



Obstacles on the Road to Christ: Diversion

Luke 11:27-28

It was a few summer back my family and I were vacationing and making our way up the east coast of our country, and we had planned to go as far north as the Canadian city of St. John. So, making our plans, it dawned on me that we have some friends that live in St. John who used to be here at our church. And so I gave them a call and I set it up, and I said, "Hey, let's meet. Let's check it out, you can have a meal, you can show us your home town and see your place. It'll be great." So weeks ahead of time we'd planned that all out. Well, we rolled into town on the morning we were scheduled to be there, and I called my friend. I said, Ok, well, let's meet at this particular place, at a particular time. We tried to figure out what restaurant we're gonna meet to get started. And the more we talked the more confusing and strange the conversation became. It was like... it got really weird. And my friend slowed down and said, "I think you're in St. John." I said, "Duh, yeah. That's, isn't that the whole point?" (1:27)

"We're in St. John's."

I said, "Oh. Is that a problem?" He said, "Yeah. You're in New Brunswick. We're in Newfoundland, about 800 hundred miles away from St. John." I said, "Well, I'm gonna be late for lunch. Uhm. Oops." Hah. I realized that that little apostrophe "s", when it comes to the eastern coastal town in Canada, you'd better make sure you're talking about the right one. Because the problem when you've got things that seem similar, you confuse two things that on the surface they seem like the same thing, but on closer inspection you find they're radically different. And when that's the case, you're gonna find yourself sometimes in some gigantic diversions taking you into situations with consequences. (2:19)

Now my friends were gracious that I wasn't careful to read the difference between St. John and St. John's, but when it comes to our relationship with God, God is very clear, crystal clear. And he says, you know, you cannot confuse just any old response to Christ as the one I'm looking for. As a matter of fact, you've gotta see that a lot of people are responding to Christ, and what may appear on the surface to be very similar responses, but in reality they are radically different. And if you don't make those distinctions, you're gonna find yourself in a situation of being completely fooled about what it means to be a Christian or a follower of Christ. So we need to note those distinctions. And Christ underlined, underscored, highlighted one of the most important distinctions that we need to make when it comes to the gospel and our response to Christ. (3:08)

In the two verses we've arrived at in our study of Luke, we've come to Luke 11:27-28, and if your Bible's not already open to that passage, get your eyeballs on those verses and let's look at what Jesus says. In a strange interruption to his teaching, which we need to glean some knowledge and wisdom from. Let's take a look at this. In Luke 11, you can glance through where we've been here. We had this strange phenomenon of this demon that made this man mute. And then we had this teaching about demons and the problem of just kind of cleaning up your life. We called that sermon "Propriety", when we kind of mistake real Christianity and transformation with just kind of making sure we're living a respectable life. Well, now we get to this interruption, verse 27, when Jesus said these things. (3:50)



Follow along as I read it. Luke 11:27. A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Bless is the womb that bore you, and the breast at which you nursed.' Now, that's a strange interruption to a sermon, there. It's just a poetic way of describing it, but of course she's saying, man, your mom just must be really blessed to have a son like you. And he says, verse 28, note it carefully, yeah, my mom's really proud of me. She is blessed. (4:20)

That what he says? No. He says, no, listen. You want to talk about favor, and good, and advantage, and blessing, no. Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Now that's kind of like shoving your compliment right back in your face. But Jesus had no problem being very forthright and even risking offense when people said things, and said, no, wait a minute, that's not the response we're looking for. Well, what response is that? Now let's imply this, because when it comes down to it she's saying how great it would be to be your mom, or to be closely connected and associated with you. Can you imagine being in the family and having this person emerge from this family that becomes this radically wise and amazing person, and maybe she even understands him to be the Messiah. What an amazing thing for someone to know you all those years, and to live with you and to glean your knowledge everyday in your family. Whoa, amazing. That would be amazing. (5:16)

And he says it's not about that. It's not about being closely associated with me. It's not about having connection with me. It's not about being in my family biologically. It's not that they've known me for many years. That's not where blessing, and advantage, and good is to be found. The advantage, and the good, and the blessing comes from those who hear the word of God and keep it. That's where it's at. Now there's a distinction that's made of something that we need to make a just a clear division in our own mind that one is not good enough because it's just familiarity. It's just knowledge. It's just acquaintance. It's just knowing, and it maybe a lot of knowing but it doesn't replace the doing. It doesn't replace the responsiveness. So let's word it this way if you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, number one on your outline this morning. Let us never let familiarity—that sense of I know Christ, I'm familiar with him, I've been just with him for a long time—replace devotion. (6:11)

1. Never let familiarity replace devotion.

Fully devoted followers of Christ that when God speaks, and of course Jesus equated his words with God's word, which is not supplanting it, it's a continuation and a fulfillment of it. But when the people said, wow, it's great to be closely associated with you. How great it would be to know you the way intimately family members would know one another. He says it's not about that. It's about being a devoted follower of me. It's about you hearing the things that I say, and the things that the Bible has taught that I'm reiterating, and you doing those things. So, there's a distinction there, and that's important for us to catch. Because there were statements that Jesus made that were even more jarring about people that knew him best. (6:53)

I want you turn to Mark 3 real quick as we think about the way Jesus makes a contrast between people that may have just met him, and people that have known him for years. No one knew him more, in terms of intimate knowledge and grew up with him than his family members. They knew him, they knew him well. They knew a lot about him. They knew the way he talked, the way he acted, the way he responded to things. They were able to grow up in a home with Jesus,



and Mary knew him, I suppose in terms of a mom, better than anybody by the time he went into his public ministry. But Jesus said, you know, the people that just meet me this week really can have an advantage and a blessing that people who have known me for years they don't have. Take a look at this in verse 20, and 21. (7:38)

