



Amazing Conversions Part 3

Saul: New Challenges

Pastor Mike Fabarez

It is interesting how many people enthusiastically accept the difficult circumstances of so many things. There are so many challenges related to things like going off to college or starting a new career or getting married or joining the gym or having children. They're all going to change your life and complicate your life and there's a lot of costs and pains and trials associated with all those things and yet people continue to gladly do those things. Matter of fact, Jesus said in John 16, it's like someone, a mom, who is so excited about having a new baby, bringing a human into the world as it's translated, that the labor pain, it just fades to the background. It becomes something that she's willing to downplay because of the joy of having a child. And they go off and do it a year or two later again and again. It's just seriously putting the pain and the challenge and the cost in perspective.

Certainly the same is true of what God said about Christ regarding his own death on a cross. It says in Hebrews 12 that Christ "for the joy set before him" on the other side of the cross, he gladly looked at the cost of the cross and downplayed it, he despised the shame of it all. He was willing to think less of it because of what it was accomplishing. I mean, there are so many things about the Christian life that have that attached to it, that there's a price to pay, but it is so worth it. There's an unparalleled benefit for you and I to be sitting here this morning saying we know God and we're increasingly knowing him better as the years go by. That we are forgiven 100% completely forgiven of all the sins that we have committed, that we are completely accepted before our creator in Christ. Those are unparalleled benefits. And yet we know that it comes with an associated set of challenges and costs.

And while some people go off to school or have a child or get married or start a job and they complain a lot about the costs, we like to remind those folks that, listen, this is something that needs to be overshadowed and put in perspective by the benefit. It would be good for us to do that, because we really will give up a lot of joy. We'll really be beset with disappointment and discouragement and disillusionment and will add a lot of complaining to our lives when we don't keep all of that in perspective.

As we have been studying the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul in Acts Chapter 9, we have seen the beginning of the Christian life for him begin with a series of reminders about the radical change, including the costs associated with following Christ. Matter of fact, when Ananias was told, as we saw last week, where we left off in verse 14, that there's this great reminder of suffering that's ahead for Paul. I'm going to show you, actually in verse 16 in particular, the many things that he's going to have to suffer for my name as he carries my name before the Gentiles and before kings and before the Jews, all of this will come with an associated price tag that, of course, he needs to identify and he needs to gladly accept. He needs to willingly embrace the challenge that comes with being a follower of Christ.

And I think as we look at his life as a template we can say, hey, we need to do the same just even if we are a new Christian and at the outset, and you may have recently been told to count the cost of following Christ or you've been a Christian for 30 years and you're thinking, OK, I now know what it is to live in the trenches of the Christian life, we just need every now and then step out and say, OK, all of the associated difficulties that go with it, they're worth it. But they need to be identified. They need to be in some way in our minds, at least in our imaginations, quantified. And we need to say, yes, that is a worthy price to pay. As a matter of fact, I am glad to go through all of that because of what it means to be a Christian. So let's look at this text and see if we can avoid some of the discouragement and unnecessary frustration and disappointment that some of the other Christians go through by looking at this and saying afresh this morning, I'm willing to pay that price to be a part of the body of Christ.

Start with me in verse 17, we'll look at verses 17 through 25 in Acts Chapter 9. Let's read it first. Follow along as I read it for you from the English Standard Version beginning in verse 17. "So Ananias," this is not the Ananias of Chapter 5 remember. He's a different guy living in Damascus, way up north in Syria. "So Ananias departed and entered the house." He was supposed to go to Judas' house on Straight Street and within the walled city of Damascus and Saul would be there. Of course he was told he was going to be there, he was going to be praying and he'd been fasting for a few days and he was blind, of course, after getting knocked off of his horse, you might remember, as he approached Damascus. "And laying his hands on him he said," so here's Ananias saying to Saul, who would become Paul, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes."

Now, he didn't have scales in his eyes. This is a phrase you could translate and the concept is "as though there were scales in his eyes," like he had a mask on or some kind of blocking, some kind of something over his eyes, which of course, he didn't. But the idea was it was like someone pulled this face mask off of his eyes and he now could see. "Something like scales." It was as though scales or something were closing his eyes were now opened and he regained his sight. So miraculously he was blinded and miraculously now he can see. "Then he rose and he was baptized." Ananias here in front of, I'm sure, some of Paul's remaining entourage at Judas' house there are watching him. There are people, I'm sure, that came with Ananias. Judas, of course, was there at his own house we can assume. And they all watch now Saul of Tarsus, the former Pharisee who came to persecute the Church, saying, I am now a follower of Christ. I declare this publicly through my water baptism.

"And taking food," remember he'd been fasting. "Taking food he was strengthened," of course, you can imagine. "For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately," in other words, the thing that he starts doing right out of the gate in his new Christian life here is "he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues." Jesus is not a popular figure to be talking about in the synagogues. Right? You've got little Christian enclaves that have been kicked out of the synagogues and they're meeting in houses in and around Damascus. But he's now going straight to the place that is filled with people who were just like him saying, "Jesus is not the Messiah. Jesus was killed and I'm sure his body is somewhere. But he's a

false messiah at best. But we're not going to hail him as some fulfillment of the Old Testament." But Paul's saying, "No. I'm going to tell you all about Jesus in the synagogue 'saying he is the Son of God.'"

