator of the worlds, that He came into human flesh and bore all of our grief, all of our sorrow, all of our sin upon Himself? He took it upon Himself! We might as well ask the question: 'Well, why did God go ahead and create Lucifer if He knew what was going to happen, and the pain it was going to cause Him?'. Because, let me tell you, the Bible says that whatever you go through and whatever I go through - and, let me tell you, there's a lot of people going through a lot more than maybe all of us put together, in this world at this very moment - every pain, every sorrow, every sin, all guilt of every man and every woman was laid upon Jesus. God could have decided to spare Himself the pain, but He didn't. He didn't, so that we might enjoy life and, more than that, that we might enjoy eternal life, and the love, and grace, and mercy of God that's available to all men, the Bible teaches.

Acts 2:23 says concerning the cross that the Lord Jesus was 'delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God', and yet the apostle castigated the Jews for having taken Him by lawless hands, and crucified, and put Him to death. There you have that relationship with men in their free will, who took Christ and crucified Him, and yet in the counsels, the eternal counsels of God before the foundation of the world, this was preordained for our salvation and for the glory of God, and the ultimate glory of His Son and His people.

Now, I know these are deep things, but we must keep a blend of these two truths. One thing I'm very sure of is that Satan hates and fears God's preordained plan, he detests it! He detests salvation; he detests a new heaven and a new earth that are yet to be; he detests that God is going to conform His special believing people and make them completely holy and perfect in the image of His own Son; he detests the fact that God's preordained plan will prove that God is victorious over evil, all evil and all evil beings, whether they be demonic or humans who followed the demonic. That is why in Revelation chapter 12 and verse 11 we read this, that: 'They', that is, the saints of God, 'overcame the devil', the dragon, 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony'. That is the power that God has given to those who believe in Christ, because He allowed Satan to be created, even though He knew what he was going to do.

Now, I freely admit I do not have all the answers - and that, I'm sure, is obvious tonight - and I don't think anyone has. It has to also be said that some of the answers that are given may raise more questions. But we must realise, as I've said at the outset, that there are areas we cannot look into. I was talking about this with a lady today who is very knowledgeable on theological matters, and she was explaining how she had heard a speaker on one occasion describe these revealed and secret elements to knowledge - how there are things that we can know, answers that we can give, and there are areas that are dark to us - like this: the illustration of a piece of land. There is free territory ranging the whole of that piece of land, but there is a segregated area that we are not allowed into. The illustration was that our knowledge, what we can know, is that free territory where we can roam and explore - it is God's revelation to us in His word. But the fenced territory is God's territory, and there is a sign there saying: 'No Trespassing'. We must observe that.

We see through a glass darkly, the Bible says, we see in a mirror dimly. There is mystery. God's ways, Isaiah says, are not our ways. Romans 11 says: 'Who has known the mind of the LORD?' - but what is sure, Ephesians says, is that 'in the dispensation of the fullness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him'. God has a plan in Christ. Down through the eternal ages, Ephesians 2 and verse 7 says, God is going to put on a 'grace exhibition'. Ephesians 2:7 says: 'that in the ages

to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'. In other words, age upon age in eternity are going to come one after another, and God is going to teach us more and more about the riches of His unbounding and everlasting grace toward us. So, how could we ever answer every question now, when it's going to take all eternity for us to grasp the depth of it all? Yet, on a very practical note, because I know this type of thing - even if it's not articulated in as much detail as we have done tonight - in our hearts we become troubled by the existence of evil and sin, and suffering and pain all around us. But here is a personal, practical lesson: personal peace of mind and heart from Satan, from evil, from suffering, comes by being God-centred, by understanding - yes, we have free will, and other people have free will to do as they please even toward us - but God is in control, and God rules forever. As Romans 8:28 says, God will work all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called - what? - according to His purpose.

Now, I hope that that comes some of the way to answering the question: if God knew the outcome, why did He create Lucifer? The second question related to the problem of evil is: why do good things happen to bad people? Now the first thing I would say to that is, to answer it with a question - that's often the way the Lord Jesus answered questions - but: are there good and bad people about? Are there? That's an interesting one! The Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, there is none righteous, none good, no not one. When you think of that, you have to ask another question: why do any of us deserve anything good? You say: 'Be careful where you're going with this', well, I understand what you're saying, but let's consider this for a moment. A lot of us have this, and we've had it ingrained from our society, that God owes us something - and He doesn't! If the truth be told, any of us, all we deserve is eternal judgement for our wickedness in God's sight. Now, that's not the way God behaves towards us of course, but that is what we deserve. If we got justice - everybody's crying out for justice these days in our world - but if we got spiritual justice, well, we wouldn't even (and I want you to grasp this) we wouldn't even be eking out a living now! The fact that God has allowed you to live, and anybody in this world to live this very evening, no matter how miserable their existence might be, is a demonstration of the long-suffering patience and mercy and grace of Almighty God. We're already getting more than we deserve - and yet the wonder is that God has given us His Son, and given us all things in Christ if we will but believe in Him.

But I understand the question you're asking: why do good things happen to bad people? In other words, why is it that some people seem to get away with wicked things, and reasonably upstanding, moral people have a hard deal? Well, there are a couple of answers to this one: first of all, there is a general principle in the word of God. Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 45: 'God', the Father, 'makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good', the sun rises and sets on the evil and on the good, 'and God sends rain on the just and on the unjust'. So there is a general principle which is basically teaching us, I think, that good and bad happens to all. We all get our fair share of good and bad things in life - but the question seems motivated by this insinuation: that some people - and I would agree - some people seem to have more or less than their fair share of either good or bad. We could all give examples of people that seem to have had a really raw deal in life for no reason, they certainly didn't earn it. Other people have done everything wrong in their life, but they seem to have the Midas touch whether materially or in some other way.

First of all we need to establish that everybody has to deal with knocks on the chin at some stage in life: man is born unto trouble as sparks fly upward. But another aspect to this answer is important, and that is this: we shouldn't expect anything different than that bad people have good often done to them, good things happen to them - because those people in our

world who have surrendered to evil will prosper now. It figures that that will often happen. Let me give you an example, and this fits in with our previous question - in Matthew chapter 4 we have the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the testing. You remember that Satan came to the Lord and said: 'If You will worship me, if You will do this, do that, if You will worship me I will give you all the kingdoms of the world'. Now, that infers that the kingdoms of the world were his to give, because he is the god of this world - and, incidentally, it was man in the Garden of Eden who had that authority devolved to him by God, who gave it over to Satan, OK? But what I'm really illustrating to you is: if you will sign on the dotted line, Satan offers you everything now. He offers you the whole world and everything in it, if you will have it, and if you would sell your soul over to him and ultimately lose it for all eternity. That's what a lot of people are doing, and that's why good often happens to apparently bad people.

We ought to expect it. We ought to expect that those investing their lives in this world system and all its principles and practices will get ahead. We ought to expect - reality check - that we, as the people of God, will have a hard deal. Jesus said as much in John 16: 'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'. You will have a hard time in this world, because what we are doing is: we are swimming against the tide. If we're not swimming against the tide, we're in trouble!

So there are two things to remember in this answer to, 'Why do good things happen to bad people?'. The general principle that good and bad happens to everybody, but secondly: if people in this world have surrendered themselves to evil and the ways of the world and the devil, it is expected that they will prosper now, and it is expected that those who don't stand with Satan will be opposed by this system. Yet, even acknowledging those things, there is genuine bewilderment - and I share it - at how things often turn out for people who just do everything wrong. You're left standing, aren't you, thinking: how can they get away with that? We say it metaphorically, and we've said over the last couple of years at least in our province, literally: people are getting away with murder - and they are! You can politicise it all you like, but that's reality. People are getting away with murder. We then move on from that to say: how can God allow it? That's what's underlying this issue, really: how can God allow it? How can God allow good things to happen to bad people?

Well, we come right back full course to where we started: freedom. That, in a sense, is part of the cost of what it is to be free - but you say: 'But it's not fair!'. Well, you're right, it's not fair - and just to illustrate that for you, if you would turn with me to Psalm 73, and this was often a theme in the Psalms. Psalm 73, now read this Psalm with me, because this is important - the Psalmist was sharing your sentiment and mine: it's not fair. 'Truly God is good to Israel' - OK, maybe I'm being facetious, but he gets the spiritual bit out of his mouth, 'God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me', I've got a problem, I know God is good Israel, but 'my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?'' - does God know what's going on down here on earth? 'Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain'.

Have you ever said that? Have you ever thought to yourself: 'Here are these wicked people, and they're getting away with all sorts of things, and they seem to be only prospering. Here's me, I get saved, I become a Christian, I try to live according to the principles of God's word - and everything seems to go wrong for me! Where is the fairness? I think it's a waste of time!' - that's basically what the Psalmist is saying. 'Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain', verse 13, 'And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, 'I will speak thus', Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me'. That, basically, is his way of saying: it's not fair!

Now, there is a danger here, and the danger is that we become envious - like the Psalmist seems to have - we become envious of the wicked. I don't know whether you're a person who grew up in a Christian home as a young person, but I had that experience - and sometimes you're tempted by the world to a greater extent, because you've never experienced it and you've got this sort of idea that you're missing out on something. You can actually be envious of people in the world, because they are living it up - wine, women and song and all the rest - and you haven't maybe experienced all that, and you think you've missed out on something. There's a great danger here, and here is the danger: you need perspective. Verse 17, after all this great rant of the Psalmist, he said: 'It was too painful for me', end of verse 16, 'Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end'.

What that is saying is, simply, he, by faith, saw the eternal perspective. Oh yes, they're living it up now. Yes, good things seem to be happening to bad people, and they are living out their innings and seem to be getting away with murder - but the Psalmist is saying you need to look at the long game! You need to gain an eternal perspective. He says when he went into the sanctuary, the house of God - and I don't think, perhaps, that meant the Temple, I think he's talking spiritually of entering into the presence of God - then he understood the end of the wicked. What was the long game? Look at verse 23, it was this, he started to realise what he has in God: 'Nevertheless I am continually with You', the wicked aren't with You, 'You hold me by my right hand', they aren't held by their right hand, 'You guide me with Your counsel', the wicked don't have the counsel of the Almighty, 'And afterward' - what about this one? - 'receive me to glory'. 'Whom have I in heaven but You?' - so he's getting his eyes off earth, and what people have here, and what the wicked have - but he says, 'Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You'. The things of earth are growing strangely dim, because he's got his perspective on God: 'My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever'.

Why do good things happen to bad people? Well, the general principle is that good and bad happen to everybody; and if you surrender your life to the world principles around us and Satan himself, you will succeed and it will be apparent - but it will only be for a short while. Now, I think what I have already said has answered the fourth question - two aspects of it - explain various facets of God's sovereignty, God's will at work in the world, that's been explained, I think. Then let me just quickly answer this one: believing that God is sovereign in all things, does that label us 'Calvinists'? That's a very big subject which I'm not going to go into tonight, but let me just say that I don't believe it does label us 'Calvinists', because there is more to being a Calvinist than simply believing in God's sovereignty. But I have to say, just sharing with you, I try to avoid any extra-biblical labels, I try to keep to just being a Christian - and not a this, that, or the other - and I think that's advisable.

Let's look at this third question, and I hope you'll give me the time to deal with it. The third question is: how do you explain to unbelievers why God allows tragedies that kill thousands of

people? That's a good one, but why is it - here's another question! - why is it that we only think that thousands of people dying is a tragedy? Is one death not a tragedy? Maybe it's because it's flashed across the 24-hour news channels when there's an earthquake, or a tsunami somewhere, or a terrorist attack - but consider this: that every day approximately 151,388 people die, every day! Now, what we're really facing is that death is a tragedy - one death, or 151,388, or whatever it is. Ultimately, this is the pinnacle of the matter: death is the result of human choice. We're going right back to the Garden of Eden: 'In the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in that day you will die'. Man had a choice to disobey God, and Genesis 2 tells us that he disobeyed God. We are working out the whole of that awful tragedy in the Garden of Eden in our tragic life that is in the midst of death.

But let me go a bit further on that, because man very conveniently ignores how much suffering has been caused directly in this present day and age by his own selfishness and his own sin. I read a very helpful article by John Blanchard, and I'll just read it to you now in this regard, think of this: 'Although our planet provides enough food to feed all six billion of us, millions die of starvation every year because of our selfish pollution of the atmosphere, our exploitation or mismanagement of the earth's resources and the vicious policies of dictatorial regimes. Can we blame God for these? Is He responsible for diverting disaster funds into the pockets of tyrannical rulers or greedy politicians? Millions are dying of hunger in India while its national religion forbids the use of cows as food. Hinduism has millions of man-made gods; can the country's chronic food problems be blamed on the God it ignores? Suffering is often caused by human error or incompetence. Had the owners of the Titanic not reduced the recommended number of lifeboats to avoid the boat deck looking cluttered, many more, if not all, of the ship's passengers might have been saved. Was God responsible for that executive decision? The International Atomic Enquiry Agency blamed 'defective safety culture' for the Chernobyl disaster. Can the blame for careless neglect of safety procedures be laid at God's door?'. Then he goes on to say: 'A great deal of human suffering is deliberately self-inflicted. Smokers who ignore health warnings and are crippled by lung cancer or heart disease, heavy drinkers who suffer from cirrhosis of the liver, drug addicts and those dying of AIDS after indiscriminate sex are obvious examples. So are gluttons who dig their graves with knives and forks, workaholics who drive themselves to physical or mental breakdowns, to say nothing of the countless people who suffer from serious illness as a direct result of suppressed hatred, anger, bitterness and envy. Is God to blame for their behaviour?'. Man conveniently avoids that, doesn't he?

An article in The Times once asked the question: 'What's wrong with the world?'. In the correspondence that followed, the shortest answer was by far the best - it went like this: 'In response to your question, 'What's wrong with the world?', I am. Yours faithfully, G.K. Chesterton' - I am. We often blame God simply to take the attention off ourselves. Now, granted, there are certain events, we often call them 'acts of God' for whatever reason, that we cannot explain - headline making natural disasters, personal tragedies in individual lives and families. What are these? Well, we can't explain the reason why they happen to certain people and don't happen to others, but there is a general principle there that they are wake-up calls to us, warnings to us that evil exists, that suffering is real, that life is brief and fragile, and that death is certain and approaching. Now we don't have time to look at the subject of how Jesus said in John 9 that sometimes suffering can be glorifying to God. You remember the man there, and the disciples asked: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he is born blind?', and Jesus said, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him'. Sometimes God is glorified in suffering when He delivers us from it by healing, or when He delivers us in it by His sustaining grace.

But ultimately - and this is one you need to think of if you're trying to explain this to unbelievers, which was the initial question - ultimately the existence of evil, now listen carefully, it points towards the existence of God, not away from it. The existence of evil ultimately points toward the existence of God, not away from it. Why? Well, does dispatching of God solve the problem of evil and suffering? Does it? 'We'll bin the idea of God' - does evil and suffering go away? No! It leaves us trapped in what someone has called 'that hopeless encounter between human questioning and the silence of the universe - all our questions with not one answer'. If we get rid of God, what we do is: we leave hurting people in the darkness as atheists, without any answers and without any hopes.

Now we don't have all the answers, so what do we do? Well, we point to Jesus, and the reason why we point to Jesus is - well, let me illustrate it as John Blanchard does - he says that soon after the events of September 11th 2001, he was asked the question, 'Where was God when religious fanatics killed those 2,800 people?'. John Blanchard quickly replied, 'Where was God? Exactly where He was when religious fanatics killed His Son, Jesus Christ - in complete control of everything that happened'. That's it! Now if you study Psalm 22 verse 1, you will get this same answer. What is the first question? 'Why? My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?', now that was uttered first of all by the Psalmist David, we know it was prophetic of Christ - but the Psalmist David, for some reason unknown to us, was asking the question 'Why?'. Now where did the Holy Spirit of the Living God prophetically take him? To Calvary! What that teaches me is that the great answer to the question 'Why?' is the crucified God, the God who became flesh and died for us bearing our shame and our pain.

Now finally, the fourth question is for some practical guidance on how to come to saying 'The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord'. Let me deal with this as quickly as I can. If you're asking that question, you need to get to the context where that statement is found that you have made into a question, and that's the book of Job. I wish we had time to read chapters 1 and 2, because it really details for us this big issue of how Satan is real, but Satan answers to God, and Satan ultimately can be controlled by God, and yet God gives him a certain amount of freedom - and so on and so forth. It's wonderful regarding all these issues, but you might be interested to know that Job is the first book, we think, that was written. It's not historically about the first things, like Genesis is, but it's probably the first book that was authored. Now isn't it interesting that the first book written in the Bible deals with the paradox of God's sovereignty and the presence of evil?

Here's the big lesson in the book of Job: at the end of the book Job doesn't find an answer to his question of why he was suffering. He had everything and he lost everything, he doesn't get his question 'Why?' answered - but do you know what happens to Job? Now listen carefully to what I'm saying: he loses his question for a better one. He loses the question, 'Why is this all happening?', in the wonderful providence of God. His greater question becomes, 'Who is wise?'. Now virtually all the characters in the book of Job claim to have wisdom - Job's comforters, you've heard of them. It's only at the end that God actually speaks in the book, and He speaks out of a whirlwind to settle the issue once and for all, and He basically declares that there is no contest, no human has a legitimate claim on wisdom - God alone is all-wise.

Job is confronted with a crisis of faith in chapters 38 through to 41 - let's read a couple of verses in chapter 38, and I'm almost finished you'll be glad to know! Job chapter 38, and this is Job's answer - he's been questioning so many things, and he begins to realise that true wisdom is with God. Verse 1 of 38: 'Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and

said: 'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?'. The proper human response, we're finding, to these great questions of evil and suffering and pain is not getting answers, but what Job has experienced: encountering God and repenting, and submitting to the all-wise God.

This is exactly what happens to Job, look at chapter 42 and verse 3, verse 1 says: 'Then Job answered the LORD and said: 'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand', that's what we do! 'Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me'. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'. His question 'Why?', was changed to, 'Who is wise?'. He repented of his questioning and submitted to the all-wise God - but there is a general answer to Job's question, 'Why?'. We've already said it, it's in Jesus Christ - God who entered into the world of human suffering at the cross, without complaining - think of it! One man put it like this: the Lord Himself has embraced and absorbed the undeserved consequences of evil. Did the Lord deserve anything that He bore at the cross? Yet He absorbed and embraced it, this is the final answer to Job and all the Jobs of humanity: the cross.

It's a big question, isn't it, the problem of evil? We've tried, I'm sure very insufficiently, to answer these four tonight - but isn't it wonderful to be able to declare, whatever you're facing this evening, that:

'God is working His purpose out
As year succeeds to year:
God is working His purpose out,
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled
With the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea'.