Then he went home to his home town and the crowd gathered again, because you know they just wanted to hear his wisdom, they wanted to have his advantage through his teaching, they wanted to hear the word of God and do it. And that's what was happening in many of these places. So he's giving it to them, and he's engaged in his work of dispensing the truth of God that he didn't even have time to get a meal. Couldn't even eat. When his family heard of it—now think about this. His family loves him, cares for him, has an interest in his well-being. When they heard that he is so engaged in ministry again that he can't even have a meal, they went out to seize him, to grab him. Let's—we gotta get him off that platform. I mean, he is just, he's grinding himself into the ground. He needs a break. My therapist says if you work everyday of the week it's just not good. You know, he needs a little mental tune up. He's out of his mind. (8:26)

Now here's some folks that have this concern for Christ, who've known him for years. Now all these people that are just getting introduced to him are there in the crowd, and you see this, this concern that they have. Now here comes commentary as the scene recurs later on in verse 31. Same kind of situation. After this intervening text about blasphemy against the spirit in verse 31, it says his mother and him brothers came, standing outside of this house now where he's doing ministry, and they sent to him, and they called to him. What did they want? Well they probably wanted what they wanted up in verse 20-21. These crowds are just sucking the life out of our brother or my son, and we just have to, we have to ratchet this back. So word was passed up to the front where Christ is. The crowd was sitting around in verse 32, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you." And he answered them and he said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Well, I just told you. They're outside, you know who they are. What are you talking about? (9:22)

Now you want to know who really is in my family, quote-unquote? You want to know who really has the connection with me that's important? You want to know who my people are? Well, you know, it may not be my mother and my brothers. It certainly isn't in this case, 'cause right now they're acting like they think I'm crazy. They're trying to pull me away from God's will in ministry. Verse 34. And looking at those that sat around him after asking that question, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." Wow. You're going to take people that know you, and care for you, and have known you for years, and you're gonna say, really what trumps that kind of knowledge and familiarity is people that just hear me? They may have known me for a week. And yet they're willing to listen to the word of God and respond to it. (10:14)

Jesus is looking for devoted followers. That's what he's collecting. That's what a disciple is. And to say, well, I guess that's no substitute—I should say familiarity and knowledge are no substitute for, for that. And you're right. And that's very important to know, because you'd look around at people like the brothers of Christ, and the sisters—he had at least two sisters and four brothers—and here they were knowing him, and a mom that cared for him and loved him obviously, and he's saying that's not enough. That's not enough. (10:41)



And how often as we talk to our neighbors, and our coworkers, and our friends, if we find they have a thorough knowledge of Christ, then well then we back off. You need to understand. The goal isn't a thorough knowledge of Christ. You can have a lot of knowledge of Christ and not be a devoted follower of Christ. And the problem is it's going on in the secret places of someone's heart, and you don't know what's going on there. Even if someone is living in conformity to some of the things that God says, you don't know really who's ruling and reigning in that person's heart. (11:10)

And that's important for us to understand. First, I suppose, by holding up the mirror of God's word and saying, well let just think about myself for a second. Do I feel okay with the living God? And think that when I die I'm gonna end up at the right place because in general terms I really, I know God. I know Christ. Is it that you know about him and know of him, and you know a lot about him and a lot of him, and you can probably compare your knowledge with the new people that walk through the door and say, "Well, I know a lot more than you do." Or could it be that the people that are devoted followers of Christ, even if they're two week-old Christians, they're really the blessed people, because in reality they have a real relationship with the living God because they're not just cramming their lives full of information. But they're the kinds of people that hear the word and do it. Here's what James 1 says: "If you hear the word and you do not put it into practice, you're one who deceives himself." Now think about that. What's the deception James has in mind? Well, it seems like a lot of knowledge sure trumps your zeal, but in reality your zeal to follow Christ trumps no matter how much knowledge you have. (12:13)

Now, important to have an understanding of both sides of this. You can the zeal without knowledge, and it can take you to the wrong place. But if you're talking about people's distinctions in the sense that they look at their lives and say I'm okay with God because I know, and I know this and I know that and I know a lot, then you should listen to the testimonies of a lot of people around you. We'll probably here some next week in our baptismal service here on this platform. There are many people who grow up in a church, and most people do in some kind of exposure to Christianity, and they know things, and that gives them a sense of assurance before God. In reality, at some point, they have to have God break through that, and recognize it's know familiarity, it's not knowledge, it's not Bible data. It's something radically different than that that takes places in the secret recesses of your mind and your heart. (13:01)

I've got a testimony like that. Many of you do, too. Maybe some of you are in the situation right now where you're relying on the knowledge that you have. I remember growing up in the church, learning Bibles stories and Bible verses, and learning them by heart and memorizing them, and being all involved in the knowledge of God. But in reality, in my heart, if you peeled back the external layers of being the church kid, the Sunday school kid, the youth group kid, and you say what's going on here? Whose will do you really want to live for? Really, who are you sold out to follow? It came down to the reality of me following my own will, my own life, my own desires, my own path. I'm not saying you know what, God is my God, Christ is my Lord, and it's really not about where I want to go in life. It's about me being a bondservant of Jesus. That's a hard realization to come to. Particularly when you realize you can rise through the ranks, to a level that you never thought you could, and never be converted. (13:57)



You still in John—in Mark 3? We started in verse 20 to kind of set these two pericopes, these two scenes up. Look at verse 19, at the end of his naming of his lieutenants. Right? He's picking the disciples, the apostles. And who's the last one on the list in verse 19? What's his name? We have no kids in the nursery named Judas right now. We despise that name. We don't like Judas. Right? He's not in the baby naming book. Because Judas is the bad guy. He's the traitor. But I don't want you to think of him that way right now. I want you to think about the fact that at this particular time you had Peter, James and John, Nathaniel, Thomas—all the guys who are now named as lieutenants, you got the family members who's kinda thinking he's crazy right now, including Mary, and he has to make the decision about those who do the will of God. And all the twelve are gonna stand back and go, "We're doing the will of God. We're not only doing the will of God because we *know* Christ, we're doing the will of God because we're *serving* Christ. Look at our lives. Look at what we're doing." (14:55)

And the twelfth guy on the list, and he's always named twelfth, but I guarantee ya he wasn't named twelfth before he betrayed Christ. As a matter of fact, you might think he was at least named third, or maybe fourth, or maybe second. Why? Because the Bible says he was the treasurer. He was the one who held the money. Now he's the guy on the board, he is one of the lieutenants, and he's the CFO of the organization. I don't think you give that responsibility to one you name twelfth. Do you? I don't think he was last on people's list. When it came to being convincing that he is a devoted follower of Christ it was something everyone was convinced of, not based on what they could see in his heart, because they couldn't see his heart. It was based on his service to Christ. It seemed like when they were out there passing out the loaves and the fishes, and he was out there evangelizing and preparing the way as he went from town to town, he was like every other devoted follower of Christ. And yet, the Bible says, in many places in the gospels as Jesus calls him out, he's a son of perdition. It'd be better if he wasn't born. The betrayer who comes to do the work of Satan, and it even says Satan filled his heart at one point in the upper room. (16:05)

Think about that. Here's a bad guy among the good guys, and no one could tell the difference. And I guarantee you they couldn't tell the difference 'cause they made him the treasurer. What convinced them? Well, it was more than familiarity. It's not just familiarity with knowledge of God, it's a familiarity and an experience in ministry. Well, how could you be in ministry and not be saved? Look that up sometime. I mean there's books, there's websites, there's blogs, all kinds of things, where people are saying it wasn't just that I was the kid who knew all the verses, man, I was involved in professional ministry. (16:38)

There's a lot of people like that you may not even realize. You know the name John Wesley. John and Charles Wesley. John was the preacher, Charles was the hymn writer. You know, John was on his way in a professional ministry capacity as a missionary. As a missionary. Hey, they'd laid hands on him, they commissioned him, he was off to take the gospel to foreign lands. And on his way he becomes a Christian. Think about that. Impossible. He must not have been well trained. Oh, well trained. I mean, his pedigree, at least theologically, was top shelf. And yet, he realizes in the midst of his ministry that I-I'm not saved. Apparently in the depths of my heart where you can't see, it was in my mind that I'd substituted knowledge and service for the reality of conversion. (17:25)



Martin Luther. You know he was a professor teaching the book of Romans and Psalms and Galatians. Here he was preaching to people who are preparing for ministry, and he's lecturing on the book of Romans. And you know his story, or many of you do, when he comes to faith as a professor of theology. Now you can't be in ministry and not know Christ. Absolutely you can. (17:48)

There are people that were very zealous, maybe in their younger years. Let's talk about Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards. Charles Spurgeon. Well he was a young convert. Well, he was a teenage convert, and before his conversion he was very active in trying to evangelize people. He was out there defending there as a P.K., a pastor's kid, he was out defending the sermons and the preaching of his father, and he was zealous to have people respond rightly to the gospel. And yet he wasn't saved. Read his testimony. Took a sermon on a day he didn't even intend to—you know, he couldn't make it to his own church, where he ducks in in the middle of this storm. Here's a sermon from a guy who wasn't even capable of preaching an eloquent sermon, and he's hit with the gospel, and here's a guy that's been active in ministry and he becomes a Christian. (18:34)

Jonathan Edwards. A passionate leader for prayer. Garnering people to pray with him. Praying in a—he built a shack out in the woods just so he could pray, and he was all about that. Everyone knew him as the most devoted person. He was influential in helping turn from their prayerless lives to pray. And read his testimony. God gets a hold of his life and he realizes he's not one who's really submissive to the word of God. There was something in his heart that basically said I'm living for me, not for Christ. (19:07)

Don't let familiarity replace devotion. It can be really extreme and go far past familiarity. It can get to the place of full-blown service. And that should bring to mind, and I don't want to be so redundant, but it is the scariest verse in the Bible because the people standing there on Judgment Day who face Christ, Christ says, "Depart from me." But not until they give their resume, not just of their knowledge of Christ, but their service to Christ. So let's hold a mirror up to ourselves and say, just like Paul would say to Timothy, a senior pastor in a church in Ephesus, hey, I mean, you need to make your sense of relationship with God sure. I mean, there's an implied sense of are you testing yourself to see if you're of the faith, which he said to the Corinthians. Make sure you're saved, and then recognize that sometimes you're gonna engage people in the marketplace and in your families that are gonna say, "Well, yeah, of course I'm saved." There was a bunch of Moravians who sat across the bow when John Wesley was sitting there scared in a storm, and he looked at this guys with a peace in their heart, and he said, well, my life is different than theirs. And here's the gutsy Moravians who looked at John Wesley and didn't say, well we don't want to fruit inspectors, and we don't want to call his salvation into question. I mean, he is a missionary. They were willing and gutsy enough to share the gospel with a guy who was a professional missionary, and say, hey, are you really right with the living God? (20:27)

I know that can get us in trouble, and it can be offensive to people. But if you've got a Romans 9, and Romans 10, verses 1 and 2 in both of those chapters, concern for lost people, you're not gonna let people substitute knowledge of Christ, or even a resume of service to Christ, for devotion to Christ. They're two different things, and you cannot confuse the two. No, it's really not the quintessential blessing to be super familiar with me like my family members and my



mom. No, the real blessing is for those who hear the word of God and keep it. (21:06)