That ought to help. Let us pray. Now, while our heads bowed, it's important we don't rush. These are the questions you've been asking, and I've given you as much as I can from God's Word - and I apologise if it has bamboozled some, but I don't think it should have. You need to face these things because someone will face you with them eventually, if circumstances in life don't. But here's the bottom line: will you allow yourself to encounter the God who allows you to make choices, and yet the God who has an ultimate purpose not just for you but for this world - the God who, if you put your hand in His hand, will allow you to share in the wonderful, incredible, amazing inheritance of the future of His great redemptive plan and the new heaven and the new earth which will soon come to pass? If you're hurting tonight, and I'm sure there's someone here, may you get into the Temple of God - that means the presence of God - and see the big picture. Your God reigns! Your God is in control! Your God is devising the agenda, and the devil - even the devil, though he has been given freedom and given this hour - even the devil will heel to the foot of God.

Father, I feel so foolish, I feel like the little boy paddling at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, fiddling about and yet ignorant to the vastness that is before him. Lord, I confess to You that I have at times questioned You and doubted these truths, and tried to contain Your sovereignty, tried to box You in. Lord, I repent, and Lord I pray that we will stop - all of us - trying to get You to follow our agenda, and start seeing what the Father is doing and get behind that, O Lord, for You are God. I thank You that one day, and I believe it's sooner rather than later, one day all things in heaven and earth and under the earth will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. One day, wonder of wonders, we all who believe in You will be conformed to the image of Jesus, Your Son. Lord, thrill us with these truths, and help us in our pain to see the One who endured the contradiction and opposition of sinners, despising the shame - the crucified and risen Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

101 Christian Questions - Chapter 2
"The Bible and Personal Assurance"

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by David Legge

Now last evening - if it's your first night, by the way, the folks here have been submitting questions over the last, it must be two months or so, in anticipation of these meetings; that I may come along and try to answer them. Over the last number of weeks or so there have been around 20-odd questions that have come in, and have all seemed to fit into four, reasonably, fit into four thematic categories. We dealt with about five or six, or maybe even seven, questions last night that all related to 'The Problem of Evil' - why God created Lucifer, if He knew what was going to happen; and why good things happen to bad people; and how you explain suffering and mass tragedies to unbelievers, why God should allow these things to happen; and the whole issue of God's will and the responsibility that we have as human beings, and so on and so forth. So if you're interested in that, or if one of those might have been your question and you weren't here last night, well hopefully you'll get the recordings.

Tomorrow night we're going to look at the 'Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage' issue, which a few questions were asked regarding. Friday evening we're going to look at issues relating to the afterlife, to heaven and hell and the soul. But tonight we're looking at a number of questions that are quite diverse in a sense, but they all sort of fall within the category of learning about the Bible, and how best to learn the Bible, and personal assurance issues. So you could put it under the heading, 'Learning The Bible, And Personal Assurance'.

I'll give you the questions, and then we'll launch into them. First of all: what is the best way to learn the Bible? A very good question. Then secondly, it follows on well from that, a specific question: why is there no mention of dinosaurs in the Bible, and what happened to them? I'm not that old to remember, but some people might think I'm a dinosaur! But we'll try our best to answer that one. The third question: please give the explanation of four terms - apostate, backslider, carnal Christian, and false convert. The person asking that question continued by saying: 'It concerns me that I was given an assurance that I never had. Are we causing people to make false professions?'. Then a fourth and final question for tonight is from a person who says: 'I can't sense anything (feelings) in the Christian life', but there is no sin apparent or obvious to them in their life; 'how do you work through this?'. And they end the question by talking about 'dry periods', dry periods that we experience in our Christian life.

So there's quite a lot to get through tonight, and I hope I didn't keep you too long last evening - but you asked the questions, so it's your fault if you're kept too long this evening! So let's launch into the first one tonight: what is the best way to learn the Bible? Now, we're going to cover considerable ground to answer this, but I was thinking to myself - I was really put on the spot to answer that question, and I think the best answer that I could give is this: the best way to learn the Bible (whatever that means, whether the person meant memorising it or learning facts or not), the best way to learn the Bible is to learn it spiritually. Now you might say: 'What do you mean?' - or does that sound a bit idealistic? Well, I suppose if I was to say 'to learn it spiritually', I would be talking about learning it experientially, as opposed to merely intellectually.

Now, let me really spell it out: the best way to learn the Bible is with a desire to know God.

Now that is vital, and it is something, I think, that, sadly, maybe not most, but a lot of people who know the Bible have never really discovered. The motivation we ought to have to learn God's word, whatever that means, is to know God. The simple reason for that is: this book is the revelation of Almighty God, both Old and New Testaments, that's exactly what it is. The Bible reveals God to us. So, as the hymn writer put it, 'Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee Lord', and we must always be motivated - in our study and dissection of the word of God - we must always be motivated with a desire to know God better, and have God revealed to us more. So often I feel that sometimes our Bible study and our Bible knowledge can be little more than idolatry. Paul warned us that knowledge puffs up, knowledge on its own.

Now, that being said, it's obvious if you're going to know God through the Bible, you've got to read the Bible. It has to be said that, from the little pastoral experience that I have had, time after time as I've counselled people who've been struggling for one reason or another, but particularly struggling in areas of victory over temptation and so on, I learned very quickly to ask people: 'Are you reading your Bible?'. You will find, nine times out of ten perhaps, that they aren't reading their Bible. It's like not eating your breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and expecting to have physical energy - if you don't feed on the word of God, man shall not live by bread alone, you will not have spiritual energy. So it is vital that we read God's word.

Now, God does not prescribe how much we read. Some people find it easiest by three chapters a day, reading through the Bible in a year. Some people read it in two years, some people take longer. It doesn't really matter, as long as you read as much as you can. I think it's good to systematically read God's word, but here's a danger: sometimes people who try to read the Bible in a year - and I would encourage you to do that, and I try and do it every year - but sometimes they get caught up in reading for reading's sake. What I mean by that is: you get a feel-good factor and a buzz out of reading your three chapters for the day, even though you didn't understand a word of it! You must guard against that. It would be better that you read three or four verses and understood them and imbibed them, than read three or four chapters and couldn't make head nor tail of it.

So that's important, but we must, ultimately, read God's word. But if you are going to learn the Bible, you've got to move on from reading to study. Now, when I say 'study', it doesn't mean you have to enrol in Bible College or University - but just whatever capacity you can do it at, study God's word. Now there are various ways of studying God's word, and I'm not going to go into them all tonight - but, for instance, you could study a biblical book. It's always good to see chapters and verses in their context. You could study just a chapter, say John chapter 3, or John chapter 14. You could study a theme, and take a theological theme throughout the word of God and follow it through with a concordance or some kind of thematic volume.

One thing I would say to you: however you choose to study the Bible, in the 21st century you have no excuse! Maybe you don't have a vast theological library at home. Well, let me tell you, if you have the Internet - you need to be very careful with the Internet, of course - but if you have the Internet, you have a vast resource of biblical helps and aids to Bible study that previous generations could never have imagined - and most of it is free. There is no excuse for any of us for not knowing more about God's word. I have to say, without doing myself out of a job for the next couple of nights, that most of the answers to the questions you have been asking probably could have been found out with an hour or two of just your own private study - whether from Ards Evangelical Bookshop, or from even the Internet. You have to be very careful and discerning what you find on the Internet and what you read, and maybe that's why God ordains certain people to teach and to have that discernment - but

nevertheless, there are so many resources out there for us to study, whatever our ability might be.

After we read God's word and study God's word in whatever way, it's then important, and it's vital that you move on to meditating upon God's word. Now that is not sitting in the lotus position, humming - which is how we understand meditation because of Eastern mysticism that has infiltrated our Western society. Meditation in Scripture is simply thinking about God's word, musing about the truth of God's word. So you read it, you study it, and then you start to mull over - we would say - someone has used the expression: 'It's like chewing the cud', you chew it over and over again. What happens is, just like chewing food, that resource becomes assimilated with your being. So, you become whatever you eat, basically, and it's the same in the spiritual realm - whatever you meditate on in the scriptures, it becomes part of you. So it is vital to meditate on God's word.

But not only to learn God's Word must you read it, study it, and meditate upon it - but perhaps the person asking the question was thinking about memorising it. Well, you can and you should memorise God's word. Psalm 119 says: 'How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!'. So, hiding God's word in our hearts, particularly by memorisation, is a good way. Some people use memorisation schemes - you can even get those to download for free off the Internet, or you can buy them in your local Christian bookshop and carry around the little cards. When you're in the dentist or have a free half-hour at lunch break, you can look over them and try to memorise them. I personally don't use any schemes like that, I find - and I think you will find too - that if you read God's word, and you study God's word , and you meditate on God's word, you will end up indirectly memorising God's word. That's the way I like it, because it's the easiest one!

To go back to where I started, before mentioning reading, studying, memorising and meditating - the Christian life must be more than something intellectual and something mental. It must be practical. The Christian life is to be lived, rather than learned. It is more than knowledge of the word of God, it must be obedience to the word of God. Mark Twain, who wasn't a Christian, said: 'It's not what I don't understand about the Bible that bothers me, it's what I do understand'. What he was inferring there was, there is a great deal about the Bible that he understood he should obey, and it troubled him. You know, we often rack our brains about 'What God's will for my life?', when probably 90% of God's will for any of our lives, generally speaking, is found in God's word. We must not just know it, but obey it. Ultimately, if we are to know God - and that is God's great desire for us, He wants to know and be known by us. In fact, if you look at John 17, the way the Lord Jesus Christ defines salvation is very interesting. Now we talk about forgiveness of sins, and going to heaven when you die - and of course all those things are included - but the Lord Jesus says: 'This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent'. The essence of eternal life is a relationship with the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - to get to know God and allow Him to know us. Of course He knows us already, but experientially to open ourselves to Him.

If that is going to happen, and we know God through the word, and obey God through our knowledge of the word; there's got to be something more than mere reading, mere study, mere meditation, and mere memorisation. Here is the missing piece: the Holy Spirit must be our Teacher. Turn with me for a moment to John chapter 16, for here the Lord Jesus Christ taught this to His disciples. John 16 and verse 13 - verse 12 says: 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come,

He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come' - He will guide you into all truth. There are other passages that describe how He would instruct, how He would direct, how He would teach.

Now, if you go to 1 John for a moment, by the same author incidentally, and chapter 2 of 1 John - there's a bit of debate going on in the church that John was writing to here, and some people were saying that they were especially anointed, uniquely anointed, to preach the word of God and have the true interpretation of the word of God; and other people, other believers had to accept it because they were the 'chosen ones'. But John critiques this in verse 27 of 1 John 2 by saying: 'But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you', in other words you have got the Holy Spirit, 'and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him'. So basically what John is saying is: every believer who is born again has the gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore you don't need any special anointed person to teach you. Now that is not disregarding people that are chosen of God with the gift of teaching and preaching and so on, but what John is saying is: they are not the only ones who have a monopoly on the truth. The Holy Spirit is the One who can teach all of us and lead us into all truth, though some may be more especially gifted than others.

Now this is vital, because I feel - particularly in conservative evangelicalism - that we've become obsessed with knowledge. Knowledge is vitally important, we cannot know God unless we truly grapple with His revelation in the scriptures. But if we stop there, we're no better than the Pharisees! The Pharisees, aren't they called 'lawyers' in the Bible? That means they were experts in the law, and the law was not what you go to the bar in Queens University to study, but the law in those days in Israel was the law of God, the Old Testament scriptures, the Torah. They were experts, they knew it better than you or I do - and yet they did not know God. Experts in the Word, but they did not know God! In fact, the Lord Jesus had to say to them, you remember, in John chapter 5: 'You search the Scriptures', and that's what they did day by day, 'for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me'. Basically what the Lord was saying was: 'You guys spend morning, noon, and night in the scriptures, and you're experts in the scriptures, and yet you've missed the whole point of the scriptures! Me!'. Do you understand?

They knew their Bibles, but they didn't know their God. Let me say to you that that is a mistake that many of us can make. The Pharisees had the law, but they did not have the Spirit. Now listen: what's the best way to learn the Bible? Well, yes, study and read it, of course, study and meditate on it, memorise and so on and so forth - do your best that you can. But what difference is there between you and someone doing postgraduate studies and a Ph.D. in university - what difference is there? I mean, anybody can take any book and study it and know it. The difference comes because of the spiritual understanding, and the spiritual and experiential learning of the word of God. Now, if you want that, you must, as a believer, be filled by the Holy Spirit. You must surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit, and you must open yourself up to the instruction of the Holy Spirit in spiritual truth matters. In other words, when you come to the Bible, do not be dependent on Warren Weirsbe, do not be dependent on John MacArthur, do not be dependent on John Calvin, on Charles Ryrie, do not be dependent on John Nelson Darby. All these are godly, good men, but we must be dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Now, let me give you an illustration before I finish this question. I read a book several summers ago by Ron Boyd MacMillan, who is a travelling sort of missionary for Open Doors

and a journalist. He relays this story, he says: 'I once knew a Chinese Evangelist to whom a mission had given 5000 Bibles to distribute. The mission was dismayed to discover that after two years very few Bibles had been distributed. They began to wonder if he was selling them off on the black market'. Ron Boyd MacMillan says: 'I was called in to mediate and, in a tense meeting, this was the reason the Evangelist gave for not distributing the Bibles at a faster rate'. I'm quoting him: 'I have discovered', the Evangelist said, 'that it is dangerous to learn truth at a rate faster than we can practise it'. Now, you think about that for a moment. He said: 'I have learned that it is dangerous to learn truth at a rate faster than we can practise it'. Ron Boyd MacMillan goes on to say: 'This man began his ministry in the 1980s when Bibles were extremely scarce in China. Travelling around revival provinces he found that each week roughly 100 people would profess faith. Being an itinerant preacher, he could not linger to disciple them, he had to keep on moving because the police were tracking him. His dilemma was: 'I have no Bibles to give to these new converts, but I must leave them something so they can keep on growing in God''. So he devised a unique method of self-discipleship.

Now follow me: out of 100 converts he picked five people at random, and said: 'You are each going to lead a weekly group of 20 people'. He went down to a stream and picked out five smooth stones. On each stone he chiselled a verse of Scripture. He gave each one a stone, and said: 'Each week give a different member the stone, let them live with this verse on the stone, think about it, pray about it, take it into the fields as they farm, put it next to their rice bowl as they eat, put it under their pillow as they sleep, all the time asking God to speak through these words. Then the next week, when you all come together, you're to listen to what God has told them about the verse on this stone. As long as the person holds the stone, they cannot be interrupted, after they release it you may extend the discussion to others. After everyone has spent a week with the stone verse, swap the stone with another group and do the same again'.

He promised to return in six months, though in reality it was often a couple of years, and he frankly expected many of the converts to have fallen away - but he was astonished to discover that nearly everyone was going on in the faith. He felt he had stumbled onto a Bible truth about discipleship, and that is why, he was explaining to this group of missionary representatives, that he did not give a Bible to the new converts, but at first required them for a time to use the five stone method. This is what he said: 'I don't want them to encounter too much truth too fast, otherwise they will get into the bad habit of never using what they know' - the bad habit of never using what they know! Boy, does that condemn evangelical Christians in Ulster, all of us! Because we know so much, and yet the secret of truly learning the Bible is not what we know, but what we experience and what we obey.

Now, I'm not saying that we don't give Bibles to people, and I'm not saying that we don't revel in the knowledge that God has given us and the many resources that we've already been talking about - but what we must make sure is that our motivation is to know God, and our motivation is to obey what we do know. Here's a principle of knowledge, and I didn't mean to say this tonight, but if God reveals something to you and you do not obey it, that is the point at which you will stop - God won't reveal anything worthwhile to you again. What is the best way to learn the Bible? I hope that has answered it in some measure for whoever it was that asked it.

Second question: why is there no mention of dinosaurs in the Bible, what happens to them? Well, you may or may not be pleased to know that dinosaur-like creatures are mentioned in the Bible. The Bible uses an ancient term for one of them, or perhaps a group of them, 'behemoth'. This is a word that we find in the book of Job. We were in the book of Job, you

remember, last night for a while. 'Behemoth' simply means, 'a kingly, gigantic beast', and it's the closest description we have to a dinosaur-like creature in the Bible. So I want you to turn with me please to Job chapter 40 verse 15. You remember that Job, we believe, is the first book written in the Bible. Job 40 verse 15: 'Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you; He eats grass like an ox. See now, his strength is in his hips, And his power is in his stomach muscles. He moves his tail like a cedar; The sinews of his thighs are tightly knit. His bones are like beams of bronze, His ribs like bars of iron. He is the first of the ways of God; Only He', that is, only God, 'who made him can bring near His sword'.

So, summarising all that, basically 'behemoth' is being described here as a creature who is not afraid. He has no need to be afraid because he's huge! He's mighty, his tail is described as being so long and strong that God here compares his tail to the cedars - and the cedars of Lebanon were one of the largest group of trees and most spectacular tree in the ancient world. So the description here seems to be a dinosaur-like creature. Now, when we come to chapter 41, we have an encounter with another creature that might be dinosaur-like, 'Leviathan'. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 41 read, God's speaking to Job: 'Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, Or snare his tongue with a line which you lower? Can you put a reed through his nose, Or pierce his jaw with a hook?'. If you look down to verse 33 - and, by the way, all this passage describes the magnificence and strength of this sea creature, and it would be good for you to read this when you go home, if it doesn't give you nightmares! Verse 33: 'On earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear'.

So, again, Leviathan, like behemoth, seems to be a description of probably the greatest creature in the sea. But we read from verses 1 and 2 that, unlike a crocodile, or a fish, or even a whale, it is useless for a man to try and catch Leviathan with hooks or harpoons. Well, what is it? Well, it's described as large in size, strong in its jaws. If you read this passage you will see that it has great teeth, it has fast swimming ability, and its back is protected, and on the back and on the underside its body is protected by very, very thick skin. So all these descriptions give us clues that the Leviathan may be a dinosaur-like sea reptile, something like a 'plesiosaur', if you know what that is - it's a bit like a dinosaur.

Now, obviously these creatures have become extinct - unless the Loch Ness monster does exist, I don't know whether you're a believer in that or not! But some of these creatures may well have been alive in David's day. If you go home and read Psalm 104 and verse 26, David mentions Leviathan, and probably citing its whereabouts at that time in the Mediterranean Sea - or he may have been talking of folklore, we don't know. But it's quite possible that some of these great creatures still exist in our world undiscovered - but that's another subject. 'What happened to dinosaurs in general, and to most of these creatures?', is a question that this person is asking. The Bible might refer to them in Leviathan and behemoth, but what happened to them?

Well, in my research I found out - brief that it was - that there are at least 55 different theories suggesting what happened to the dinosaurs, and all of them have been thrown out for one problem or another. For instance, certain theories that try to describe why the large dinosaurs or large animals disappeared, do not often explain the extinction of the small animals that have disappeared, or sea creatures for that matter - not on land, but in the oceans. A lot of scientists are speculating but, whatever happened to dinosaurs, scientists seem to agree that whatever caused them to become extinct was something that affected the whole world. Now, the Bible speaks of a cataclysmic event that affected the whole world. In fact, a flood in Noah's day that covered the entire earth. Of course, as we read the account there in Genesis we see that this is the greatest disaster that has ever been in history. So

great was the destruction that every human being died, and every animal, millions of animals and plants, died with the human beings. This is one explanation of marine fossils, many fossils that have been found across the face of the earth - mainly, I think, 95% of them being marine creatures, fish and so on - a flood would explain it.

But what happened to the dinosaurs? Well, most of the dinosaurs were probably destroyed in the flood. But we believe that Noah took onto the Ark animals, two-by-two and seven-by-seven, depending on whether they were clean or unclean animals. We believe that, if dinosaurs were on the Earth at that time, that sample creatures, dinosaurs - and dinosaurs aren't all huge by the way - would have been taken onto the Ark; and would have come off the Ark, consequently, to inhabit the new earth. But of course dinosaurs became extinct somewhere along the way, and whether or not the flood changed the Earth to such an extent that the post-flood world had a lack of food for dinosaurs, or there were diseases that caused the death of the dinosaurs, or perhaps man's activity may have caused these types of animals to become extinct - we don't know, but for one reason or another dinosaurs, like many other creatures, died out.

That's as far as I can go for you. Dinosaurs may well be mentioned in the Bible, the Bible may have an explanation why the dinosaurs mostly were wiped out - that being the flood and the conditions that the flood brought to the Earth after the flood - but we don't know much more than that.

Third question: an explanation of four terms, 'apostate', 'backslider', 'carnal Christian', and 'false convert'. The person, of course, ends by saying: 'It concerns me that I was given an assurance that I never had, are we causing people to make false professions?'. Well, let's deal with each of these one at a time: backslider. Well, if you were to get a concordance, you would find out pretty quickly that 'backslider' is really an Old Testament word. I stand to be corrected, but I don't think it appears, at least in the English translations, in the New Testament. But nevertheless, we have adopted the term to describe someone sliding back from their true Christian profession. We generally use the expression, rightly or wrongly, to describe a person who is genuinely converted, born-again, but they fall into sin - the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, I would always encourage the backslider to consider whether they were ever a 'front slider' in the first place. Particularly in Northern Ireland, there's a lot of people running around, and they claim to be a backslider, and they say: 'Well, I tried that, and it didn't work for me, but it maybe works for other people' - and you really need to question whether people really had tasted and seen that the Lord is good. But nevertheless, I think the description of what a backslider is can be found in the New Testament. For instance, you see Peter denying the Lord Jesus Christ. You read of Demas, Paul said Demas forsook him in his missionary endeavours, having loved this present world. It was getting too hot for Demas, for one reason or another, and the bright lights of the world seemed more attractive, and he forsook Paul and Paul's cause to join the world - that could be described, I suppose, as backsliding.

So that's what a backslider is, it's not a very biblical term in the New Testament sense perhaps. What's an apostate? Well, an apostate is a person who appears initially to be a true Christian, but then they begin to deny the faith that they previously professed - perhaps even to the point of vehemently opposing that faith in Christ. Though they apparently began as a true Christian, by their opposition and denial of the faith they prove that, in the beginning, they were never a true believer in the first place. Let me give you examples, or at least descriptions of this. If you were to turn with me to 1 John chapter 2 please, verse 19 - I think

this is an apt description of the state of an apostate - John is describing the deception that will be in the last hours, so it's very applicable for us today. He says in verse 19 of 1 John 2: 'They went out from us', so they were once numbered among God's people, at least in an outward capacity they looked to be among the church, 'but they were not of us', so they weren't really Christians, but they were among Christians and professed to be Christians, 'for if they had been of us', if they were truly Christians, 'they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us'.

Now that's an apt description of an apostate, someone who walks away - it literally means 'to stand off far' - from truth. Now, turn with me to Acts chapter 20, because Paul, when he was departing from the Ephesian elders, he warns them that apostates would arise. Acts 20 verses 29 and 30, Paul says: 'For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock', these apostates were never sheep. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, but they were never sheep - sheep don't metamorphose into wolves. 'For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also', and here's an interesting point, 'from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves'.

So not only will these people come in from outside, but from among those who profess to be God's people these apostates will arise. Now, the Lord Jesus was probably referring to this in Matthew chapter 7, if you turn to the Sermon on the Mount please, Matthew chapter 7. In Matthew chapter 7, verses 15 through to 19, the Lord Jesus describes false prophets, and then He goes on to say in verse 21 in that same context: 'Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven'. So not everybody running around calling themselves Christians are true Christians, 'but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders', that's literally 'miracles', 'in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!''.

Now I want you to grasp this: here are people who are prophesying, who are casting out demons, who are doing miracles in the name of Christ, and calling themselves Christians, and calling Jesus 'Lord' - and yet Jesus said: 'I never knew you'. Not, 'There came a time when you sort of grew cold and backslid', He says, 'I never knew you'. That's remarkable, isn't it? Yet that's a good description of an apostate. Now, if you want to know more about what an apostate is, a description anyway, 1 Timothy 4 would be a good passage to read, and 2 Peter 2, and the whole book of Jude - which is only one chapter of course - describes very graphically how to recognise false teachers and apostates. Those who initially appeared to be true Christians, but turned away from the truth and deny some one aspect of the truth, fundamental truth, or perhaps the whole faith in its entirety.

So that's a backslider, a person we have come to describe - a person who is truly a believer but falls into sin - as a backslider. An apostate is someone who wasn't there even in the beginning, but people thought were there, and they might have thought they were there - but the evidence of their false profession is in the fact that they have denied the faith in its entirety, or in one particular fundamental aspect. Now, what is a carnal Christian? Some people don't even believe that there is such a thing as a carnal Christian, which baffles me because, if you turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, you will see that Paul talks about carnal Christians.

First Corinthians chapter 3 verse 1: 'And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual

people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul', and another, 'I am of Apollos', are you not carnal?'. So there it is, if you didn't believe in carnal Christians, there is the proof. When you go to chapter 5 and verse 5 you begin to see what some of these carnal Christians were actually capable of getting up to. We read of a man who was committing immorality with his stepmother in the church - Paul said it was a form of fornication and immorality that wouldn't even be talked about among the Gentiles. That's how carnal a Christian can be! Black-and-white.

In verse 5, Paul's instruction regarding this man was: 'Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh', and that probably means for his own death, 'that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus'. Paul was asking the Corinthians to administer church discipline toward this man for the testimony of the church, that this man probably would be taken in death, that his spirit might be saved. So this man was saved, this man committing this sin - and, in fact, we haven't got time to look at it, but in 2 Corinthians this man repents, and Paul exhorts the Corinthians to restore him, and to love him, and to accept him because of his contrition. He's a believer!

Christians can be carnal, and there is such a thing as someone who is born again but not living in the power of the Spirit. That's what a carnal Christian is. They don't have to be committing immorality, they can be born again and just living in the realm of the flesh, walking in the flesh, not living by the power of the Spirit. Galatians says that if you walk in the flesh, you will fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The only way not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh is to walk in the Spirit. I have to be convinced that most professing Christians do not fit into this carnal category, otherwise most of them are living Spirit-filled lives - and I think things would be a wee bit different if that were the case.

Carnal Christians, truly born-again but they have never - well, it's their right in Christ, and it's their blood-bought possession to live a Spirit-filled, victorious life - but they have never entered into it, and have been content to live a sub-normal Christian experience in the flesh. You know, you can do good things in the flesh, legalistic people live in the flesh, Pharisees live according to the flesh - they do good things by the power of the flesh and not by the power of the Spirit. But anyway, that's another subject!

The backslider, the apostate, carnal Christian, and then the false Christian. Turn with me, you're still in Corinthians I hope, to chapter 6 - because this is an interesting one - and verse 9. Paul reminds the same group of people: 'Do you not know', verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 6, 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God'. Now, Paul is doing two things here I think: for the true believers who might be compromising with immorality, he sends this shot across their bow in verse 9, 'Do you not know that the unrighteous, people who live unrighteously, will not inherit the kingdom of God?'. So those compromising with immorality who are genuinely saved, Paul wants to give them a wake-up call, and he wants them to know that it's people who are not going to heaven but going to hell that live like that!

For those people, he says to them in verse 11: 'Such were some of you', this is the life that

God has delivered you from and made you free to be victorious over through the blood of the cross and the resurrection, 'but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God'. So to those compromising with immorality, this is a warning - true believers who are compromising - but equally it's a direct warning to counterfeit Christians whose lives are characterised by these descriptions. Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners - they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So there's a difference here, I think, between a true believer who is compromising in these areas - they need to be warned that people who go to hell live like that! If you're truly saved, you've been washed from that, you've been delivered, there is no reason why you should live on like that. But equally so, if your life has been characterised by these things, it may well be that you're a counterfeit Christian and you need to be warned that such will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now, that's a hard one to call. Distinguishing the backslidden believer from the counterfeit Christian is not easy, and I think this passage proves it in a sense. The individual themselves may or may not know that they are a counterfeit Christian - and that's frightening. But God knows, and God will uncover the secret things. In Matthew chapter 13 is a very interesting verse that tells me I'm not required to go around the whole country trying to search out the counterfeit from the genuine, and just to preach the word and let the Holy Spirit do His job - but there is a day coming, Matthew 13, I'll just quote it to you, verse 30, speaking of the wheat and tares, which look very similar but they're very different. The wheat speaks of genuine believers in the world, and the tares speak of false professors, I think. The devil sows them in the world, and it's hard to tell the difference at times between the counterfeit and the genuine - that's what's inferred in the parable, but Jesus says: 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn''.

In other words, one day - it's hard to tell now, but it's not our job to tell - but one day God will weed out the tares from the wheat. Just you make sure you're among the wheat. Second Timothy chapter 2 and verse 19 says: 'Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His', and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity''. The Lord knows them that are His, and let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Now, that very aptly leads me to the second aspect to the person's question. They said: 'It concerns me that I was given an assurance that I never had, are we causing people to make false professions?'. Now, I hope you have your assurance now - if you haven't, please talk to me afterwards if you're here. We can, we can know that we are saved - that's an important thing to establish. When you say, 'It concerns me that I was given an assurance that I didn't have', you need to know that an assurance can be ours and should be ours if we are truly trusting in Christ. The whole Epistle of 1 John, it's purpose for being written is declared in chapter 5 verse 13 - John says: 'These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God'.

Now listen very carefully: if you have true repentant faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation - that means, repentance is changing your mind about sin; realising that by God's law, His holy standard, you have fallen short and you're a sinner and you're condemned; and changing your mind about the sin that is destroying you and the selfishness that will eventually damn you; and realising that you need a Saviour; and trusting alone in Christ and

His death and resurrection for your salvation - you by doing that, genuinely repenting and trusting in Christ, can know, can know for sure that you are saved. That being said, God is the only One who can give assurance - both objectively and subjectively. What does that mean? Well, God in His word says that if you repent and believe you will be saved. So it's God giving the assurance, He's the only One who can do that. This person by their question is inferring that we are causing people to make false professions by giving them false assurance, and this person says that they were given an assurance that they didn't have - well, listen, God is the only One who can give objective assurance, because He promises that if you repent and believe you will be saved. The question begs to you is: can you believe Him, and will you believe Him? That's maybe the bigger issue, and that could be the issue of why you don't have genuine assurance, if you have repented and supposedly believed - but 'believed' means that you accept Him, what He says.

Not only is God the only One who gives objective assurance, He's the only one who gives subjective assurance. What I mean by that is: He gives the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God. It is also manifest in our loving obedience to Him. Now that does not mean that we live perfect lives, for none of us do - but there are desires for us to live godly lives, and that is a subjective witness to our being saved that will give assurance; when you're going on with God and maturing and growing. Now that being said, this person says it concerns them that they were given assurance when they did not have it. Only God can give it objectively and subjectively, but we may pronounce conditional assurance, we may do that in our preaching - and this is how I do it regularly, I've done it already tonight. If you truly repent and believe, you will be saved - what I'm doing is, in preaching, giving conditional assurance: 'If'. I can't say to you: 'You are saved, and you should be assured of it' - I can't say that, only God can do that for you. But I can pronounce that if you repent and believe, you will be saved. So I can pronounce it, we all can pronounce it, but only God can impart it! Have you got it? Objectively, for the promise of His word that He gives to all who will repent and believe - and you must believe it - and subjectively by the witness of His Spirit, and by a life of loving obedience to Him. But the bottom line is: we must accept it by faith. Salvation and assurance come by faith in Christ. Now, I hope that answers all aspects to that person's question.

The final question, number four - and it follows on well from that last one - a person who says: 'I can't sense anything (feelings) in the Christian life, but there is no sin apparent in my life. How do you work through these dry periods?'. Now let me say to you that Christianity is a life based on faith, we've already established that. It's based on faith and not feelings. Not that feelings aren't important, they are important, and emotions were created by God, and emotions play a vital role in the Christian life. Take peace and joy, for instance, those can be sensed, and our feelings are involved in them - but we must understand that, on their own, feelings and emotions change on their own. Feelings and emotions are fickle:

'Feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving -
My warrant is the word of God, none else is worth believing!'.

Now here is the key to understanding our emotions and our feelings: our feelings are determined by other factors. Now if you're writing anything down, and you're interested in this, write that down: our feelings are determined by other factors. Example: bad feelings come to our hearts when we allow circumstances or negative thoughts to produce those wrong feelings in us. Now we can't really directly control our feelings, but there are certain things that indirectly affect our feelings: circumstances, negative thoughts. So we're getting a clue as to how we can dictate to feelings: our thoughts will dictate our feelings. So basically, if

you can control your mind, you can control your emotions. Now, the New Testament talks about the Christian having the right, through the blood of Jesus, to a renewed mind - Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, the renewing of your mind is mentioned. Now basically what that means is that we can be delivered from wrong, sinful and negative thoughts - and those are the thoughts that might be creating emotions in our heart, the emotions that seem uncontrollable to us, but we don't realise that they are intrinsically linked with the thoughts that we are allowing into our mind.

Now listen carefully to what I'm saying: the Bible teaches the New Testament Christian that you can control your mind, and indeed it is your right in Christ to control your mind. Let me show you this, Philippians chapter 4 - and we're almost finished - Philippians chapter 4 and verse 6 please: 'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God', don't worry about anything, but pray about everything, 'and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'. Now, here you have your thoughts, your cares are being turned into prayers - and what happens? The peace of God comes. But here's another clue to this, verse 8: 'Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things'.

Do you understand? If you think about bad things all the time, and you just let garbage continually come into your mind, you will have bad feelings and you certainly won't feel the joy, peace, and the love of the Lord in your life. Let me illustrate it like this, this is what the Christian experience is like: you imagine a kiddies railway set. There's a steam engine and two carriages behind, OK? The steam engine, Christian-wise, is the facts of the Gospel and the truth of God, OK? That's the steam engine pulling everything along. The first carriage is faith, faith in the facts. The second carriage is feeling, OK? So you've got the facts, the truth of God's word; then you've got faith in the facts; and then coming behind faith and the facts are the feelings. Now what everybody wants, it seems, is for the feelings to come immediately behind the facts - but that's not the way it works. What you need to do is believe and accept the truth of God, and the feelings will come behind. Accept the facts, and dwell on the facts, don't dwell on your feelings, and the feelings will look after themselves. Your focus has to be on the facts and accepting the facts by faith, and then the feelings will come.

As Isaiah 26 and verse 3 says: 'You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You'. Now listen carefully, whoever asked the question - but I'm sure it applies to everybody - if the feelings become our primary goal and focus, and sole motivation, we will never become a mature Christian. You will never become a mature Christian if feelings become your prime focus and goal. Let me illustrate it to you like this: it's like a child who plants a little seed in nursery school. The day after they plant the seed they start digging it up to see if it's growing, and the second day they start digging it up to see if it's growing - they do that every day, and lo and behold the seed never grows! If you continually focus on your emotions, focusing on your feelings, you will be frustrated, you will be disappointed - but ironically, if you want more sustained good feelings, joy, peace, etc, that are spiritually enhanced of course, it is achieved through faith in the facts. If you concentrate and focus on faith in the facts, the feelings will take care of themselves.

Now here is it put very practically: focus on God, focus on God's great character, God's great attributes, focus on God's promises, focus on God's word - and the feelings, I guarantee it, will come. Now, how do you work through this if the feelings aren't there and you've got a dry

period, as our person has asked? Well, we all get dry periods - but there are two portions of Scripture with which I will finish which help me. We'll only take one of them for time's sake, Lamentations 3 I'll just mention: 'God's mercies are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness'. There it says that it's good for us to wait and hope in God. Sometimes there are times when God allows us to wait and hope in Him, that we might learn. It's teaching us something, we might never know what it is.

The second portion is Isaiah 64 please, and this is an important one if you ever find yourself in a dry period - Isaiah 64 verses 3 and 4, Isaiah says, praying to the Lord: 'When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down, The mountains shook at Your presence. For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one', and this is the part I want you to notice, 'Who acts for the one who waits for Him'. Now I'm led to believe that that phrase 'waits for Him' has a pictorial affinity with a word that means 'to entrench'. So you could read it like this perhaps: 'God acts for the one who entrenches himself in Him'.

If you find yourself in a dry period, the best thing to do is dig yourself into God and wait. This verse says that if you dig yourself into the character, and the person, and the promises, and the attributes, and the word of God; God will work for the man or the woman who waits like that on Him. That's it, may God bless His word and the answers to these questions to your heart.

Let us pray, and bow our heads together. Father, we thank You. We have trusted that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth, and we're not claiming that we have an answer to everything - we don't, far from it. Lord, one day we probably will find out that we were wrong on a lot of things, but we thank You that the main things are very clear in Your word. We thank You that we can stake our very lives upon them. Even that portion that we read about false prophets, the Lord Jesus went on to say that there was a foolish man and a wise man, and the wise man built his house on the firm foundation. We believe that that was the Word and the truth of God, and who Jesus Christ is. When the storms came, whether they were storms of judgement or storms in life, the wise man's house stood firm. Lord, help us all to have our lives built firmly on the Rock that is Christ, and be sure of our salvation, and be working out the salvation that You have worked into us - and not only have the objective word of God and faith in it, but have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, and lives of loving obedience that testify to the life of God in us. Lord, help any who are struggling through dry periods tonight. I know it's not easy, I've had many of them - but, Lord, we thank You that if we entrench ourselves in You, though we are faithless, You remain faithful for You cannot deny Yourself. Thank You, Lord, for Your faithfulness to us even tonight. May You take us to our homes with Your blessing and protection until tomorrow evening, Amen.