Now, verse 27. Now I'm trying to be an expositor here. And I'm gonna fill in here a potential problem based on what we see in early church history, but it is certainly a potential. Now I can't throw the woman who interrupts the message under the bus by saying that the reality of what we're about to talk about is in her heart. I don't know that. Maybe it's a very godly thing that she's doing, in doing what we see in Proverbs. In our reading today, our daily Bible reading in Proverbs, we saw that idea again of how great it is to have godly children and wise children, and it makes the father glad and the mother glad, and they rejoice in that. And maybe it's just that. How great it is for your mom. Now Christ is gonna say that's not enough, and that's what we just dealt with. But sometimes it gets beyond how great it must be for your mom that's so closely associated with you. Sometimes it turns into how great *she* must be. And now all of a sudden it's not it must be great for this person that seems to be just so tight with you. Now it becomes the person that's really tight with you, well that's really the great person. And we start to see Christ not be the complete, absolute, exclusive center of devotion. We start to have other things or people or organizations creep in, and now all of a sudden our focus, if we can call it this, our religious, devoted focus starts to... shift off the centrality of Christ. And it happens. (22:31)

The only reason I bring that up is because it didn't take but three centuries for the church to careen off, if we're speaking of Mary here being so blessed to go from "isn't it blessed that she was the mother of the Messiah", to "you know what, she's blessed in a sense because she inherently is so great". And then you saw by the third century the church starting to pray directly to Mary, and by the fourth century their all agreeing it's okay if we worship Mary. Problematic. Problematic. Number two on your outline. Let's jot this down. Which will include a lot more than the Roman Catholic focus on the veneration and praying to Mary. It gets much deeper than that, and there's many more facets, but let's just jot down the basic idea. We need to beware of a shifting religious focus. A shifting religious focus. (23:19)

2. Beware of a shifting religious focus.

It is easy for people who are inherent worshipers to take a look at the Christ of the New Testament, and say instead of saying how blessed you are inherently, to start saying, you know, there is people in this scenario that are so blessed inherently because of their association with you. And then we begin to give our devotion and our allegiance in a very unbiblical way to those people that we think are in the cockpit with Christ. And that's problematic. And just to be, before we leave this, let me at least make it clear. Some of you say, well, I just don't think that's what our Catholic friends down the street really believe. You do understand there are a lot of bad Catholics in our community. And by that I mean they don't adhere to the teaching of the Catholic Church. And I'm all for it, really. Right? Let's have more bad Catholics. But if you're a good Catholic, and you're gonna take your cues from the headquarters, and you're gonna look at the shifting and evolving doctrine of Rome, eventually you've got to say, to be a good Catholic I have to adhere to that. And the latest, definitive theological statement from Rome came out in the form of the Catholic Catechism of the church, which on the internet if you want to look this up and follow along with this, it's usually you can find it with CCC and a section number. CCC, the Catholic Catechism of the Catholic Church. If you look through the sections of the 900 section, and the 400 section, that deal with salvation and Maryology, you'll find there's the definitive



statement from Rome about what Catholics must believe, should believe, have to believe, if they're gonna be good Catholics, in what to think of Mary. And there's no getting around these statements being not only unbiblical, but drawing the devotion that should be exclusively given to Christ and placing it into other personages, in this case Mary. Problem. (25:07)

In the 900 section, for instance, 969. CCC§969, gives these appellations, these titles, these venerated titles to Mary. She is our advocate. She is our helper. And if you know the Bible words, from the upper room discourse, these are problematic. Advocate, helper, and mediatrix. She's our mediator. You start using those words to describe her, you're going to say, well, who do you think she is? Well, here's who they think she is. Back in §494, she is the all holy—I'm sorry, this is 721—all holy, ever virginal—in the 400 section, she is without sin, conceived without sin, so sinless that she wasn't even subject to death. These are the official teachings of the church which lead them to say, §6—967, that she is to be preeminent in the church. Now you start using those words, and I know it's originally written in Latin and it's translated into English for us. But you start looking at words like "preeminent", and studying well what exactly did Rome say about this, these are words that there's no way around it. We are now edging into territory that the Bible makes exclusively Christ's. Mediator. The advocate of the Spirit. The Helper, the Parakletos of the Spirit. The one who is our preeminent one, Colossians 1. There's only one preeminent person in the church, the head of the church, and therefore only one that we trust in to bring our concerns and our sin to the Father. (26:33)

Nothing more heretical than §494, that Mary is the cause of salvation for herself, and the cause of salvation for the human race. You cannot use in any logical way in English or Latin the idea of causation and attributing salvation to a woman who cried out in Luke 1 that she was in need of salvation, and she rejoiced in her redeemer. You know who needs redemption? People that are sinners. This is problematic. (27:03)

Oh, he's picking on the Catholics. No, I'm picking on any organization, or any group of people that is gonna take the preeminence and the centrality of Christ as the focus of our devotion and start to squeeze him out. And you have to do that by somehow minimizing Christ and exalting something else to where as so many organizations do, it's really not about just Christ, it's about Christ and this other authority. Whether it's the magisterium of the church, the formal decrees of the church, whether it's another testament of Christ because a prophet is on the scene now that's created the latest testament for us. Or whether it's about the fastest growing religion in the world that's gonna tip their hat to Christ, oh yeah, he's a, he's a prophet, Jesus is a prophet, but you know what? There's the prophet that superseded him, that came and, that's the blessed one, and that prophet spoke with the truth that Jesus just couldn't, and all your thoughts about him being the preeminent one, come on you guys, that's impinges on our monotheism and so let's just stop with that Christ. And let's make sure we understand the pecking order here, even among the prophets. It's problematic, and we see it everywhere. Or the Watch Tower and Tract Society do, we are the definitive and sole, infallible interpreters of this book so really, when it comes to you understanding Christ you really can't understand it unless we tell you what to think of him. (28:24)