101 Christian Questions - Chapter 3
"Divorce and Remarriage"

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Well, thank you and good evening to you all again. It's good to be with you once more. We have traversed now two evenings past, looking at questions related to 'The Problem of Evil', and last night - I can hardly even remember what it was - yes, questions to do with learning the Bible and personal assurance. As I said, I received many questions from yourselves that really fell into four categories. Tomorrow evening's are all related to the afterlife: heaven, hell, and the big one that often many believers are asking, 'Will we know one another in heaven?'. But tonight's was really only one question with several questions in it related to the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Because it's such a big one, I think we needed the whole night to look at it.

So let us consider - now, before, let me make a few remarks, caveats and 'health warnings'. This is a very controversial subject, as I'm sure you're aware. Not least because it affects all our lives in one way or another - if not directly because we have been divorced or remarried ourselves, but indirectly some of our friends and family, I'm sure, will have. It is not my intention, far from it, to unnecessarily cause further pain or annoyance; because I am aware, having dealt with some people, the great anguish and tragedy that this whole issue involves. However, questions have been asked, and questions must be answered. I have to also say that there must not be any 'no-go areas' in our lives where we prohibit the word of God applying. That is important, because there is a danger in the day and age in which we live that we protect little areas and say, 'Well, that's too painful to allow God's Word to shine upon'.

There are other reasons why we must answer these questions that are being asked regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage - also for the young people's sake we must encounter it. Our young people - whether or not you are aware, and I'm sure you are - are growing up in, not an immoral society, but an amoral society, which means there are no morals. It is vital that our young people get instruction, in particular regarding family issues and marriage in particular. But not just for the benefit of our young people, but for couples who are struggling in the midst of the church - they need counsel and they need help. Where else are Christians going to get that but from God's Word? Also churches need direction, because churches not only are finding themselves in the midst of this amoral society, but they're facing changing laws on a regular basis, and of course the challenge of evangelism. The evangelistic field that we are called upon by our Lord to go into and reap is rampant with immorality and amorality, and so the church needs direction in these issues.

Let me also say that, among Bible believing Christians, there is a difference of opinion regarding the issue of divorce and remarriage. Take it from me, good and godly men and women disagree on this issue. So your view on divorce and remarriage does not reflect upon your spirituality. Neither does it reflect upon your knowledge or aptitude in the word of God. This issue is a very important issue, but we must keep all things in perspective. It is not an all important issue, and it is certainly not a fundamental issue. A good dose of humility all round would be welcome in many debates in evangelicalism, not least this one. I'm reminded of Harry Ironside, a great Bible teacher from years ago, and he was doing a lecture or something on a particular controversial subject. A man in the gathering vehemently disagreed with him,

and came up to him afterwards and went at him. Ironside's response was very very gracious, he said: 'Brother, when we get to heaven we may find out the answer, and perhaps I will discover that I was wrong'. I thought that was lovely. He held his opinion with conviction, but humbly acknowledged that none of us have a monopoly of the truth. I think Augustine's adage is relevant in this regard, and indeed in many regards that are debated in evangelicalism: 'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity'. Amen?

Now, let me add to that the fact that I believe there are too many spoon-fed Christians in the church. By that I mean, they want to be told what they should believe. If you've come here tonight to be told what you should believe about marriage, divorce and remarriage - well, you're going to be disappointed. Because I want you - and this is not a copout...it might be slightly, but I'm trying to convince myself it's not! I want you to engage in the exercise of the Bereans. The Bereans were commended in Acts 17 verse 11, because it says they were 'more fairminded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so'. Often that is supposed to be that they're very commendable because they critiqued and analysed everything that the apostle Paul said, and that is not the sense, I think, of that statement. The sense is: they were more fair-minded - they didn't just react to what Paul was saying with their prejudices and their tastes and their traditions that they had grown up with as Jews. Rather they tested it according to the scriptures, and they searched out the thing themselves.

Now, I want you, with me tonight, to survey the biblical material regarding divorce and remarriage - but you, along with me, you must come to a conclusion. I say with Paul in Romans 14: 'Let each be fully convinced in his own mind'. That's important, because I fear in these days in which we live that believers don't search and study the scriptures as they should. They don't come to conclusions, they usually just swallow whatever they have been taught from their youth, and whatever denomination or particular Christian sect they have grown up in - and that's not good enough.

Now the question that I have been given tonight is, and I'll quote it verbatim: 'Is divorce and remarriage ever acceptable to God? e.g. in the case of the wronged party, a victim of desertion or adultery, irretrievable breakdown, or someone who had not been a Christian when married the first time and subsequently becomes a Christian, and then perhaps marries a Christian. What about if such a person goes on, perhaps, to serve the Lord in a full-time capacity? Is that acceptable?'. Now, we're going to give the whole night to attempt to answer these in course. I'm not going to answer them each specifically, the ground we will cover hopefully obviously will answer them. But I want to do it under four general headings: first of all, I want us to lay down the biblical ideal - what the Bible teaches about marriage, divorce and remarriage. We're going to take a bit of time to do that. Then we will look at an apparent exception to that Biblical ideal - some of you may already be aware of what that is. Then on a more practical note, I want us to consider a pastoral dilemma and an evangelical challenge - and those will be self-explanatory when we come to them.

So let's deal first of all with the biblical ideal. So we're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel chapter 19 to the words of our Lord, verse 1 of Matthew 19: *"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them 'male and female', and said, 'For this*

reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate'. They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery'. His disciples said to Him, 'If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry'".

Now, what the Lord Jesus is doing here in answer to this question of the Pharisees is, He is laying down the biblical ideal - and that's what we need to discern first and foremost. The biblical ideal, as the Lord cites, is that from the beginning divorce was never God's will for mankind. Speaking to these Pharisees, the Lord makes it clear - and He is appealing now, if you look at it carefully, to the divine order of creation - that in the beginning God made one man and one woman, and His intention was that for life they would cleave to one another and no man would separate. Now the Pharisees were asking this question of the Lord, testing Him, because there were two schools of thought among the Jews at this particular time regarding divorce and remarriage. They all hung upon the interpretation of a phrase in Deuteronomy chapter 24, and so it would be good for us to turn to that just now for a moment.

Deuteronomy 24, and of course you know that this is where the Jews - particularly the Pharisees, these lawyers - taught the people from, God's law. Here is a law concerning divorce, verse 1 of Deuteronomy 24: 'When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because' - and here's the phrase - 'he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance'.

Now that instruction is simply that if a man divorces his wife, and that wife goes on to marry another man, and say that other man then subsequently divorces her again, or he dies - she is not permitted, according to God's law, to return to her first husband. But in the course of this whole teaching, the initial reason for divorce is indicated: 'she finds no favour', verse 1, 'in his eyes because he has', and here's the phrase, 'found some uncleanness in her'. So the Pharisees debated: what was this, this uncleanness in her? The two different schools interpreted that phrase, 'some uncleanness', two different ways. Now let me say this, this is significant: this is the only passage in the Old Testament stating the grounds and procedures regarding divorce. Jesus goes on to explain in Matthew 19, where we read from, that Moses gave this divorce law because of the sinfulness of the human heart, the hardness of the people's heart. As you study this, you find out that this law was probably more likely given to protect the wife from being discarded by the husband like a piece of furniture at the husband's whim. Because if she was just thrown out of the home, no other man would marry her, and she would be left defenceless - and in that society of those days she probably would have become a social outcast and be treated like a harlot. So because of the wicked sinfulness of the Jew's heart at this particular time, Moses, it seems, gave this certificate of divorcement in order that the woman would not have to go to such extremes, and would then be allowed to legally remarry and be saved from all these predicaments. But the point is: this was a legal injunction, and the Lord Jesus said it was admitted by Moses because of the hardness of

people's hearts - but this was not God's highest thought regarding marriage from the beginning.

Now the two schools of thought among the Jews were the school of Rabbi Hillel, and the school of Rabbi Shammai. Now Rabbi Hillel had a lenient interpretation of this 'some uncleanness'. In fact, the Lord indicates it in verse 3 of chapter 19 of Matthew, or it's indicated by the Pharisee's question: 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' - and that's basically summing up the school of Rabbi Hillel. He believed that a man could divorce his wife for any reason - even burning of food, walking about with her hair down, speaking to men on the street publicly, or speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence - that would get a lot of you women into trouble, wouldn't it?! In fact, Rabbi Akiba, who was of the School of Hillel, went further to say that the phrase in Deuteronomy 24, 'find no favour in his eyes', meant a man could divorce his wife if he found another woman who was more beautiful! That's what he taught. Now before some of you men join the school of Rabbi Hillel, just wait till I finish the message tonight!

There was an alternative, of course, Rabbi Shammai - and he was more strict in his interpretation of 'some uncleanness'. He believed this referred to some premarital sin, or something indecent in sexual conduct that was found in the wife. So there's the two basic views - the view that basically said you could divorce your wife for any reason, and then the view that said, no, it has to be some sexual immorality. But please note, and this is very interesting, and I don't want to build too much on this just now, but neither of these schools believed that Moses gave this certificate of divorcement for the cause of adultery. The reason being, the law is clear that the penalty for adultery is not divorce, it is stoning. So these Jews were not debating over what the penalty for adultery was, it was for 'some uncleanness' - whatever that may have meant - but what we are sure of is that, in Jesus' day, the Jews were not allowed to use capital punishment because in their own land they were governed by the Romans, and they forbade it in their legal system for the Jews to exercise that. So it seems that in Jesus' day what was the penalty for adultery was death, according to the law, but they couldn't put anybody to death so they substituted the death penalty with divorce. Are you with me?

Now, that is the context wherein Jesus says: 'It was not this way from the beginning...and I say to you...', and then the Lord Jesus gives His instruction. Now, let's move to the present day for a moment before we draw any conclusions. Modern views concerning divorce and remarriage mostly revolve around this question: 'When is it OK to divorce and remarry?'. I personally fear that when we get taken up with this issue of when is it OK to divorce and remarry, that we are in danger of missing the whole point of Jesus' teaching. Indeed, we may even fall into the trap and the pit that the Pharisees found themselves in. Now what do I mean by that? Well, let me quote to you a writer by the name of Tom Hovestol, commenting on the Lord's warning in the Sermon on the Mount about oath-taking. He says this: 'We live in a culture today in which promises and commitments, even solemnly made ones, are routinely broken. Our wedding ceremonies, baptism rituals, infant dedications, and church membership covenants, to varying degrees, include pious oaths which we cavalierly break. Every divorce is a major violation of the promise 'Till death us do part'. However, we spend most of our theological energy debating when it is OK to break our promises. We are like the Pharisees, seeking loopholes. We are masters at the art of evasion'.

You see, really what Hovestol, I think, is getting at is that marriage is more than a contract, it is a covenant - biblically that is how it is set forth. Princess Diana cited, I think, in her divorce papers that there were three in her marriage. Well, there ought to be three in every marriage,

and the third ought to be God. When we make our vows, we make them not just with each other, but before God. He enters into covenant with us as married couples. So, really the point I'm getting at is that we need to be very careful in this whole regard - whilst we want answers to the question - that we don't fall into this trap of asking: 'How far can I go and be OK with God?'. Rather we should be asking: 'How near to God can I get, and how obedient can I get?' - and there's a world of difference.

Now we need to consider this because of the impact, the obvious impact that divorce has had on society. Whenever I perform a marriage ceremony, one of the preambles to the vows is: 'It was ordained for the welfare of human society, which can be strong and happy only where the marriage bond is held in honour'. To put it very bluntly, because God's order has been rejected by our society, our society is beginning to crumble - perhaps no longer around the edges, but at its very core. So we must be clear on this issue because of the impact, obviously, that it's having on society. Equally so, more personally, there's an obvious impact it is having on the family. Often in this whole debate, the children - if there are children involved - are ignored, and yet they are often the ones who suffer the most when there is divorce. Pat Conroy, in her book 'Death by Marriage', recites her personal experience regarding her family. She says, I quote, 'There are not metaphors powerful enough to describe the moment when you tell the children about the divorce. To look into the eyes of your children and to tell them that you're mutilating their family, and changing all their tomorrows', she says, 'it felt as though I had doused my entire family with gasoline and struck a match'.

If you know anything about this, you will know how painful this can be - especially for children. Not only is there a great impact of this issue upon society and the family, but also upon the witness of the church. This may surprise some of you, but statistics from every source tell us that Christians are more or less clones of our secular culture, and in some cases even worse when it comes to divorce and remarriage. According to George Barna's research quite recently, born-again Christians are now slightly more likely to divorce than the general population. There is more divorce among the church than there is, in fact, among those who would call themselves atheists.

Now that is troubling, because it would indicate to us that our society has grown more comfortable with divorce, so have many Christians. But in the context of what I'm sharing with you tonight from Matthew 19, this at least, at the very least, betrays a serious misunderstanding regarding the biblical ideal for a marriage that God has given us. Whilst there are many aspects of this whole subject that may be unclear as we will see, one thing is clear: God's ideal, the biblical ideal for marriage, is one man and one woman who remain married until the union is broken at death. Now let me just reinforce that for you: Paul agrees, of course, with our Lord Jesus in Romans chapter 7, if you will turn with me to that. Romans chapter 7 and verses 2 and 3: 'For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man' - that is the biblical ideal.

In fact, in Malachi 2 and verse 16, God very explicitly says that He hates divorce. The reason why divorce has had to exist is because the devil hates marriage. Now, we could spend a whole night on that - but the reason why the devil hates marriage is found in Ephesians chapter 5, that the whole marriage bond between a husband and a wife is typifying, picturing the union between Christ and His church. That is something that was envisaged before the foundation of the world, as we thought about on Tuesday evening. We often think that God

sort of adopts human terminology in order that we might understand - and I might touch on this tomorrow night - but it's the opposite that is the truth. Actually many of the experiences of our life that God has ordained are in order to reflect spiritual truths in heaven on earth, and here's one of them. That's why the devil wants to wreck marriage as an institution, because it signifies Christ and His love for the church.

So let's recap a little here. In Matthew 19 Jesus says: 'Look, Moses may have allowed divorce because of the hardness of the human heart' - that is, if I can put it another way, Moses allowed the certificate of divorcement because of the failure of God's people to understand God's purpose in marriage. But Jesus made it very clear that it was not this way from the beginning and, more than that, He indicates very plainly that the kingdom of God demands a lifelong faithfulness to one partner, because that was God's original plan from creation. That is the reason for verse 10, His disciples listening to this - and remember they have the context of these two groups of rabbis and religious lawyers debating one another - they want to know which side He's going to take. He just cuts above all that, and He doesn't side with the group that say for any cause, and He doesn't side with the group that say necessarily for immorality, but He seems to come to the higher principle. He says: 'This is not the way it was from the beginning: one man, one woman, for life' - and the disciples are aghast in verse 10, and say to Him, 'If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry'! So that reaction gives us a clue to how the Lord Jesus was setting down the biblical ideal.

Of course, that being said, there is an apparent exception to that biblical ideal. We have it here in verse 9 of chapter 19, 'I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality', or 'fornication' literally is the term used there, 'and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery'. In fact, you have a very similar statement with this, what has come to be known as 'an exception clause', in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 and verse 32. Now, though the Lord Jesus has established the ideal, it appears now He cites an exception to that ideal - literally sexual immorality, verse 9, or fornication. But of course, as you could already have guessed, there's a great debate over what this term actually means. I'll give you the different views.

One view believes that this term 'fornication' is indicating unfaithfulness during the betrothal period between a Jewish young man and Jewish young woman. Now, the Jewish betrothal period was a bit like our engagement but was much more legal and binding. The only way you could get out of it was if there was unfaithfulness found in the wife, particularly, because it doesn't seem that the woman had the rights that she might have in this day and age. To give you an illustration of this, if you turn to Matthew chapter 1 - and it's interesting that Matthew should be the one to give us this example - Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 and 19, related to Mary and Joseph, you have this illustrated. 'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together', there it is. They were betrothed, so there was an established bind between them, but they had not come together, they had not consummated the relationship and they had not been officially married - but this was something stronger than engagement. Before they had come together in a fully fledged marriage, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Now, look at the reaction of Joseph in verse 19: 'Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly'. He was minded to divorce her on the quiet.

So to break up this espousal was technically a divorce, because it was so legally binding. Now those who believe that this is referring, this fornication in verse 9 of chapter 19, is referring to unfaithfulness during the betrothal period believe that this little exception clause, 'except for sexual immorality', 'except for fornication', it really only applies to Jews - because Jews were

the ones who had this particular custom. They explain this further by saying that we only find this exception clause in Matthew's gospel, although it is there twice it's only in Matthew's - and most accept that Matthew's gospel is the gospel that was written specifically to the Jews. When we go to Mark's dealing with divorce and remarriage he doesn't mention it, neither does Luke, and neither do any of the epistles. So the assumption is made that this is specifically for Jews, it doesn't refer to Gentiles, and therefore there are no exceptions for Gentiles because we don't have this espousal practice.

So that's one view, and it's a view, I have to say, that I have had. But the second explanation of this so-called 'exception clause' allows divorce and remarriage on the grounds of sexual immorality, and they interpret 'sexual immorality' as any sexual misdemeanour and impropriety after marriage. But even among those who believe that, and I think that's probably the majority view among evangelicals, there is not agreement as to what this actually is. Some think one instance of unfaithfulness is grounds enough, and other scholars believe that it is more a persistent lifestyle of unfaithfulness - and it's very hard to pin down. I have to admit to you that I find these matters very difficult to come to conclusions on myself.

Now here's the point at which I want to really try to bring all this together to be helpful - we want to be helpful tonight. Even if this phrase 'fornication', 'sexual immorality', does mean 'sexual unfaithfulness' after marriage, it is certainly not a command. It is a concession, it is not a pronouncement, it is permitted. Even upon this, even if this is what you believe about this exception clause, it cannot be argued that divorce is mandated in the New Testament - in other words, that you have to get a divorce if your spouse is unfaithful to you. That really brings me back to the biblical ideal that our Lord Jesus laid down in keeping with the whole spirit of the word of God, and that is that one man joined to one woman ought to do all in their power by the power of God in their life, if they are Christians, to stay together 'till death us do part'. So the Christian ideal for marriage is staying together, and the Christian ideal for infidelity in marriage is not divorce, but rather reconciliation.