2 Corinthians 11, Paul said my concern is that Satan wants to somehow distract you or pull away from that pure devotion to Christ. And then he says you know, it's funny how willing you are to



have and accept another Jesus. See, that's the thing. You have to present a different Jesus than the Jesus of Daniel 7, where the Son of Man comes from the heavenly throne with all dominion and all power. Isaiah spoke of this one that possessed all the attributes of divinity, breaks on the scene, proves he's the creator of the world. And then, the Father says if you would focus on him you'll bring glory to me. And the Spirit is sent to invade our lives to drive us to worship him and honor him and focus on him. See, he is the one who is to be preeminent in the church, and there are a lot of people that when they should be focused on Christ are too busy looking at someone else. (29:14)

Now, I don't want to throw the woman under the bus. You know, I may meet her one day in the kingdom, and I don't want to say that was what was on her mind. But I am saying that it didn't take very many years at all for the church to take people that seemed to be so blessed, it wasn't blessed for, it was that they were blessed themselves, they had inherent blessing. It wasn't that she's, it must be great for her, it's that she is herself so great that she deserves some of our religious devotion. (29:43)

Well, you know most non-Christians I deal with, they're not worshiping anything. That's where you're wrong. You do understand that we are inherently worshipers. We worship. Idolatry is spoken of in the Bible in such varied ways, such a broad spectrum of idolatry. By the time we get to the Romans who look as secular as we are. I mean, they're not even like the Greeks. These people, I think, man, they're just the secular folks of the day. And here's what Paul says about them in Romans 1. That when they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, they end up worshiping and serving the creatures rather than the creator who is blessed forever. Now, that's the kind of worship that goes on with your latte sipping, Wall Street Journal reading neighbor who calls himself an agnostic. And you think, well, he's not, you know, his devotion is nowhere. Oh, it is somewhere. I mean, it may be in a variety of ways that they're worshiping something of the creature and the, and the, and the creation. I mean, they may be the Sierra Club member who it's all about saving dolphins while we abort our children. Or it could be the scheming guy you picture in front of some computer screen worshiping the creation of some naked body and saying, well, this is—whatever it is, it's devotion. (30:55)

There is a magnetic devotion to worship something, and so much so that the Bible says that as we near the end—I'm quoting now 2 Timothy 3—it's gonna get really perilous. Perilous times will come. And by verse 4 it says the problem is people are gonna be so swollen with conceit that they're not lovers of God but they love pleasure rather than God. You think, well then it's a worshipless society. No, it's not. The next verse says they have a form of religion, a form of godliness, but they deny its power. So much so, not only till the end of time but by the time we get to the great tribulation that Jesus talked about, that the book of Revelation explains, it becomes clear that that whole book is filled with worship. Matter of fact, when the scene is set for us in Revelation and this great world leader steps on the scene, it's not without his own high priest. He's called the false prophet who makes everyone worship, and everyone's glad to do it. They give their devotion and their focus for someone. See, it's not about a church, it's not about a pastor, it's not about an organization, it's not about someone in the Bible that stood next to Christ or raised Christ or gave birth to Christ. You understand this is about Christ. And you can confuse a lot of things, whether it's the secular person where Christ isn't even the circle, or more confusing is the camouflage of adding devotion with Christ in the picture but he shares the



spotlight with a few others. Beware of a shifting religious focus. (32:19)

Thirdly, verse 28. I've been, at least in the first point, trying to contrast familiarity, knowledge, even service, with devoted followers of Christ. We talked about the word "devotion", used the word "focus" in the second point. But devotion needs to be defined the way Jesus stated it, so let's be clear about that. Which is very helpful knowing that there would be generations of Christians that couldn't go and just sit at his feet in Galilee or Judea and learn what Jesus said, and take up our stuff and follow him around. We're not talking about physically following him. It's about doing what he says. It's about doing what God has said about him. It's about responding to the precepts and principles that God has articulated in his word. But he said blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. (33:07)

Now this is very uncomfortable for our generation, 'cause we don't like it. It is the thing that is under attack in a way that it's never been under attack, at least in our culture, in any recent, memorable era. We are now living in a day where people do not want the reality of this third point. But Jesus says it's not about familiarity. Listen, don't get distracted on some other personage that you think is great. That's the point at least that we made, if someone who's distracting and moving and diverting your attention elsewhere, whether it was for worship or veneration or just to say how great it must be. But now we get to the real point. To be a devoted follower of Christ is to be someone who understands the authority of Scripture in our lives. Number three. We need to let nothing displace biblical authority. (33:50)

3. Let nothing displace biblical authority.

This passage reminds us it is about the word of God. It is about what God has revealed to us. Now again, whenever I teach on this I think we need about eight hours for us to at least explain to the new person, the skeptic, who thinks like everybody else in the world, well the Bible, it's just been written a million times and you can't really trust it. That's why yesterday on my Facebook page I posted our free, twelve-part, they're 90 minutes a lecture, series of trying to understand how the Bible came to be. Is it just a massive literary telephone game? Or is this book really the accurate reflection of the biblical message that God sent from heaven? Is this man's best thoughts about God? Or is this God speaking to mankind, not only in the first century but in the twenty-first century? If that's the case, see then we ought to look at that book and recognize that that becomes in very practical terms the final arbiter of truth and practice in my life, and I'd better be very careful how I interact with that book. (34:46)

That's why when Maryology and number of other things got off the rails, it started early on in the church. Certainly Constantine and the post-legalization and even the coercion in many cases of Christianity in the Roman world became so out of control, by the medieval days we had in the Reformation coming out of the medieval era this concern that we better get back to what God has said. And part of the Latin phrases that were used to express our ultimate concern was one of the five *solas*, we call it, which was *sola scriptura*. Which meant, in Latin, *sola* only, *scriptura* the scriptures. What are you talking about? Well, the Scripture needs to be our only, what, our only source of authority. The church cannot sit around, and I don't care what kind of panels they-they meet in, I don't care what kind of clothes they wear, I don't care what they claim for themselves. When it comes down to it, those that are blessed are those who hear the word of God



and keep it, and do it. And that means that that needs to be the only authority. (35:44)

Now there are a lot of things that became the authority throughout church history. But when I sit here and preach to the twenty-first century of a bunch of people in south Orange County and across America, here's what I've gotta say. It's very important for us to be *sola scriptura* as we look at all the issues of our lives and of our day. We'd better be very careful not to let anything displace biblical authority in our lives. (36:07)

Let me give you three of the most common, in my opinion. And before that, let me add this. Why *sola scriptura*? Here's a verse you ought to jot down, you ought to memorize it. Simple, simple, simple. Here's the logic of the Bible. James 4:12. Here's what it says. There's only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and able to destroy. Now that one verse should change everything about our epistemology, about our biblicism, about what we think about scripture. Listen to this. There's only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and able to destroy. So let's start at the back. He has all authority. At the end of the day, when you roll into town, if it's the right town, he's got the ability, the authority, to save and to destroy. Now, when you look at the God we're dealing with, he gives the rules, he reveals the truth, he's claimed it's through the pages of Scripture, and he will judge us. We're accountable to him. He makes the rules, and he holds us accountable, and he has all authority to enforce those rules. So when it comes to what God says, really it has to become the sole and exclusive authority in our lives, and we're bound to it because it doesn't make any sense not to. There's only one lawgiver and judge. He's not gonna share that with anybody, including you. (37:25)

I said there would be three things I want to point out, ways that we unfortunately undermine *sola scriptura* in our day, when it's the Bible plus something else. Okay. First of all, we love to make it, the Bible, plus, I'll let this into the cockpit, how I feel about it. The Bible plus my feelings. The Bible and what feels right. If I can get those two in the jury room then they can come to a conclusion, and they'll come out with a verdict. And I can understand what I ought to do in my life, and what I ought to stand for, when the Bible and what seems and feels right to me, when those two can agree then we're good. When they're deadlocked, I guess jury's out and you know we can't figure it out. Now, think this through for a minute. This is problematic in every way. From the very beginning in Genesis 3, when there was the enemy of God saying did God say, I know God said a lot of stuff but really I'm starting to question that and let me appeal to your feelings right now. Would you look at this fruit? How does that, how does that strike you? Oh, it looks good doesn't it? I think you want it now. Kind of, get in tune with your feelings right now. This is what, aw, don't worry about what God said, 'cause when it comes down to it it's what God says plus how you feel, and somehow we can negotiate some middle ground and so let's make a decision. (38:43)

When it comes to Christ, here's one thing that really doesn't feel good to me at all and never has. Mark 8. Mark 8, Jesus said, "Hey, Mike Fabarez and every other Christian on the planet. When it comes to me and who I'm all about, here's the thing. You need to, if you're gonna follow after me, you gonna have to deny yourself, take up your cross, and then let's get on with me being the leader and you being the one who follows." I don't like that. 'Cause you know what always rebels when I have something that Christ says that makes me feel like I don't want to do it, and it grates against my desires and my pleasure. Ah, I don't want to do that. And I get expert at trying to



somehow rationalize why I'm not going to do what God asked me to do because it doesn't feel good to me. (39:24)

I'd rather go up the road I suppose and go surfing with out neighbors who are influential, best-selling authors who talk about God incessantly. Who say you know what, when it comes to the love of God it doesn't feel right to me that Christ would judge people, and at the end of time condemn people. That doesn't feel good to me. Well, you know what? If it's the feelings of my heart plus the Bible, I suppose I gonna, gonna hang out with my new found friends who, I just, they are gonna convince me it doesn't feel right. And yet I open my Bible and I see very clearly that Jesus says, "I am the judge. I didn't come at the first coming to judge, but I'm coming at the second coming to judge." And as Paul said in Acts 17 God has appointed one man to judge all people, and we'll all stand before God one day. And that person behind that tribunal will be Christ himself. I don't like that. I don't like condemnation being on the table. I don't like the reality of hell, I don't want to talk about hell. It does not feel right to me. If it's the Bible plus what feels right, then I got a problem with a lot of things in the Christian life, and a lot of things about Christ claimed. But it can't be the Bible plus my feelings. That's sentimentalism, and that's what rules our day. I often put it this way. We like to feel our way through the Christian life. We don't like to think our way based on the precepts of the Bible, and that's problematic. That's epidemic. Go to the average, you know, best-selling list on the internet of what books are selling right now under the name of Christianity, and most of them are nothing more than the tripe of sentimentalism with God slapped on the cover. That was a pretty good line. Was that 144 characters? Sorry. [*Faint laughter from audience*] Thank you. She got it. (41:10)