You'll hear maybe a lot of sermons, maybe not a lot, but you'll find quite a few on the whole subject of divorce and remarriage - and that's legitimate, we're doing it tonight - but you'll perhaps find very few messages on the reconciliation between those who have been unfaithful, or one who has been unfaithful to another. Really what the Lord is saying in Matthew 19 and, I believe, in all the Gospels, is that the standard of the kingdom of God is even higher than the standard of Israel. It's even higher than any other standard in society, and it ought to be - though I wouldn't like to be in the position, and I don't know how I would react if I were - but it ought to be the case. I have, I have to say, I have dealt with people who have known unfaithfulness and their marriage has almost fallen apart - and yet, by the grace and the miraculous supernatural power of God, they have been enabled to allow God's grace to bring healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. Now it's very hard to ever bring that trust and fidelity back again, but nevertheless: we live in a broken world, we are all broken people, we have broken relationships - and this is what God's people have been called to. Even if it's permitted if such an occurrence happens, this is the ideal - and I don't think there's any argument with that. Even if you add to it 1 Corinthians chapter 6, where Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going to court with one another, well, that brings another bearing on the whole regard as well, doesn't it?

No matter what view you take, by the way, in my reading and study of this there are concerns right across the board that Christians are divorcing one another all too readily. R. Kent Hughes says: 'Too often men and women eagerly pounce on the infidelity of their mate as the opportunity to get out of a relationship they haven't liked anyway. It's so easy to look for a

way out instead of working through the problems'.

So that's the exception clause in Matthew, and whatever conclusion you come to regarding it, we must always come back to the biblical ideal: God wants us to make marriage work for life. Some might say: 'Well, what about 1 Corinthians chapter 7?', and this is what I think our questioner was alluding to when he mentioned 'desertion'. Is it justified to permit divorce on the grounds of desertion? First Corinthians 7 and verses 12 to 16 - and by the way, let me say, that I didn't enquire of what the church's view here is on divorce and remarriage deliberately, because I wanted to try and be as balanced as possible in dealing with the biblical data. I also want to respect the teaching of your overseers, whatever that may or may not be - but I'm wanting to bring you the information as honestly as I can, and the conclusions that I have come to as far as a feel I can in that context, and allow you to make your mind up.

So 1 Corinthians 7, what does this mean? Verse 12: 'But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her'. So let's just make sure we understand this scenario here. A guy get saved, and his wife remains unsaved, and she wants to stay with him. Paul says, if that's the case, 'Brother, you stay with her, don't divorce her'. Then in verse 13, 'And a woman who has a husband', the same situation, 'who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her', same with the wife, 'let her not divorce him'. Verse 14: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy'. We'll not go into that, that's a whole subject on its own. Verse 15: 'But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife'.

Now, it's this verse 15: 'But if the unbeliever departs, let him or her depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace'. Now some interpret that verse to say that, therefore, divorce is acceptable when a believer is deserted by an unbeliever. They interpret when it says 'not under bondage in such cases', that Paul was really saying he or she is free to obtain a divorce for desertion. That is one view, it's quite a common view these days. But some also believe that this case mentioned here is exactly the same as the exception clause in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, in this regard: that it's more than likely that the unbeliever, when they depart, will probably go and link up with someone else. They feel that adultery here is inferred - well, I'm not sure that you can infer that, but nevertheless it's one view. Then there are others who believe that this is a difficult passage of Scripture, and that 'not under bondage' is not the same as divorce. If Paul wanted to use the word 'divorce' - he had used it, perhaps, before - but there was nothing stopping him being unambiguous. They believe it is too shaky a foundation to establish a practice of divorce and remarriage on this term 'not bound'. They would say that 'not bound' may simply mean that, well, if you get saved and your spouse walks out on you, well, you're not expected to try and maintain a relationship that has clearly broken down and is over.

Now, the passage may well be used to countenance the possibility of separation when things do get difficult in these circumstances, when someone, perhaps, is converted, and a wife or a husband isn't. But I think you'll agree with me: whatever view you establish yourself, it's difficult, isn't it? It's certainly not black-and-white, and I find myself - whilst I may have been very dogmatic on these issues in the past - I find less and less being able to be too dogmatic, whilst I have my own personal views. But the question begs - and the asker didn't ask this

one, but he should have - why didn't the Bible make it more clear? Well, I think it did - now you say, 'You're talking out of both sides of your mouth now! You're contradicting yourself'. Well, I think if the Lord wanted us to get too bogged down with all these minutia, He would have made these secondary aspects clearer - this is only my opinion - but what He did make abundantly clear was: it was not this way from the beginning, and the biblical, Christian, kingdom of God ideal is one man, one woman, for life, until death. So whatever school you come down on regarding this exception clause - and you have liberty to do that - the Bible is clear. I don't think God ever desires for a man and a woman to break up. Please be careful not to misrepresent me, I'm not suggesting that a woman should stay in an abusive relationship, I'm not suggesting that for one minute - but as far as the biblical ideal is concerned, I think the Bible is clear on the main thing.

Now, we've looked at the biblical ideal, an apparent exception, but that brings me - and this is where it becomes very personal for me - to a pastoral dilemma and an evangelical challenge. What I mean by 'a pastoral dilemma' is simply this: how do we, in the 21st-century, uphold the biblical ideal, and yet at the same time remain pastorally sensitive to those who have been affected by divorce and remarriage? How do we do that? And how do we remain faithful to the biblical ideal, and also offer grace to people in our world and in our churches who have broken lives affected by this and broken marriages? Now, whatever your answer to that is - how we do it, how we keep this tension - here's my answer: however we do it, we must, we must do it! We must, on the one hand, uphold the biblical ideal for the sake of our children, for the sake of society, for the sake of the witness of the church, for the sake of the integrity of upholding the Bible as the word of God, which is what we believe - but we must be pastorally sensitive to those who have been affected, and we must minister the grace of God to the broken. The reason why we must is: Jesus did!

This is vital, and I feel this is an area that is neglected regarding this whole subject. The Lord was the One who re-established the biblical ideal, irrespective of what Moses consented to in the Old Testament, irrespective of what Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai were teaching, the Lord Jesus was the One who went back to the beginning and established the ideal. But as we look at Him moving and ministering in His life, in individual cases mercy, it seems, transcended the general rules and principles. Are you with me? So He's establishing general radical ideals, but when He meets broken people in broken marriages with broken lives, He ministers grace. Now I could give you a couple of examples - John chapter 4, He meets a woman at a well. In fact, the Bible says He goes out of His way to meet her. He already knew, as it is disclosed in the conversation, that she had been married five times and the chap she was cohabiting with was not her husband at that present time. He uncovered her sin, but He did not condemn her for it - and that is vital - and He offered her living water whereby she would never thirst again. I think the implication is that she had been seeking after satisfaction in human relationships, and she couldn't get it - but Jesus Christ satisfied her in her spirit, and she was born again.

Now the Lord Jesus administered grace to her, whatever the biblical ideal was: she was a broken sinner who needed forgiveness, who needed grace. He didn't condemn her. I remember a man saying to me on one occasion: 'You know there are people who are fit for heaven, but they're not fit for the local assembly' - well, that's poppycock! But apart from that, it's a pity the Lord Jesus wasn't informed of that before He went out of His way to seek out this woman. Now someone might say: 'Ah, but this was before the time the church came into being and so on and so forth' - well, are you really trying to tell me that this woman, after conversion, the Lord had saved her with the knowledge that she wouldn't be admitted into a church in a few years time? Of course, it's ridiculous to suggest such a thing!

Everything in our Lord's ministry of grace testifies the opposite.

You come to my favourite story in the New Testament, which is John chapter 8, the woman caught in the act of adultery. Again, the very smell of adultery was on this woman - and, incidentally, she is dragged into the midst of a theological debate, and these Pharisees are talking over her head in theological terms, when there's a broken life in the midst and nobody is taking any attention to her...except the Lord, except the Lord. He convicted them of their sin, and they all disappear, and she is left with Him - now, isn't that interesting? He said: 'Let he who is among you without sin cast the first stone', everybody went out from the eldest of the youngest - but she was left with Him. Now she had plenty of sin by the way, but why was she left? Because she understood His grace, she understood that this was a Man who was different than the religious Pharisees, here was a Man who was different than the men that she had known who had taken advantage of her. Here was a Man who was holy, who was truthful, and yet he did not condemn her - and again He says that to her! 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'.

So there's a biblical ideal, but there is a pastoral sensitivity and an offering of grace to those who are affected in this regard. Luke 7 is another one - there's a woman mentioned there, and it's not Mary Magdalene, and it's not Mary of Bethany, she's just called 'a sinner'. We're all sinners of course, but the inference is that she was known as, perhaps, a woman of the night; and people knew her as 'the sinner'. She was forgiven - and I love this story, I love this story - the Lord Jesus knew the illicit kisses that her mouth had given, and yet He allowed her to kiss His feet with those lips. He knew how her hair was a honey trap for many a married man, and yet He allowed her to dry His feet with her hair. He knew the graphic scenes that those eyes had looked upon, and yet He allowed the tears from those eyes to watch His feet. He spoke to her and said: 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace'.

Now, please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not advocating license here, grace never does. Paul was asked: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?' - never should any non-Christian, or Christian for that matter, think 'Well, I can go and do as I like, and God's going to forgive me anyway'. That is a complete and utter misunderstanding of grace, but I'll tell you this much: Matthew 12:31 says, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven of men', all manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven of men. Whilst the biblical ideal is plain, and I believe it very strongly, in the New Testament and in the whole Bible, that God does not want divorce - and I am on the side that thinks God wants us to avoid divorce - but the church, particularly the conservative wing in some sections, have made divorce and divorce and remarriage the unpardonable sin. You could have cohabited with a dozen partners and never married one of them, but if you married one of them and lived in monogamy for 40 years, you're not fit. Now that just doesn't make sense. You could have been a mass murderer in the UVF, and get up in the pulpit and give your testimony - but if you were married a second time and live faithfully to your second husband or second wife, you're not fit. Now that just does not make sense - that makes this particular aspect of life greater and more consequential than anything else, and it just doesn't weigh up when we consider that in Christ, whatever is sin and not, grace, His grace, is greater than all our sin. So there is a pastoral dilemma, but it's a tension that we must strike. We must always preach and uphold and practice the biblical ideal, but in pastoral ministry we must always be sensitive. We must never condemn, because the bottom line is that all of us are adulterers in our heart. Maybe you're the exception, but I'm certainly not. So none of us can condemn.

The dilemma is that we must uphold the ideal, but minister Christ's grace as He did. We must bring these people to Christ! That is the evangelical challenge, because our prospective

mission field is rife with this problem and similar domestic problems. It is disingenuous of us to proclaim that we want to reach the lost, but we're not prepared to grapple with their 'issues'. I remember hearing the story - I didn't plan to say this - but Colgate, you know the toothpaste guy, well, he was a Christian businessman many years ago in the States. He was involved heavily in his local church, and they had a real burden - they worshipped downtown, and they had a burden to reach the people around about in the streets who really needed the Lord. They were praying a lot for sinners to get saved - and this is sometimes what happens. The worst sinner in the whole city, a prostitute, got saved. Don't think I'm likening people affected by divorce and remarriage to a prostitute, don't think that at all - but what I'm saying is: the biggest sinner of them all got saved, and the church had a real problem! This woman was baptised and she wanted immediately, which was her right, to come into church fellowship. Of course, when she was brought to the church, everybody started: 'Well, we ought to give her a little bit of time, just make sure that there's a work of God', and all this blarney. Colgate got to his feet, and he said: 'Look, I think we should pray to God', and he said, 'Lord, I think we're going to have to apologise to You, because when we asked You to save sinners, we didn't stipulate to You the type of sinners that we wanted You to save'. It's true, isn't it?

It is disingenuous of us to proclaim that we want to reach the lost, but we're not prepared to grapple with their issues. If we are trying to reach the world, we must live in the real world. I confess to you that I have not for many years. There must always be this balance between grace and truth. Joseph Stowell, in his article 'The Divorce Dilemma', says - listen carefully, this is very good: 'We must keep our commitment to strong families, and still provide welcome and support to those who have been damaged by divorce. Grace that threatens truth is not grace at all', so you must not dilute the biblical ideal, we must not be looking for ways and loopholes and small print for how we can get out of covenants that we have made with a spouse and with the Lord, we must not do that. 'Grace that threatens truth is not grace at all', but equally, 'truth apart from grace requires an impossible goal of perfection'. We don't live in a perfect world - stuff happens! - but there is grace, not only sufficient for our sin, but sufficient for every need.

So biblical idealists, and I am one, must be practical realists. One example of this is that when God made His laws, He did not take our laws into consideration. Do you understand? He didn't put a caveat into each of His laws for the day when, here in our land, now, unlike 60 years ago, you can be divorced against your own will. That used to not be able to happen, but it does happen now. Through no fault of your own your spouse could foist divorce upon you, against your will. Now the church cannot realistically hold that against anyone. 'What about', you might say, and this was mentioned in the question, 'people divorced, and divorced and remarried, before their conversion?'. Well, I know a lot of people and places that have got a real problem with this one - but I don't understand what the problem is at all.

If you turn, and do turn with me, to 1 Corinthians chapter 6 please, and I hope I'm not causing problems for the oversight here - that's not my intention, but I think that the word of God is clear in this regard. First Corinthians 6: 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God'. So in that motley crew of transgressors, with the homosexuals and the idol worshippers, are adulterers - and they're accepted into Corinth because they're saved, because they're washed, because by the Spirit of God they have been sanctified and

made holy. I think that's clear. If a person has been divorced, or divorced and then remarried, before conversion I don't see why - if they've confessed their sins, He is faithful and just to forgive them - why should we hold it against them?

But then someone will go a step further, as you probably would imagine: what about people divorced, or divorced and remarried, after conversion? Well, this is a more difficult one. Let me say that it's difficult to lay down hard and fast principles and rules, because you find each case often has its own idiosyncratic characteristics. I think each case needs to be dealt with individually. But if sin has been involved, if sin has been involved - for instance, say a professing believer has backslidden for a while, and during that time divorced and remarried - if sin has been involved, and that's a big 'if', because it all comes down to how you understand many aspects to this whole teaching, but I believe that if sin has been involved and it is acknowledged, and there is repentance, and perhaps discipline - perhaps discipline - all of that is with a view to restoration. I don't know anywhere, perhaps with the exception of the other night when we were thinking of the man who was delivered, Paul exhorted Corinth to deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be saved - that seems to be him going beyond the pale, and how could any restoration come out of that? But the fact is, in 2 Corinthians, the guy is restored - and so we believe that all church discipline ought to be with the view of restoration. But there must be repentance, and there must, perhaps, be discipline - depending on the circumstances of course, and how you understand it - but I admit that there are problems here. I have not all the answers, but I do believe, I do believe that there is grace for every broken and contrite sinner - I believe that. If I didn't believe that, I would be in trouble!

It's inferred also in the question that, can a person be restored to go on to serve the Lord, even in one of either of these circumstances? Well, I think the answer is yes, that the grace of God can restore them to serve the Lord - because none of us were saved ever to be stuck and sitting about doing nothing. Yet the New Testament is clear that the position of an overseer is prohibited for a person who has been touched by this. Now we've got to bow to God's wisdom in this regard, and you can read about that in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

But that's really all I have to bring to you tonight: the Biblical ideal, an apparent exception, a pastoral dilemma and an evangelical challenge. Let us pray together. Now I'll be honest with you, while your heads bowed, that I had a bit of a dilemma as to whether I should answer that question or not, because there is such a divergence of opinion, and not knowing what was believed here - but I thought that was an advantage in a sense. But you know, it's always been controversial, it was controversial in Jesus' day - but He had to give an answer, and His answer was the ideal. It is controversial today, and we need to give an answer - we need to give an answer! We need to give an answer for the reasons I have cited, and I in no way have desired to hurt or cause pain for anyone affected by this - I hope that you know my heart regarding that. Yet the Holy Spirit may be bringing to some of us issues or inconsistencies, not least mentally. I mean this one fells me immediately: 'You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery': but I say unto you, if any of you look at the woman lustfully, you have committed adultery already in your heart'. That's a great leveller, isn't it? Do you know what God wants? Not people who tick the boxes of people who think they know, God wants a company of broken, contrite sinners who confess their sin and don't cover it - put their hands up and admit their misdemeanours, and take all the grace He has to offer. I believe God is most glorified when we do that, and God is closest to those of a broken heart.

Father, I pray that You will minister Your grace as only Jesus can by the power of the Spirit - Your grace and Your mercy to all our hearts, for we are all broken sinners, every single one of

us. Let us never ever take the stance of that Pharisee, saying: 'I am glad, O God, that I am not like other men, sinners, and not like this publican'. Let us be like that tax collector who beat his breast, saying: 'Be merciful to me, a sinner!'. Lord, that's where the grace - that guy, he went home justified - and Lord, I pray that everyone here, whether they are affected directly or indirectly by this, may learn what it is to repent of what needs to be repented, but also learn to embrace the audacious grace of God. Lord, may we as the church not cave in to the pressure of the kingdom of darkness, and let us always uplift - even if our own lives are affected by this - always uplift the Biblical ideal for the good of society, for the good of our families, and for the good of the church and testimony of Jesus; in whose name we pray, Amen.

101 Christian Questions - Chapter 4
"Life After Death"

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We have covered quite a lot of ground, I'm sure you'll agree, in four nights. We started off looking at 'The Problem of Evil', and why God allowed it, suffering, pain etc. Why He created Lucifer, and created Adam and Eve for that matter, and humanity in general, when He knew what was all going to happen - that is, the fall and suffering? The next night we looked at specific problems that some people see in the Bible, questions, and we tried to answer those, and also how best to learn the Bible, and issues of personal assurance - like: what is a backslider, a carnal Christian, a counterfeit believer and so on? Then last evening we took the whole night looking at what is a very controversial but very necessary subject to deal with, that is: divorce and remarriage. Tonight we're looking at the afterlife, or heaven and hell - but more heaven, it has to be said, than hell, you'll be glad to know!

Now one very commonly quoted verse of Scripture in relation to heaven in particular, and you often hear it in prayer meetings, is 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, which reads: *"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'"* - and that's often where they end the quotation. The inference that is often made is that, there's very little we can know about heaven. You may have heard it said by some that the Bible doesn't tell us an awful lot about heaven, and even the remark: 'Heaven is unimaginable'. Now I would agree that, I'm sure, many many aspects of heaven are unimaginable - but it is wrong, and a misconception, to say that all of it is unimaginable and that the Bible has little to say about it, because that is not the case.

In fact, that quotation, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him', the next verse which is connected to that previous verse reads thus: 'But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God'. So that passage actually goes on to say the opposite of what people use that verse to say, that we can't really know anything about heaven - where, in fact, Paul is saying: 'Well, it doesn't enter into the natural senses from our wisdom, but God has revealed by His Spirit to us, for His Spirit searches all the deep things of God and reveals them to us'.

So really what I'm saying to you is that there is more that has been revealed about heaven than most believers have realised. So, in answering these questions tonight, you might get a bit of a revelation yourself about some aspects - but I would encourage you to search the scriptures, as we encouraged you last night, just like the Bereans, and find out what the Bible has to say about heaven. You will be surprised how much it actually does contain.

Now, there are three questions for us to consider tonight, and we'll take them each at a time as we have done on previous evenings. The first question is in John 11:14: when Lazarus died the second time - OK? So he died the first time in John 11:14, but obviously he died again at some stage. When he died the second time, the questioner is asking, did that mean there were two souls waiting for him in heaven? They quote 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 8, which reads: 'We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord'. The second question, the questioner has put in relation to Luke chapter 16, which you may or may not know is a story the Lord Jesus told about a rich man

and a beggar called Lazarus. The rich man went to hell and Lazarus went to heaven. The questioner asks in Luke 16: can believers now who are in heaven look down on loved ones who are on earth and see what they're doing? The third question is the big one, and we'll spend the majority of our time tonight on it, and that is: will we know our family, will we know one another in heaven?

So let's deal with them one at a time as we have done each night, and God willing, I hope that with the Lord's help we'll answer these questions. The first one in John 11:14, where Lazarus dies the first time, the questioner asks: when Lazarus died the second time, did that mean there were two souls waiting for him in heaven? They quote 2 Corinthians 5 verse 8, as I said: 'We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord'. Now I suspect that from this question this questioner - and by the way, this is not in any way a rebuke or censure, because I was taught at school (whether it was just because I was stupid, I don't know) but there are no stupid questions! If you have a question in your mind you should ask it, and if it is not perhaps a good question you'll find out pretty quickly! But it's important that you ask it and get it answered. I suspect there's a misunderstanding here in the mind of the questioner concerning the nature of the soul.

You don't get a soul when you die, but neither do you have a soul - I think that's an unfortunate term that we use as Christians - you are a soul. Do you understand? The soul is not something that you get when you die, and neither is it something that you have - as if you're carrying this entity around in your body that belongs to you, and it's sort of an impersonal thing - rather the soul is who you are. Now the Bible, I believe, teaches that we are made up of three parts. The technical word for that is 'tripartite', or a 'trichotomy' - we are made up of body, soul and spirit. I think that can be borne out by some scriptures, particularly 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Hebrews 4 verse 12. Nevertheless, basically the body is the world-conscious part of us, the physical aspect to us. It's how we relate to this environment around us, the material world, and that happens through the senses. So the body is the world-conscious part, the soul is the self-conscious part of our humanity - that's who we are, and how we know who we are. It's really the seat of the personality, and it's made up of three aspects: the intellect, that is the mind; the emotions, which you could describe as the heart; and the will, the volition, what we do with it. So that is what makes up the soul - the mind, the heart and the will. But there is another part of the human being, the spirit - and the spirit is that which is God-conscious and relates to God.

This is a tricky one, and there are times in the Bible when they seem to - spirit and soul - be talking about the same thing; but one of the reasons, I suspect, for that is that when man fell into sin - I don't want to spend any time on this - but when man fell into sin, he was cut off from God in fellowship. Therefore his spirit, like the top floor of a three-storey building, the spirit crumbled into the second floor, and he became essentially a self-worshipper and selfish. His soul related to his body, and his body related to his soul - his mind, his intellect, and his will - and really didn't want to relate to God any more. That's what it means when it says man 'died' in the Garden. He didn't physically die immediately - and, by the way, 'death' in the Bible does not mean ceasing to exist, 'death' in the Bible means 'separation'. So his spirit did not cease to exist, but it was cut off from God. We'll not go into that any more, but just so that you understand what the soul is.

So, when the believer dies, you don't get a soul - because that would mean you'd be getting your personality which you'd lived with all your life, and who you really are. 'Soul' is just, I suppose, another word for 'life' - you've had life. But what happens when a believer dies is, their soul and their spirit go to God, and they await a new body which they will receive at the

resurrection when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. So if that was your question, it's good that you've asked it, but I hope that you do understand that the soul is not something that you get when you go to heaven, but it's something that you are now and you always will be.

That's the first question quickly answered, the second: Luke 16, can believers now look down to see what loved ones are doing on the earth, look down from heaven? Now again, I'm not sure how the questioner has derived from Luke chapter 16 this question. The reason being, there is no indication in Luke chapter 16 of people from heaven looking down on earth. What you have is, essentially, Abraham looking from Paradise into hell, and talking to a man in hell; and you have a man in hell looking into Paradise and talking to a man, essentially, in heaven, Abraham - but we don't have anyone looking from heaven onto the earth. But though that may not be the case in Luke 16, it is a valid question: can people in heaven look down on people on earth? Sometimes you hear people throwing away this remark: 'Oh, so and so will be looking down on me', and there is this concept that this may be the case.

Now the person may mean, and maybe they've written their question down wrong or I have misunderstood it, maybe they have meant: do those in heaven see those in hell and vice versa? Which is what happens in Luke chapter 16, it would appear. Well, I haven't got time to answer that tonight, it might be answered in a roundabout way as we go through this - that's quite a big subject - but we will deal with earth this evening, and if you want to invite me back to answer that one, well, you'll have to catch me before I run! The earth, do people in heaven see people on the earth? Well, the answer, in a sense, is yes - not so much they see, but they are aware of some of what is going on on earth. To some extent we do know that people in heaven are aware of certain things that are happening on earth.

Now that might surprise you, but if you turn with me to show you this from God's Word, to Revelation chapter 6, you will see this very clearly. Revelation chapter 6 and beginning to read at verse 9, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only One worthy to open the seal of, really, the conclusion of humanity, opens in verse 9 the fifth seal, which is the cry of the martyrs: 'He opened the fifth seal', Revelation 6 verse 9, 'I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed'.

Now there are a number of obvious inferences in this passage. Here are martyrs who have been killed for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, and they are praying for justice and, indeed, judgement on their persecutors. Now they are dead, and so they are believers, therefore they are in heaven, they're under the altar which would indicate the altar in heaven - and it's suggesting that these saints in heaven are praying for suffering saints on earth as well, their brothers and their fellow servants who are being persecuted for the faith of Jesus Christ. That's very interesting, because we know of people here on earth who pray for the dead; but here we have the dead praying for the living! That's a subject all on its own.

In verse 11 these folk, martyrs, are praying, and God answers their question. Let me just say in passing that that tells us that you don't know everything in heaven, and often you will hear the remark: 'Well, we'll know when we get to heaven' - well, will you? You will not have omniscience when you get to heaven, only One has omniscience and that is God. We will be learning in heaven, and we heard the other evening how the countless ages of eternally, it will take it all, which will never end, to expound the great grace of our God toward us. So we will

be continually learning in heaven. So God answers the question, and He says in verses 10 and 11, they're crying out in verse 10: 'How long, O Lord?'. Incidentally, here's another thing in passing, 'the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more' - wrong! Time shall not be no more: how long? That is a temporal phrase, 'How long must we wait?'. The Lord basically answers by saying: 'Wait a little longer'.

Wait a little longer for what? Well, that is the resurrection at the coming of our Lord Jesus, and the consummation of all things when this world will be judged. But what I want you to see also in verse 11 is that 'fellow servants' and 'brothers' are mentioned, which also indicates that these folk - who are dead, and praying, and aware that their brothers and sisters in Christ are still being persecuted on the earth, and aware that there is a need for justice and judgement upon their oppressors - are also aware of fellow servants and brothers, and they still retain their relationship to them. Now that is interesting, isn't it? That correlates with Luke chapter 16, because you remember that the rich man who was in hell cried out that Lazarus might be sent back to his five brothers, who were still living, and tell them to repent and believe lest they come also to that place of torment. So the rich man in hell was conscious of his five brothers and, therefore, in the afterlife, even whether you're in hell or heaven, you still retain your relational ties to a certain extent.

Now, we have proven, I believe, from Revelation 6, that people in heaven are aware of certain things on the earth, they know certain things. But the question is: can they see? Well, I am convinced that they can't see everything, but perhaps they do see some things. Let me show you this, if you turn with me please to Luke chapter 9 verses 30 and 31, we read of the Transfiguration of our Lord. You remember He took Peter, James and John up the Mount: 'And behold', verse 30 of Luke chapter 9, 'behold two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem'. So here you have Moses and Elijah appearing with the Lord Jesus, and Moses and Elijah appear to be fully aware of the drama that they have just stepped into. Do you understand? They're talking with Jesus about the decease, His death that He is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. They are talking with Him about it, so they are aware to some extent of God's redemptive plan.

Where did they come from? They came from heaven. Now, I beg of you, surely when they returned to heaven they remembered what had just happened? That they had met the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, you remember, that their whole ministry was pointing to - and they had talked to Him about this great event, the greatest event of all time, the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. They're bound to have remembered the discussion in heaven. So they are aware, to some extent, in heaven, what's going on on the earth.

Another verse, you don't need to turn to it, Hebrews 12 and verse 1: 'Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us'. Now, what the author to the Hebrews is painting for us in our mind's eye is the picture of a stadium. He's already using the analogy that we, as Christians, are like athletes, and we're running a race - but he is painting a picture of this great stadium, and the witnesses around, spectators, are described as surrounding us. Not merely preceding us, going before us in a chronological sense, but the term that is being used is: it's as if they are witnessing our performance. Now that may not be literal, but what it certainly does mean is that there is a great crowd of deceased witnesses who are witnessing God's unfolding drama of redemption. So, what I'm really saying is: I do believe that people in heaven, the dead believers who are in heaven, are aware of the sequence of calendar events in God's plan of redemption. I'm not

saying that they know when the Lord is coming, I'm not saying they know when the tribulation's going to be, and who the Antichrist is going to be - I'm not saying that, but I'm just saying that they are aware, as events happen on earth that correspond to prophetic literature, that they are aware in heaven, as we ought to be aware because we have the Bible down here on earth.

Another example we could cite - it may be a bit tenuous, but nevertheless it may indicate this - Luke chapter 15:10, I'll just read it: 'Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents' - and that's the great chapter of the lost things, the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son - and there is great joy. We need to read the scriptures carefully, it doesn't say that there is great joy with the angels - it doesn't say the angels have great joy in heaven, it says there is great joy among the angels, or in the presence of the angels in heaven; and that could infer that it is those who are among the angels in heaven, dead believers, who are rejoicing over even one sinner who repents. Now, you may or may not agree with that, but nevertheless heaven is aware of something that is happening on earth - and those parables would indicate that heaven is aware even of one sinner who repents. Do you think a party could go on in heaven and the believers not know about it? If we were to look at believers down here, perhaps that might be the case, but not in heaven! Not in heaven.

The question could be asked: if people in heaven are aware to some extent of what's going on on earth, how could it be that they are aware of bad things on earth? That's a valid question, but I think such a question, with the inference behind it that, you know, you can't think about bad things in heaven, is a dubious one. The idea that knowledge of suffering and evil in heaven, the idea that the knowledge of that will make us not happy doesn't figure. Let me show you: God is aware and knows everything bad that is going on, but it does not diminish heaven for Him - 'Ah, but He's God'. OK, well, the angels know a great deal of what's going on down here, because they are among us, they are among us tonight we believe - but it doesn't diminish the joy of heaven for them. You say, 'But they're angels'. OK, Abraham and Lazarus. Abraham, in Luke 16, and Lazarus in Paradise - they were aware of the rich man in hell, but it was still Paradise for them.

Now, this is where confusion comes in with regards to our understanding of heaven as Christians, because when we talk about heaven, half times we don't understand - let alone others - whether we're talking about what some have defined as 'the intermediate heaven', or 'the eternal state'. Now let me explain that to you: 'intermediate heaven' - and it's a bad term, but it's one that helps us to differentiate - 'intermediate heaven' is the place where the believer goes when they die now, but that is not the eternal state. The eternal state is described in prophetic scripture as 'a new heaven and a new earth'. Now, that has not come into being yet, and nor will it come into being until our Lord Jesus returns and, I believe, after a thousand year reign - it will not come into being until then. This old earth will have to be rejuvenated, it will be burnt up, Peter says, with a fervent heat, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Now, people will quote about heaven, and read at funeral services - and I've done it myself - Revelation 21. Of course, that tells us: 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' - that is in reference to the eternal state, a new heaven and a new earth. In that eternal state we will have new bodies, but people who die in Christ, fall asleep in Christ now, they don't have a body in a completely physical sense - that's another debate, but their soul and spirit does go to heaven, to where God is now, but that is not the place where we will dwell for all eternity.

That's a whole other subject but, nevertheless, what I'm trying to get at is: we've read from Revelation 6, and we can almost feel the anguish, can't we, the martyrs beneath the altar praying for vengeance upon the enemies of God? That's heaven, now, and I believe that folk in heaven are aware of ramifications regarding the redemptive plan of God. We should not be afraid of that, because the knowledge of negative things, for God, for Christ, for the angels, for Abraham and Lazarus, and I believe for everyone else in heaven, does not rob them of the joy and the ecstasy of what the intermediate heaven is for them now. One writer puts it like this: 'Happiness in heaven is not based on ignorance, but on perspective' - and that's good. Happiness in heaven - and I admit that people in heaven don't know everything that's happening on earth, neither do they see it - I don't think they're ignorant of everything that is going on on the earth, even some of the bad things, but we should not assume that that robs them of heaven.

Consider this: the greater work of heaven will be to enable us to see difficult things as they are, perhaps, presently on earth, but enable us to see them through the eyes of God - to see them as He sees them. Maybe you think I'm pushing boundaries here tonight, but I don't believe I am. If you turn with me to Revelation 19 now, please, just before the Lord Jesus Christ comes to the earth and returns to judge the world, in Revelation 19 we read of the fall of Babylon. Verse 1: 'After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her'. Again they said', that is, the saints in heaven, ''Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!' And the twentyfour elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, 'Amen! Alleluia!' Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!''.

Now, what you have just read is a description of the fall of Babylon, but please don't impersonalise these events. Babylon, if it's not a literal city, it is certainly a body of people - these are people being judged by the wrath of God for their opposition to Him! So really what we're reading here is the condemnation of people, but here we see that the saints of God in heaven are crying 'Alleluia!'. Now that is not callousness or insensitivity, what it is is: those who are in heaven - we're talking now about what heaven is now for a believer who dies, because the resurrection hasn't happened yet at this point in the book of the Revelation, and Christ is just about to come but He hasn't come yet - believers in heaven at that moment are in complete sync with God's sovereign plan and will, that even His just judgement of people will not disrupt peace in heaven for believers.

That might be hard for you to accept, but you've got to understand that you're going to be different in heaven, you are going to be in complete harmony with the will and the purpose and the word of God - that's the miracle of heaven. Now, whatever they don't know in heaven - and I think there's a lot that they don't know about what's going on on earth - whatever they don't know, it seems, as someone has said, unthinkable to imagine that they would have remained ignorant of the culmination of human history taking place on the earth. I think they know more than we suspect them to know.

Let's move on from that one, and I could spend a lot of time on it, and if you want to know a wee bit more about it, I think I did an eight week series when I was in the Iron Hall entitled 'Glimpses of Glory', questions about heaven, all sorts of harebrained and weird and wonderful

questions that people ask and think about. You can download that off the Internet if you wish, and many of these further questions that may have arisen from the answer to that previous one might be answered in that series.

Let's move on to this one: will we know our family in heaven? This is the big one, and this really incorporates two ideas: recognition, will we recognise one another in heaven - and that is a certain sense of the word 'know' - but secondly, not just recognition but relationship. Will we know one another? I mean, will we know them the same way that we know them down here, and that's a very important part of the answer as well. So let's deal with the first one: will we know one another, family, in heaven - recognition?

Now, I, and I'm sure you have to, have encountered some over-pious Christians who have inferred that it's not spiritual to want to meet loved ones in heaven: 'You know, you should be taken up with the Lord, and not with those tied to you by the flesh'. That sounds very good, but the real question is: what is God's intention? Is it God's intention, and is it God's revealed will, that we as believers should have the joy of anticipating reunion in heaven? I have to say that I think the whole Bible indicates: yes. So it is not impious or unspiritual to look forward and have joy of meeting others in heaven. But shall we know one another in heaven? George MacDonald, that famous preacher from many years ago, said: 'Shall we be greater fools in Paradise than we are here?'. It's a good point, isn't it? Will we be more stupid in heaven than we are down here? We mightn't know everything, but I'm sure we'll know people that we have known down here.

You might say, 'Well, that's a rational assumption, but is it in biblical terms a reasonable conclusion?'. Well, I think, generally speaking, ignorance about heaven is due to ignorance concerning the scriptures. I think the scriptures are full of evidence that we will know one another in heaven. Let's take a couple of witnesses from the New Testament first of all. The Lord Jesus Himself, we read about His transfiguration, we'll not read it again - but you remember that Moses and Elijah appeared side-by-side with the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, they had died centuries before the time our Lord lived, and yet it appears that Elijah and Moses still maintained their human identity. The disciples recognised them. You might say, 'Well, how did they recognise them if they died hundreds of years previously?'. Well, what you've got to understand is that Elijah was the foremost prophet in Judaism, and he was very characteristic in his dress. He wore camel's hair, and he was very hairy himself, he was a distinctive character. Moses was, perhaps, the chief personality in the mind of the Jews who obeyed the law of God, he was the lawgiver - and so their traditional stories and their anticipations of this great man would have been fulfilled. They would have obviously recognised Elijah, and who else would be beside the Lord along with Elijah but the lawgiver, Moses. So, to the Jews, this was obvious - but what I want you to see is that they were obviously, in some way, recognisable in a human sense. Now, here's one for you to think about, and I'm not going to answer it tonight - this is before the resurrection, this is before the resurrection and yet they had physical forms of some kind and were recognisable. You can sleep on that one.

Now, also the teaching of our Lord Jesus. Not just the transfiguration experience, but the teaching of the Lord Jesus indicates this. Luke 16 has already been mentioned several times, but very simply what Luke 16 is teaching us is that the rich man looked up in hell and he saw Lazarus in Paradise, we can say heaven, with Abraham. So he recognised the bag of bones, as he knew him, who lay at his gate every day, and he stepped over him in his pomp and pride - but this bag of bones was taken to heaven by angels, and that rich man, probably a Pharisee, went to hell. The point is: he recognised the guy in heaven as the same guy that he had

known in his life, do you understand? So the teaching of the Lord Jesus, I think, bears this out.

Also the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Himself. Luke 24 is often used to dismiss this, but in Luke 24 the Lord Jesus said: 'It is I myself'. There are many many examples of the Lord Jesus appearing to His disciples, and them recognising Him after His resurrection. But let's look at Luke chapter 24 to deal with this one, because it's here that there are the two on the road to Emmaus, and you remember the Lord appears to them and it seems that He was unrecognisable to them. Do you remember that? He was unrecognisable, and people infer then: 'Well, that means that we won't recognise one another in heaven, because they didn't recognise the resurrected Christ. So, when the resurrection happens, and we are resurrected, well then, people won't recognise us'. But that's not right, because if you look at verse 15 you will see the reason why they didn't recognise Him: 'So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him'. So there was a power that was operating on Him, inhibiting them knowing who this was. Just in case you don't believe that, look down at verse 31, and here is the remedy for this eye condition that they had been given: 'Then their eyes were opened', verse 31, 'their eyes were opened and they knew Him', they knew Him, they recognised Him, 'and He vanished from their sight'.