Number two. Letter B. It's the Bible and what makes sense to me so often. I know what needs to be in the jury room when it comes to any decision in my life. It's a Bible and then what really makes sense to me and what I think God in my rational mind would do. If I were God and I think that makes sense, and that really fits the kind of the clear, mental, logical thinking of my mind. The church has been good through era, they call that rationalism. And if we think about God who makes the world, and then puts us in it and has certain things for us to do, and to live out it in, then he, every now and then according to history in the Bible, intervenes in time and space and so we recognize there's a lot of things about our theology that are based on things that really are not rational. For instance, when someone dies they don't expect them to rise again. I never start funerals with an opportunity for the corpse to rise out of the casket. 'Cause that doesn't make any sense to me. Dead people stay dead. And yet the Bible, on a few occasions, shows us that God has the ability to call dead people living, and in fact they do. Jesus himself said that he possessed his own power. We quoted it in this series, to lay down his life and take it up again. That makes no sense. I can do down to the college here. I can go to UC Irvine. I can talk to the biologists, and I can say, does this make an sense? I need to get my mind around the idea of dead people rising. And they're gonna make sure I understand you cannot be a logical person and believe that. It's not rational. (42:37)

2 Peter 3. People came to the early church at the end of the first century and said, you know what, Jesus said he was coming back. It's been a long time now. Look at how many decades it's been. It doesn't look like it's gonna—it doesn't make sense. It doesn't really compute. That's not rational that Jesus would wait this long. And they called into question the promise. When Paul responded to the people that said it's not rational that someone would rise from dead, he wrote a



whole chapter in 1 Corinthians 15 saying if that's the case then we're done. Let's go surfing this morning, or play golf, or whatever it is you want to do, read the paper, sip your latte. Because there's no reason for us to be here. Christianity has no bearing on this life or the next if there's no resurrection of Christ. And when it came to the timetable of Christ keeping his promises, it may say it look like he's really a long time in coming. He's making, he's tarrying a long time. But if Christ said he would return, then he's gonna return. Now it hasn't been decades, it's been millennia. It's been centuries for sure, multiple centuries stacked upon centuries. Where is he? He's not coming back. Breaking through the sky like he left, come on. We don't believe that. Now that's called liberalism, or another way to put it, it's called the rationalism of a lot of liberal Christianity that takes anything that doesn't make sense. And it's been around for ages. Thomas Jefferson made it popular when he created his Bible that he excised everything that did not fit in his brain. I don't see how this could work. We're not naturalists, we're not rationalists. We're biblicists in that we believe God has spoken in time and space, and I can't let anything displace that biblical authority 'cause Christ, the one who did rise from the dead, who proved his divinity, said blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. (44:11)

Thirdly. Which if, you don't see this one everywhere, what you won't even get home with the radio on and not hear this one. When it comes to making decisions about life and right and wrong, it'd better be the Bible plus what my generation thinks. What do the people of my day think? Get up this morning, perusing the interview with the Supreme Justice just waxing eloquently about how important it is that we realize that we've got to make judicious decisions based on the changing times in which we live. Everyone lives by that philosophy. How can I possibly hold to something that the Bible says that everyone in the surveys and polls now say you shouldn't believe in. And if you poll people that are fifty, sixty, and seventy years old, and you compare it to what people are in their teens, twenties, and thirties and say, well what's our society thinking about x, y—or let's just start with the obvious in the headlines everyday. Matthew 19, Jesus defines what marriage is. He's very clear about what it is. Now, in my day, I can't get up on any news show, any program, I can't go to Oprah and spout this. I cannot say, you know what Jesus said about this definition of marriage, that's what it is. I can't say that. 'Cause now I'm booed off the stage. I'm jeered. Why? Because our generation has, they have weighed in on this. And the jury says we got to excise that part of the Bible. (45:61)

Here's another one everyone wants to excise. How about this verse. Jesus said, "I'm the way"—Matthew 14—"I'm the way"—I'm sorry, John 14—"I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No comes to the Father except through me." Verse 6. There's been a survey on this. That ain't true anymore. Right? It's not true. No one's buying that. I mean, you cannot say that the sincere Hindu or the Buddhist monk dressed in his orange outfit, I mean, clearly he's devoted to God as he understands it. You cannot say that Christ and a relationship with Christ is the only way for you get your sin problem dealt with. Oh, you guys just believe that because you were born in America and raised in church. If you were raised in some Middle Eastern country in a mosque, you wouldn't think that way. The exclusive claims of Christ are based on the exclusive evidence that Christ provided. And really, it doesn't matter where you come from or who you are. Either you believe in the sole authority and biblical claims of what Christ taught us because again, I wish I could talk to you through the whole history of the Bible and how it came to be, that this is not man's best thoughts about God. This is God speaking to his creation. And if that's the case, and Christ said he's the only way, then the exclusivity claims that we choke on cannot be



summarily dismissed because my generation doesn't vote for it. (46:49)

Technical word for that is syncretism. Syncretism. I'm trying to take my culture's values and somehow put those in a cagefight with the Bible, and we'll see who wins. Well, we know how that's gonna end. Just like when my feelings get involved, and I sentimentalize the Bible. Or my mind sits there and says if it doesn't fit into my grid and my college professor's class, well then I dismiss it. That kind of rationalistic Christianity, or if it's the poll-taking form that it seems to be so popular. And a church one week, and another church another week, and another church another week, falling, falling, falling. To the epistemology, the belief about what's true being based on my culture won't allow me to believe that anymore. (47:27)

Let nothing displace biblical authority. It'll be the reason some people in this room don't come back to this church. It'll be the reason that this church, you know, may become a weird and bizarre anomaly in our culture. Let nothing displace biblical authority. Your outdated old books. Stop quoting your outdated old book. Well, we need to spend our time perhaps working through our bibliology that we can stand and say that it makes perfect sense that Christ would say blessed are those rather who hear the word of God and keep it. Our devotion to Christ cannot be in any way divorced from the biblical authority that he claims in this text. (48:06)