Even sometimes Mary is used in the garden, where she thought that the Lord was the gardener and so on - but then He spoke, and then she recognised Him. It says that she recognised Him. So I think the occurrences, post-resurrection, of our Lord Jesus would show us that we will be recognisable not just in the intermediate heaven now, as Moses and Elijah testify - and incidentally Elijah didn't die, so that's another one, so he was literally in heaven with a literal body, and yet Moses appeared as he had been in his old body, another one to think about. But Jesus was recognised in His resurrection body.

Now let's go to Paul, that's the evidence from the Lord, but let's go to Paul. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians, please, chapter 2, and I think Paul bears this out as well - that we will be recognisable. First Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 19: 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy'. So Paul is saying, 'The joy that I will have when Jesus comes, and ultimately the joy in heaven and the joy in eternity, is you who I have led to Christ'. Now in 2 Thessalonians 2 he talks about 'our gathering together unto Him', now Paul must surely mean that he hoped to recognise these converts. I mean, how could he have joy over his converts in heaven if he doesn't recognise his converts in heaven? Does that not make sense?

First Thessalonians 4 and verse 17, that wonderful portion about the rapture of God's people says: 'We will be caught up together to meet the Lord' - together, and that implies the knowledge of being with one another, we will be caught up 'together'. Now, if you go to 1 Thessalonians 4 and realise the context of it, the Thessalonians were concerned about their loved ones who had died in the faith. Now that's vital to understand that. They were saying: 'What's going to happen to them when the Lord comes?'. Paul had to explain, 'Well, the dead in Christ actually rise first, so don't you worry about that, and then you'll be caught up with them. Your dead loved ones won't lose out'. But, if you think about it for a moment, they were concerned about their dead loved ones - what comfort would these words be if these believers wouldn't even recognise their loved ones? How would they know if their loved ones were OK if they were unrecognisable?

Paul's point is not simply: do not sorrow hopelessly because your loved ones are at rest and

free from pain, etc, you don't need to worry about them - but you are not parted forever from your loved ones. That's the import of this passage: you will see them again. They will not miss out, and they are not lost! You will see them again when Christ brings them with Him at His return. For that reason, in verse 18 of 1 Thessalonians 4, he says: 'Comfort one another with these words'. Now comfort comes from the prospect of reunion, and the comfort of reunion is nonsensical without mutual recognition. You can't have a reunion with people that you don't know or don't recognise - you certainly can't enjoy it!

So what Paul is teaching is: at the moment we meet when our Lord comes, we meet loved ones who have gone before, we shall at once know them and they will at once know us. Now that should increase our anticipation of His coming, shouldn't it? We ought to be anticipating the Lord's return, but isn't the Lord so wonderful that He doesn't just give us Himself, He gives us those who are in Christ along with Him - He gives us everything. We ought not to feel guilty, we ought not to feel unspiritual by anticipating meeting our loved ones who have died in Christ. Graham Scroggie put it like this: 'If I knew that never again would I recognise that the loved one with whom I spent more than 39 years on earth, my anticipation of heaven would much abate. To say that we shall be with Christ and that that will be enough is to claim that there we shall be without social instincts and affections which mean so much to us here'. That's a vital point, because in the beginning, when everything was perfect by the way, God made Adam and he was alone. I say it very reverently: nothing could surpass the spiritual relationship that he had with His Father in heaven, God, his Creator - and yet, even in that perfect scenario, he needed something more. God created us as relational beings, social beings, and God made man woman in a perfect world.

So, is it too much to expect that we will know one another in heaven? Scroggie goes on to say: 'Life beyond cannot mean impoverishment, but the enhancement and enrichment of life as we have known it here at its best'. That leads me on well to the second aspect of 'Will we know one another?'. First is recognition, and I hope I've proved that we will in some way recognise one another. Now people are recognising one another, I believe, in heaven; but in the eternal state, in our resurrected bodies, we will recognise one another - although we will have glorified bodies, we will still know who is who. But the second aspect is this relational one, relationship: will we, in the new heaven and the new earth, or even in the intermediate heaven, will we have the same relationships with people as we have had down here? Does the new heaven and the new earth erase history? Well, it doesn't. You see, what you've got to understand is that God's plan right from the fall - and, in fact, before the fall, but we dealt with that the other night - is a plan of redemption. Now what I mean by that is, to 'redeem' is to buy something back - that means God does not rubbish what He made, He doesn't bin it and make another prototype. He wants to redeem His whole creation.

So the new heaven and the new earth does not erase history, it redeems it. The old is not destroyed, the old, rather, is made new. You know that that is a catchphrase in Revelation, 'all things are made new, behold'. Now, heaven is not a place, therefore - and get this - of unfamiliar things. I don't have time to go into this tonight, but the new heaven and the new earth, specifically, will be a place of familiar things made new. There are trees spoken of in the new heaven and the new earth, there are animals spoken of in the new heaven and the new earth, there are rivers spoken of, mountains spoken of - but they will all be made new. The same applies, I believe, for friends and family. Now each of these answers, I know, is providing many many other questions - but let us try to deal with them as far as we can, and I'll anticipate the ones I think you might be asking.

What about marriage? Will we who have been married in this life, will we have that

relationship in heaven? That's the big one. Well, turn with me to Matthew chapter 22 please, Matthew chapter 22. Now the Sadducees, and you must understand that the Sadducees - I learned it in religious studies - they didn't believe in the resurrection, that's why they were sad, you see. They didn't believe in the afterlife, they didn't believe in angels...some of you were a bit slow there! This is evident in verse 23: 'The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: 'Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother'' - and that's Deuteronomy 25, the law of the Levirate marriage. They cite this probably farcical incident: ''Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her''.

Now, you understand that they're not really concerned whether you're married in heaven or not. Their issue was the resurrection, they were trying to trip the Lord up with this ridiculous idea, they felt, of the resurrection - because if you're married seven times on the earth, I mean, who's going to be your wife or husband in heaven? 'Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living''.

Now, they present this hypothetical scenario, and Christ is teaching here very clearly that men who have been men on earth will be men in heaven, and women who have been women on earth will be women in heaven, but there will be no marrying and no giving in marriage. In that way we will be like the angels - there will be no marriage in heaven. That's what Jesus very clearly taught. Now, why will there be no marriage in heaven? Well, I'll not be facetious and say, 'It's heaven!' - but it won't be in heaven because it won't be needed. Now, you say: 'What do you mean it won't be needed?'. Well, I alluded to this the other night but I didn't really get to it in depth, but we must understand this: heaven is the substance and earth is the shadow - do you understand? Heaven is the real thing. When Moses went up the mount and God gave him the plans of the Tabernacle, God gave him the plans based on what the Tabernacle and Temple of God in heaven was like. The earthly Tabernacle was a shadow of the reality, the substance in heaven. I believe that's always the case. As I said the other night, God didn't call Himself 'Father', and Jesus 'His Son' because we can understand it, because we are fathers and sons down here - no. He made us fathers and sons down here because His relationship is a Father-Son relationship with the Lord Jesus in heaven. That's the substance, we are the shadow.

In the same regard, this is how it is with marriage. It will not be needed because marriage is a shadow of the substance in heaven. Ephesians chapter 5 says that marriage is a mystery, it signifies Christ and the Church. The male is meant to be representing Christ, the female the bride, which is the church, and so the marriage institution on earth is a signpost pointing to the relationship that we are going to have with Christ as our Bridegroom in heaven. Now, here's the bottom line: signposts are unnecessary when you reach the destination. Have you got it? Because marriage is the copy, marriage is the echo, marriage is the shadow of the true ultimate marriage between Christ and His church. So the purpose of the marriage institution in this life was to point us to, and prepare us for heaven.

Now, that's clear, there will be no marriage institution in heaven - but obviously that bothers

some people. From that fact they make some wrong conclusions, and by that I mean they say: 'Well, I love my wife', or, 'I love my husband, and I want to continue with them in heaven'. Now please bear with me, this is important: that is a false assumption that you're making from that fact that there is no marriage in heaven. Let me put it to you like this: are you conceiving that you will be more distant from your husband or wife now in heaven, is that what you're thinking about? It'll not be like that at all, in fact you will be closer to your husband or your wife in heaven. I believe that nothing will take away from the fact that you and your spouse were married on earth and invested so much of each other's lives in each other. Jesus said, follow with me, Jesus said that the institution of marriage would end, having served its purpose - but He never hinted that deep relationships that have been between married people would end. What I mean is: it's not that you and your spouse will lose that relationship in heaven, but rather that you will gain a full relationship in heaven, but not in the marriage institution.

Now, I know this may be confusing, but hopefully it will become clear. Let me illustrate it to you like this: in our lives two people can be business partners, for instance, or golfing partners - but often when their business partnership dissolves, or they don't play golf anymore, that doesn't mean their friendship ends, does it? In fact, many will continue in a very deep friendship even though their business partnership or their golfing partnership ends. Now this is where I'm coming from: God, generally, doesn't rubbish His creation. Remember that the marriage bond was ordained before the fall. What God does is: He makes it new, but when He does - on very rare occasions - replace His original creation, He always does it with something far better! OK, are you with me? So the marriage institution will cease, but your relationship could not conceivably get worse in heaven - as if you're going to be wandering around not knowing who your husband or wife is, or not feeling any affection toward them that you ever did in a life in the will of God.

Here's the main thing to remember - and I mightn't be answering this question categorically for you - but here's the main thing to keep in your mind regarding this, if this troubles you, and I'm sure it has troubled many of you. Psalm 17 verse 15 says: 'When I awake with His likeness, I will be satisfied'. Now, that quietens all fears, doesn't it? Nothing to worry about anticipating heaven, OK? So, whatever your worry is, and maybe it is several spouses like the passage that we read from Matthew chapter 22, and this is a very serious question that people have - to be married several times, and what's going to happen to these folk if they're in heaven? Well, I don't have a specific answer to that, but simply to say that relationships in heaven, it would indicate, are retained in some shape or form, though the marriage bond ceases - but we are all perfect! It's a perfect environment, and that means we will relate perfectly to everyone around us: to our spouse, or those who have been spouses. But here's the bottom line: it will be far better!

Now I know that that raises many many questions, but it should settle many many fears. Well, it would be naive of us to think that everybody wants to relate in heaven the way that they related on earth, wouldn't it? Because many of us have difficult relationships with folk, even believers on earth. A lifetime of broken-heartedness that stems from twisted family and other relationships, we don't want that baggage to be carried into heaven - but the good news is: it won't! Now think about this - and I know that believers have difficult relationships with believers and their families - but in heaven neither our family, nor any other member of the body of Christ, will cause us any pain. Our relationships, finally, will be harmonious - and that is what we have longed for, isn't it?

Jonathan Edwards, the great puritan theologian of America said, 'No inhabitant of that blessed

world will ever be grieved with the thought that they are slighted by those they love, or that their love is not fully and fondly returned'. Isn't it a wonderful phrase of the apostles: 'Better by far'! That's what we must dwell on.

But what about family? We've talked about marriage, what about family? Well, turn with me to Ephesians 3 verses 14 and 15. How will we relate to family members? Ephesians 3:14-15 says: 'For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named'. Now Christians are called a family - I mean we talk about 'the family of God', don't we? - because we have all one Father, and our Lord taught us to pray: 'Our Father, which art in heaven'. It's never 'My Father', it's 'Our Father' - although you can say 'My Father', but our Lord taught us 'Our Father' to indicate the collective nature of His family, because we are all the children of God. We relate to Him, we've been born again, and in the community of faith we are God's family.

Again, now here is this principle: earth is what? Earth is the shadow, heaven is the substance - OK? So the family unit down here is foreshadowing of the great family unit up there. The difference is it's not a billion or a zillion families that existed down here on earth, it's one big family with one Father in heaven. Not separate families, but one great family. Now, in saying that, I think when we die one of the few things that we do carry with us into heaven is our friendships and relationships that we've had down here. They will differ, they will change, but I cannot conceive - and I don't think anything in the Bible indicates - that they will cease. We've said that regarding marriage, we've said that regarding people we know, and it's the same with family.

Randy Alcorn, who has written a very helpful book on heaven, says: 'Nothing will negate or minimise the fact that we were members of families on the old earth'. Relatives, in that sense, always will be in the sense of our emotional ties, but there will be one family, one whole family - and that will be better. Now the question might be in your mind: what of loved ones who aren't there? That's a big one. Well, I don't believe that you'll go through all eternity in the new heaven and the new earth with a consciousness of the eternal torment of a loved one. Hell will have no power over heaven, and cannot, and none of hell's misery will ever veto any of heaven's joy - so let that one lie. Think about this, think of it positively - 'Heaven help us' is an expression, but heaven does help us if we would dwell on it a bit more. Think about this: heaven will be an opportunity to develop old undeveloped family relationships, an opportunity to develop old but undeveloped family relationships.

Take David, for instance, you know that David's child to Bathsheba died. In 2 Samuel 12 verse 23 we read that David had been fasting and praying that the child would recover from this sickness, and he died. David stopped fasting and stopped praying, and said: 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me'. Now some scholars would say: 'Well, he was talking about the grave, I will go to the grave and follow him there' - but, you know, David stopped his fasting and stopped his praying, it would indicate that he took hope, he took some kind of joy out of this anticipation that he would meet him one day. It cheered him up. Now I'm sure there's someone here who has lost an infant, maybe at birth or not long after birth, or a young child, or an older child - but think that heaven will be an opportunity to develop old relationships that have remained hitherto undeveloped. Isn't that amazing? Especially regarding children. Children don't go to heaven because they're innocent, none of them are innocent even from birth - but because of the mercy and grace of God - and I think it's indicated towards the children in the Bible, and our Lord Jesus welcomed them to come to Him, for such is the kingdom of God. Imagine what it will be for someone who has lost a child for, perhaps, their child - at whatever age they might be, I don't know - for perhaps their

child to take them by the hand and show them around heaven.

A chance to develop old undeveloped family relationships - but what about to develop new relationships that never had been. Imagine walking down the pastures of the new earth with Abraham or Moses or David, or any of the patriarchs, any of the prophets, any of the apostles, the great saints of the ages. I'm sure you have your favourite writers, or the martyrs, or the reformers - imagine what it would be like to strike up a friendship with them! Imagine how glorious for grandchildren and grandparents who have never really know one another, or great-grandparents and great-grandchildren who never ever met one another, to enjoy youth together in the cities, and fields, and hillsides, and waters of the new heaven and the new earth.

Maybe you were robbed of a parent early in life, I don't know - but you've all eternity, if they're in Christ and if they're in glory, all eternity to catch up! Maybe a father died before he took you down the aisle, and he's a believer in Christ - well, he'll be there for your marriage to the Lamb. It's staggering to think about it, to walk together with loved ones who you never really got time to have a relationship with, and what it is to explore heaven and praise the Lord together.

Now here's a very delicate one: if you weren't able to have children on earth, God, I believe, will give you relationships that meet the needs that never were satisfied on earth. You will be able to invest those maternal or paternal instincts and cravings on others, and that aching pain will be healed. That's what the Bible says: we shall be satisfied! Do you know what heaven is all about? Now listen carefully, whatever it is or is not, and whatever the answers are or are not, heaven is all about compensation - lost time being restored. Read one portion with me, and I'm closing now - Luke's gospel chapter 6 and verse 21: 'Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets'.

Here's one for you, Romans 8:18: 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us'. Now, that's marvellous! The suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Now listen carefully to what I'm about to say. There is a story told, I think it's only a legend, about a man who was wrongly convicted of a crime. A ball and chain was put around his ankle and he was thrown into the dungeon. Later on it was found that he was innocent of the crimes he was charged for, and the King declared that he was justified and he should be released. He ordered the guards to cut off his ball and chain and put it on a scale, and give him, in gold, the weight of the ball and chain. It was at that moment that the prisoner wished that his ball and chain was a lot heavier. The sufferings of this present world are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Luther said of this great compensation: 'I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all, but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess'.

It's wonderful, isn't it? You know, we don't think of heaven often enough. Never again should you wonder if we'll see those saved loved ones again, and know them in heaven. Listen as I close to J.C. Ryle on this regard, he spoke to his own flock and he said: 'Those whom you laid in the grave with many tears are in good keeping. You will yet see them again with joy. Believe it! Think it! Rest on it! It is all true! There is something unspeakably comforting, moreover as well as glorious, in this prospect. It lights up the valley of the shadow of death.

It strips the sickbed and the grave of half their terrors. Our beloved friends who have fallen asleep in Christ are not lost, but only gone on before. These eyes of ours shall once more look upon their faces. These ears of ours shall once more hear them speak. Blessed and happy indeed will that meeting be, better a thousand times than the parting. We parted in sorrow, and we shall meet in joy. We parted in stormy weather, and we shall meet in calm harbour. We parted amidst pain and aches and groans and infirmities, we shall meet with glorious bodies, able to serve our Lord forever without distraction - and best of all, we shall meet never to be parted, never to shed one more tear, never to put on mourning, never to say goodbye and farewell again. Oh, it is a blessed thought that saints will know one another in heaven!'.

Let us pray. Father, I pray that the truth of Your word would remain in the hearts of those who have been able to receive, and that there will be comfort, help, sustenance, and edification. Oh God, Lord, this is a myth, that we might be too heavenly minded for any earthly good - we can only be any earthly good if we are heavenly minded. Lord, that's where we are told we are seated with Christ, and we pray that we will allow heaven - as a hymn writer put it - 'Just one glimpse of Him in glory, will the toils of life repay'. Lord, we pray that these answers would not just be a help to the one that asked the questions, but to all our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

101 Christian Questions - Chapter 5
"The Curious Christ"

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Well, good morning to you all. It's good to be back with you today, and let me just say what a delight it has been to have fellowship with you Tuesday through to Friday each night. I enjoyed being here, and I enjoyed attempting to answer your questions. Thank you for those questions, and I'm sorry I went on a bit long each night, but that was your fault - don't ever forget that now! That was your fault for asking too many questions! But I'll try and keep it tighter this morning in the meeting.

I want you to turn with me in your Bible to Mark chapter 2. Now this is, I suppose, in keeping with the theme of questions, and I've entitled this message: 'The Curious Christ'. This time the questions in this portion - and there are four - are being asked of the Lord Jesus. It's an interesting study, and we'll take a while to look at it this morning. Mark chapter 2, and we're going to read the whole chapter. I want you to try - right away, I've given you a head start - try to find the questions, there's four. If you have a pretty up-to-date edition of the scriptures, your chapter could already be broken up into four, and that will help you right away.