Homework assignment for you. Might be a great section of scripture. It's the third chapter of 2 Timothy. I don't have time to get into it. I wish that I did. But if you would just jot that down, 2 Timothy 3. Break that down. Falls into these categories, it'd a good way to put it: verses 1-4, verses 5-9, and 10 to the end, 10-17. One through four, our deteriorating culture, it's gonna get harder and harder to believe and express biblical authority in a deteriorating society. It's gonna get even harder in verses five through nine, because the opposition that existed in the first century and will continue to go from bad to worse as time goes on, and so you're going to be attacked for biblical views all the time. But ten through seventeen, some of the most famous verses in the Bible. But you, Timothy, Paul says, continue in what you've learned. And I love this line, to jump ahead, because you know from whom you've learned it. And he's not pointing at himself. Paul's not saying you learned it from me. 'Cause it goes on to say, you've known the sacred writings from your childhood, that they are apt and able to make you saved, that they can bring you salvation. And you know that all scripture, not man's best thoughts about God, it is God-breathed and it's profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, training, and righteousness. So that the man of God, the woman of God, the person of God, the student of God, can be equipped for every good work. (49:31)

You'd better be non-negotiable about these things. Familiarity can never displace devotion. Our focus needs to be on the centrality of Christ, and nothing can share the spotlight there. Nothing, no one, no authority. And speaking of authority, we've got to maintain our commitment to the final arbiter of truth being God's revelation to man. (49:55)

With the way TV's are hooked up these days, there's a lot of room for messing things up, particularly with our six or seven remote controls that sit next to your couch and mine. Lot of times it ends up not working for some strange reason. And I'll get a call every now and then, especially when my wife usually turns on the cooking channel when she's cooking dinner, and sometimes things don't work. And sometimes she'll call me and say, "Hey, when you get home



you just need to know the picture's there but there's no sound." And I say, "Well, go to remote control number four and hit the third button from the—" "I've done all that. It doesn't work. Just, when you get home, would you fix it for me?" Then on another week I'll get a call, "You know what, honey, I'm getting sound but I'm not getting any picture. So I'm hearing all about how to cook but I don't see it. And so when you get home could you fix it?" "Well, look at remote control number 2, and punch—" "I've tried all that, it doesn't work." So I get home and I fix it. (50:43)

Had a weird call not long ago when she called me and said, "Hey, Mike. I'm getting picture, and I'm getting sound. But I started cooking dinner and I turned on the cooking channel, and they're totally out of sync." I said, "You usually call me 'cause the picture's not working or the sounds not working. You've got them both?" "Yeah, I got them both." "That's good enough." "No, it's really not. I mean, it's like a bad Godzilla movie, you know. I can't, I can't do this." Well of course I'm a little, "Come on, can't be that bad." I get home. I walk in, family room, next to the kitchen, and I say, "Come on, you can handle this." And I sit there for about five minutes trying to see how bad it is. And it took me about five second to realize it's worse than a bad Godzilla movie, 'cause it's not just the voices that don't match the lips, everything else, it—and it was only like a second off. But man, was it torturous. I said, "All right. Let me fix it." I don't even know how I fixed it. I eventually did fix it. But it was a strange problem to have. And I thought, you know, you got all the elements there, it's okay. Close enough. No. Certain things in life are designed to work in a kind of symmetry, and a kind of harmony that are designed to work, and when they don't work that way—and you might have all the elements but they're just jogged and off a little bit. Well, it really becomes catastrophic for enjoying the thing the way it's designed to be enjoyed. (52:12)

When it comes to our salvation it's more than our enjoyment that's at stake. Jesus said there's a lot of people coming to me on that day who say, "Lord, Lord." I never knew you. Now how could you miss it? Because two things that seem similar, they just really are radically different. And their response to the gospel it seems like all the pieces are there, and Christ is in the circle, and there seems to be devotion, and—it's not good enough. (52:35)

Oh, Mike, you're making the gospel too complicated. It's not complicated. I've never claimed it's complicated. Matter of fact, you want it in a word? Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Very simple. It's just tremendously hard. So hard is it that Jesus said it's impossible. It's impossible. You need God to invade your life to change the way you are, number one, and what you trust. You trust in the finished completed work of Christ. And we don't even like that. My feelings and my rational say, well, I got to have a part in earning this. That's not how it is. That's why people when they hear that the gospel of grace is that you could on your deathbed—I don't recommend it—but on your deathbed, you could repent of your sins, put your trust in Christ, after a lifetime of crime and immoral behavior, and be ushered into the gates of heaven. No, they gotta throw in a purgatory or something there, right? No. The Bible's very clear on this. How does that work? That doesn't feel right. That doesn't seem right. Jesus made it very clear by dying on a cross and reaching out to this criminal next to him, as God grants him faith and repentance, and he says, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." Can you imagine if you're one of the victims of that man's crime? How dare Jesus say that? See, that's the gospel of grace. You've got to be able to hear the word of God and respond to it, keep it, guard it. I love the



breadth of the translation of that Greek word. Guard it. Make that, make that your treasure. You have to not only do it, but you have to keep it as the thing that you value as truth. Starting with the gospel, and moving onto our sanctification. (54:04)

Now God, as we live for you this week, we know there'll be many challenges to biblical authority. There'll be a lot of things that want to squeeze Christ out and be the focus of our attention. There'll be a lot of things in our hearts that make us feel like we're okay 'cause we know certain things. We can be self-deceived by knowing if we don't become doers of the word. So help us this week to integrate these principles from this passage, that we might walk in step with you and live as Paul said, circumspectly, carefully, thoughtfully, soberly, as we live for you this week. Help us, God, and help our culture, as we seek to do what we can to stand for what is good and right. Dismiss us with a sense of your presence, and with joy as we sing one last chorus. In Jesus' name. Amen.