Chapter 2 then, verse 1: *"And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you'. And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, 'Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins'; He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house'. Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!' Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office",* that's Matthew of course, *"and He said to him, 'Follow Me'. So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'. The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will*

come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins'. Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, 'Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' But He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?' And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath''.

Winston Churchill, who I'm sure will be mentioned many times today, said of the Soviet Union that it was a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. In other words, it was hard to understand! That's how the Jews viewed the Lord Jesus Christ: He was curious to them. It has to be said, that is probably how the majority of the world still views the Lord Jesus Christ: a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. The tragedy is: the Jews, because they couldn't explain Him, rejected Him. Sadly that's what this world does, and that's often what we do with things in general - if we can't understand a thing we reject it. In chapter 2 of Mark's gospel we have in embryo the great rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish nation. It is compiled around four questions. In verse 7 we have this question: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?'. In verse 16 they ask: 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?'. In verse 18, 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'; and verse 24, 'Why do they do on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?'.

Now, when we come into chapter 3 of Mark, we find that this rejection that has been in embryo in chapter 2 now is manifest. In verse 21, if you will look at chapter 3, we see that His friends begin to publicly reject the Lord: 'But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind''. His friends thought He was mad. Then verse 22 of the same chapter, we read that the scribes reject Him: 'The scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebub', and, 'By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons''. The scribes, the religious establishment, is now rejecting Him, saying He's demon-possessed. Now if you look at verse 31, down the chapter a bit, you will see that His own family, His immediate relatives reject Him: 'Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You'. But He answered them, saying, 'Who is My mother, or My brothers?''. It seems that His family was embarrassed by Him, and so made this attempt to restrain Him and take Him back home to Nazareth before things got worse.

Now if we come to chapter 4, we have the parable of the sower, and basically that parable teaches that the majority of people who hear the word of God will not receive it as they ought. Now, what's that only rejection? The Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples that they've got to be prepared for that. When we come into chapter 5, we have the very well-known story of a demon-possessed man, the Gadarene - but verse 15 tells us that the people of the area where the Gadarene lived rejected the Lord Jesus for doing this great miracle. They couldn't understand Him, so what did they do? They rejected Him, verse 15: 'Then they came to Jesus', chapter 5, 'saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who saw it told them how

it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Jesus to depart from their region'.

Believe it or not, when we come to verse 31, even His disciples start doubting and, in a sense, in spirit, may be rejecting a little bit His ministry. Verse 31 of chapter 5: 'But His disciples said to Him, 'You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'', you remember the woman who was in the crowd with the issue of blood for many years. Now the inference there is that they're starting to doubt, 'Lord, what are You talking about, we don't understand You'. You see, they can't explain why He should say in a crowd: 'Who touched me?', and so there is that tone, I think, in their statement where they say, 'the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched You?''.

Then if you go to verse 40 of chapter 5, you remember Jairus' daughter that Jesus has been sent for to help her. There were mourners in the house, and when the Lord Jesus, says that the child is not dead, but sleeping, in verse 40 it says they ridiculed Him. They thought this was ridiculous! Now, you would be a little bit sympathetic with them - but they openly ridiculed the Lord Jesus, they were rejecting Him. If you go to chapter 6 and verse 2, we find this regarding the Nazarenes - that's the people of Jesus' own town: 'And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!''. Now that word 'astonished' has the sense of being deflated, like a tyre that is going down - they were astonished! Webster says this could be translated, 'They were completely flabbergasted'. 'Who is this man?' - their problem was, having grown up with Jesus in Nazareth, they were too close to Him, they were too familiar with Him to see His greatness. In verse 3, if you read it, of chapter 6 they say: ''Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?' And they were offended at Him'. That word 'offended' is a word that means 'stumbling stone', and it's the word that we derive our English word 'scandal' from. They were scandalised by the Lord Jesus!

Ultimately this rejection that we see in embryo in chapter 2, and then manifested in chapter 3 on, is completed and climaxed in the cross, where the whole nation, the whole people, reject the Lord Jesus - and Mark's gospel, of course, is the gospel of the cross. Now here's a lesson: education has trained us in our generation to question everything, and you have been questioning a lot of things during the week - and that's commendable. We ought to use the brains that God has given us, and we ought to reason as far as we can, as long as we realise that there is a limit to our human intellect. We must beware, especially in spiritual things, of trying to rationalise everything - because we can't - but if we do, that will lead, inevitably, to unbelief. You have it in chapter 6 and verse 6: 'And He marveled because of their unbelief', the people of His own town, and then He left them and 'He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching' other people who would receive Him.

Now you cannot explain the unexplainable - you can't! No matter how clever you are and the education that you've had! That applies to many holy truths, it applies to the Trinity, it applies to God's sovereignty and how that relates to human responsibility as we have touched upon this week - but primarily in this context it applies to the incomprehensible Christ. You cannot understand Him completely! We might be curious about Christ, but we've got to come to terms with the fact that we are not called upon to explain every aspect and characteristic of our Lord Jesus, but we are called upon to believe in Him and worship Him in awe before the One who is beyond us.

Now, such rejection that we have seen evidenced in these portions seem to be poles apart with verse 1 and verse 2 of chapter 2 that we read together, because we see there that the people were thronging the house where Jesus was because they wanted to be healed, and they wanted to be helped in the problems of life. It shows you how fickle humanity really is, doesn't it? As the old hymn puts it:

'Sometimes they strew His way
And His sweet praises sing,
Resounding all the day,
Hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify!'
Is all their breath,
And for His death
They thirst and cry'.

People heard that He was healing but, when the multitude came, what did Christ give them? This is a good point for you in the church here in verse 2: they came for healing, and I'm not suggesting they didn't get it, but it says at the end of verse 2, 'And He preached to them the Word' - that is the greatest need of humanity. I believe God heals, and does heal today, but the greatest need is for God's word, the greatest need is that the sin problem would be healed.

Now, let's look at this passage this morning. If you were to look at chapter 2 right through to chapter 3 verse 6 - and we've left off that chapter 3 part - there are five accounts in the ministry of our Lord Jesus that are marked by controversy. The Lord and His disciples are being challenged by the Pharisees and the scribal interpreters of Jewish tradition, and He is scandalising them by His behaviour. But here's an important point, and I want you to grasp this: the ground of their objections was their own understanding of spiritual things - that was the ground of their objection, their own understanding of spiritual things. So when God started to work outside their tradition, they were confounded because they couldn't think outside the box of their own accepted wisdom and their own authorities.

We see this in the first question that they asked the Lord Jesus in verse 7: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?'. Now in all these questions that I'm going to bring before you this morning, there is an issue at stake, there is an attitude displayed by the Pharisees, and there is an answer that the Lord Jesus Christ gives in every one. So follow with me: the first one, verse 7, 'Who can forgive sins but God?'. The issue was authority, that's what the Pharisees were getting at: who has authority to forgive sins but God? Now, if you were to look at chapter 1 verse 22, you would see there that the people recognised He had authority in His teaching: 'They were astonished', chapter 1 verse 22, 'at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'. Where they getting jealous? I think so.

When you look at verse 27 of chapter 1, you see also that it was recognised that He had authority over demons: 'Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him''. In verses 29 through to 34, we'll not read it, and in verses 40 through to 45, He demonstrates His authority over sickness and disease. Now what is He doing? He has the audacity to claim authority to forgive sins! How can He have authority to forgive sins? That's the issue of the Pharisees over authority.

But what you've got to see is behind the facade to their attitude, and their attitude was

commendable in a sense - because they were coming from the perspective that 'Only divinity can pronounce absolution! Only God can forgive sins'. Now this is very interesting, how the Pharisees at the one point can be theologically correct, and yet come to wrong conclusions. Is that not an interesting one? Vance Havner said: 'Often evangelicals have all the facts and come to the wrong conclusions' - it's worth pondering. But the answer of the Lord Jesus Christ really focuses on the authority, because He in a sense agrees with the Pharisees, but He fills in the missing part that they couldn't see - His answer basically was: 'Authority has just come from Divinity, that's what you're missing!'.

The Lord Jesus, you see, in His life didn't just claim divinity, to be God and to be God's Son; He demonstrated God's authority. This is what He was doing in chapter 2 verses 9 and 10, and this is what this means: ''Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sin'', that's why He said to the paralytic...

Now, the Lord Jesus is saying this: which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you', or 'Arise and walk'? Now, I'm asking the questions now this morning! Which is easier to say? Have a bash! Come on now, you can't ask all the questions of me, and stand me up here all week and then not answer one very simple question I'm asking you! ...Well, if you said 'Arise and walk', you're wrong! Because it's easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven you', why? Because who knows! There is no evidence. The harder thing to say is: 'Get up and walk', because if somebody doesn't do it you're finished, your authority is over! What the Lord Jesus was saying is: 'Which is easier to say? It's easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven you', but I have proved to you that I have power on earth to forgive sins by raising this paralytic!'. So He's saying: 'Yes, forgiveness comes from divine authority, but I have demonstrated it to you' - He was God.

Now we come to God in Jesus' name, but let us never forget that He is God of very God, and He has divine power and authority. Now that ought to encourage you, whatever you're going through today. It ought to encourage you if you're not converted, and you've committed heinous sins, that Jesus Christ has power to forgive sins and He can forgive yours. Backslider today, He has power to erase all your misdemeanours - now they're all forgiven if you were truly saved in the first place, but He has power to wipe away all those foul things that are hindering your fellowship with Him at this moment. Don't you ever think that you can't come home, like the prodigal, when the Father is looking out for you.

That's not where I want to leave it this morning, the second question, we've got to move on - verse 16: 'How is it that He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners?'. Now the issue for the Pharisees was His company - and, by the way, I hope you know that 'Pharisee' means 'detached one' or 'separate one'. They just couldn't handle the company the Lord Jesus was keeping. Their attitude was: it was bad company! You've got to understand that tax collectors were despised, and they were despised - rightly so in a sense - by the fact that they were dishonest, they were lining their own pockets with the taxes that they were collecting. But they were also, as far as the Jews were concerned, disloyal - because they were in cahoots with the Roman establishment, who were the occupiers at that time, and so they were seen to be traitors. But they also were defiled, they were despised because they were ceremonially unclean as far as the Jews were concerned. The rabbis taught that you shouldn't talk with them, you shouldn't walk with them, and above all you shouldn't eat with them.

You can see their problem! The answer of the Lord Jesus to this indictment of bad company in verse 17 is clear: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I

did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'. Who else would you expect the Saviour of sinners to be with, but sinners? Who would you expect Him to be mingling with? You see this is vital, because the Pharisees consider themselves as being well, 'We're the separate ones, and if we mingle with the 'hoy polloy' we'll get defiled, and we'll get dirty'. They saw themselves as well, when really Jesus says: 'No, you're sick, but your problem is you don't see it! When those who are the sinners are sick, but they know it, and that's why I'm with them, and that's why I'm making them well - because they know they're sick'.

The reason why this is so, as verse 17 says, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'. He didn't come to call people who thought they were righteous, that's the inference, but were really sinners - but He came to save those who were sinners and knew they were sinners, He came to call them to repentance. Now that is evidenced in verse 14, the feast in Levi's house, but before that there was the conversion - He called Levi, Matthew, a tax collector. It is evidenced not only in Levi's conversion, the conversion of these type of deep-dyed sinners, but the fact that Jesus was content - verse 15 - in their company: 'Jesus also sat together with them, and His disciples; for many of them followed'. One translation puts it that He didn't just sit with them, 'He reclined at table', you know how they did in those days - the table was way down low, it was probably about that level to this platform. They didn't sit on stools, they reclined on their elbows - and the Lord Jesus looks comfortable, that was the Pharisees' problem! He's comfortable with these folk.

Kent Hughes says in his commentary, and this is worthy of your consideration, I don't have time to elaborate: 'Perhaps none of us espouse such pharisaical beliefs, in fact we loathe them, but many of us live them out nevertheless. We come to Christ and in our desire to be godly we seek out people like us. Ultimately we arrange our lives so that we are with non-believers as little as possible. We attend Bible Studies that are 100% Christian, prayer meetings that are 100% Christian. We play tennis with Christians, and eat dinner with Christians. We have Christian doctors, Christian dentists, Christian plumbers, Christian veterinarians, and even our dogs are Christians! The result is that we pass by hundreds without ever noticing them, or positively influencing them for Christ. None of us are Pharisees philosophically, but we may be practically'.

Does His company strike you as curious? Does it? Does it? It's a question! Well, if it does, you need to analyse your heart, and we also need to analyse our practice. The third question, verse 18: 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'. Now, the issue is ceremony. It's likely that at this present time the people were observing a fast - on Mondays and Thursdays they fasted. So, if you think about this, Levi's having a feast on one of the religious fast days - and who's there enjoying it? Jesus! So the issue is: ceremony - He's just walking it under His feet.

The attitude of the Pharisees is 'gluttony', that's their attitude. In fact, we haven't time to look at it, but in Matthew chapter 11 verse 19 they say that He is a glutton, He is a drunkard, a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. Not only was He in bad company, but He's enjoying it! Not only is He with these people, but He's feasting on a fast day in their company! Now what is the answer that the Lord Jesus brings to this? Here it is: 'I came to bring gladness, not sadness'! Now, don't interpret this as the Lord being anti-fasting, because He was not. He said that the day would come, which I believe is today, when His followers would fast. But what you've got to understand is that the Old Testament only prescribed one day a year for fasting, and the Pharisees - by their accepted wisdom, generally, concerning the whole law - they had added so many rules and regulations and traditions of their own that

they had extracted all the semblance of joy from religious experience. Things that should have brought joy into their life were burdensome and weighing people down. But here's the Lord, and His life is a feast, not a famine - He's talking about new garments, not a patch-up job like Judaism; He's speaking about new wineskins and new wine. He's talking about joy that would explode the old forms of Judaism, something new was necessary - and we know what that something new was in Acts chapter 2, it was the birth of the church. What happened at the birth of the church? Everybody around, who were Jews by the way, thought the Christians were drunk! New wine, the joy of the Lord. Such exuberant joy!

Now, is such exuberant joy curious to you? It's curious to me that Christians are meant to have it, sometimes, when I look down at the congregations I have to preach to on a regular basis! Paul said in Galatians, one translation put it like this: 'What has happened to all your joy?'. What has happened to all your joy? Now, we are to fast, and I think it's a day that we need to be fasting and praying - but let nothing, let nothing take away from the joy that the Lord Jesus has brought us. The issue was ceremony, the accusation and attitude of the Pharisees was gluttony, they accused Jesus of, but He pronounces that He came to bring gladness, not sadness.

The final question in verse 24: 'Why do they do on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?'. Now the issue is legality. The law, in Deuteronomy 23, expressly said - now follow with me - it expressly said that it was not illegal, not illegal, for a hungry person to take some of his neighbour's fruit or grain, provided he didn't fill a vessel or use it as a harvesting tool. Do you understand? So you're allowed to pick for a wee snack if you're hungry, but you're not allowed to take a whole load to harvest it for your family or to sell it on. Now that's what the law said, but what was the attitude of the Pharisees? Their attitude was: infallibility. What I mean by that is: they had developed all their own extra rules - and they had these rules for good reason, by the way, they were like fences to keep people away from coming anywhere near breaking the law. But the problem was: these fences themselves became the rules and became infallible! They had 39 extra laws added on to Deuteronomy and the rest of the law concerning the Sabbath, and four of those 39 prohibited this reaping, winnowing, threshing, and preparing a meal. They were added on to God's law, and according to their hair-splitting rules, the disciples - by plucking, by removing the husk, and by eating the corn - had broken all those rules.

So their issue was legality, but what they failed to see was that they had elevated their additional rules and traditions to the status of infallibility. The answer that the Lord Jesus brings them is: infallibility is from God's Word, not man's. Verse 25: 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?'.

Now David had broken God's law by going into the Temple and doing this, that's a very interesting point - yet he's not rebuked by God. Now we're not going to dwell on that, save to say that I feel that the Bible teaches, right throughout, that as far as God is concerned: lives are more important than laws. But Jesus' point is: if David actually did break the law by going in and doing this, how much more blameless are my disciples who, under similar circumstances, have broken nothing, because the law allows them to do this? All they have broken is the tradition of the elders. What Jesus was demonstrating was that God is more concerned with meeting people's needs than He is with protecting man-made traditions. Often in the church we've got God's priorities confused.

In Matthew chapter 12 and verse 7 the Lord Jesus said: 'If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless'. Now the underlying truth of this incident here with the grain and the plucking of it was: when David did this, went into the Temple and ate the shewbread, he was on the run - do you remember? He was the anointed king, and yet he was rejected by Israel. We have the exact same scenario here in Mark: Jesus is the anointed King, and as He's travelling He's plucking grain - and again, as it was in the days of David, so it is in the days that Messiah has come, things are not right in Israel. The Pharisees should have been feasting in the presence of their Messiah, but what are they doing? They're plotting His death.

If you look at chapter 3 and verse 6: 'Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him'. It's incredible, isn't it? Why? Why did they want to kill this miraculous Man? Well, there are many reasons, but one is: He didn't fit their man-made mould of what Messiah should be, and how He should behave. He was the curious Christ to them, they weren't satisfied with Him. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying as I apply this as I close: when there is a conflict between our ways and God's ways, do you know what we have to do? We have to bow our brains to the Bible. We can't explain everything. Maybe you're unsaved here this morning, and you've got great questions and doubts, and Christ is curious to you. Well, that's OK, but I encourage you to search the scriptures and look at His character, and look at His person, and I believe that you will be truly satisfied in all your questions and doubts - at least most of them.

Maybe you're saved here today, can I ask you a very very personal question? Are you still satisfied with the Lord Jesus and His word? It seems to me, and I have to confess of myself at times, that Christians seem to need more these days at times, they just need 'a wee bit more'. 'Jesus and...' whatever, whatever it may be - and the church, at times, is guilty of this. They need more than just Christ and His truth, but when you look at this passage of Scripture: what could be more exciting than this Man? But beware of questioning Him, because their questioning of Him - if you're an unsaved person, if you're a backslider, if you're a doubting Christian - your questioning of Him, like these Jews, will lead to your loss of Him. I'm not saying you can become unsaved or anything, but the loss of His presence - because after this event, He departed and went to other villages and ministered to them. There may be some here today that will have to say:

'What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
This world can never fill'.

Is that you? Come back to this curious Christ, and don't try to explain Him - He cannot be explained. If you want to explain Him in completeness, you will end up rejecting Him - but if you allow the mystery and the majesty of His person to overwhelm you, you will fall at His feet and worship. Like doubting Thomas, you will say: 'My Lord and my God!'. May God bless His word to our hearts.

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