He is the Son of God, which is a phrase we often talk about here from the platform from Daniel Chapter 7. It has to do not just with his tightness with the Father, but his majesty and his deity, the fact that he is one who has all the authority and power over all the people of the planet, that he's going to one day be enthroned over the earth. He is the Son of God. "And all who heard him were amazed," they're like, wow, I can't believe this guy is now for all this, right? "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of all those who called upon his name?" He was arresting, this guy, he was arresting people and having them killed who were proclaiming his name. Now he's doing that. He's proclaiming his name. Right?

I mean, think about it. Has he not come here, all the way up here, a multiple day's journey up to Syria? "Hasn't he come here for this purpose to bring them bound," those people who call on his name who call on Jesus, "bound before the chief priests?" "But Saul," he kept being challenged and he kept being denied and kept having people argue with him, "but he increased all the more in strength," and he was winning these arguments with many. He "confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus," not only because of who he was and now who he is, but even in his arguments, because he was "proving that Jesus was the Christ." "Christos" that transliterated word into English, the "Masiah," the Old Testament Hebrew word translated into English or transliterated as Messiah. This is the anointed one, the one from the Old Testament that everyone was supposed to give their homage to, the one who would be king, prophet, priest and king, as it turned out. He is that one. He was dismissed before, the object of the scorn of Saul of Tarsus. And now he's saying, "No, he's the one. I was wrong."

Verse 23. "When many days had passed," which, by the way, that phrase, if you know your Bible well, Sunday school grads, you'll know there's that passage over there in Galatians Chapter 1 where he talks about spending three years in Damascus. Three years, the reckoning, by the way, much like looking at a calendar where it says 2021, if you end up looking at the calendar and it says 2023, you would say three years in a Jewish reckoning. So we don't know how many months it was, but it traversed over three different years and so that was many days. He goes out into Arabia, by the way, I should say that. Arabia we often think of in the south, if you know your biblical geography a little bit or modern geography, you think of it way down there like, you know, your biblical geography, Mount Sinai, where Moses got the law. I often thought, wow, when I was first reading the Bible, well, that's weird, that's a long way. I mean, that's going to be a seven, eight, nine-day journey at best. That's a long way to go. Maybe two weeks.

Well, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the Northern Arabian desert. The Northern Arabian desert was actually the gateway to that was the walled city of Damascus. Matter of fact, it didn't take days at all. Matter of fact you can walk right outside the city walls of Damascus and into the sand wilderness and what you've got is from Damascus up here in Syria, you walk right into the Arabian desert. A way down there, it goes all the way down in this vast desert, all the way down to the tip if you want to think about Arabia down in Sinai.



But up here in the Northern Arabian desert, that's where Paul leaves Damascus as his headquarters now into three different years on the calendar. He's learning, relearning, I'm sure as a Pharisee knowing the Scriptures as well as he did, memorizing so much of it as a child and teaching it. Now he's looking at it all knowing, well, wait a minute, this Jesus is the Christ, this Jesus is alive and he's retooling all of this. The Bible says that Jesus himself is teaching him in that desert experience that he has.

So many days, that includes a lot there. If you want to kind of harmonize all the things that Paul says about his early Christian life. But he comes back to Damascus, that's his base of operation, at least the beginning here, and "the Jews plotted to kill him." They think, "We've got to kill this guy. He comes into town, he's going into the synagogues and he's saying Jesus is the Christ. And we're like what Saul was. We're against this now. He's for it. We just got to get rid of him." They try to kill him. So the tables have really turned. He came to kill Christians. Now he's a Christian. Now they're trying to kill him. "But their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates night and day in order to kill him." So he sneaks into the city. At some point he gets in there, they don't know where he is. They can't flush him out of one of the houses. It's a very compact place, there are a lot of places to hide. And they keep watching the gates, knowing if he's going to come in and out into the surrounding areas of Damascus. We're going to find him at some point.

So they posted people to find Saul. So he's got no way out except the disciples get very innovative here. And it says, "The disciples," verse 25, "took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall." You might remember Rahab and the scarlet marker that she has about the spies and all that back in Joshua. A lot of these compacted cities, they build them with plenty of space initially with these big fortified walls to protect them from the ancient armies. And they get so impacted they're building actual apartments, if you will, condos into the walls. And there are some windows there. Well, one of those disciples had a place to live, a dwelling in the wall and there was a gateway there. You'd get your head out through it at least, and they would shoot weapons through that or whatever it might be in the ancient world. But he was let out through that in a basket, "lowering him in a basket," which he talks about in Second Corinthians 11. That picture of him is so different than what we saw with him riding up on a horse up the road to Damascus. And now he's leaving as a fugitive in a basket with people lowering down in a basket with a rope. It's just an amazing turnaround.

Now, more on where we go with this with Barnabas and the rest next week. But right now, let's just look at that. It's plenty for us to tackle here verses 17 through 25. And I want you to think of all the ways that God could have done this. Let's start with how he initially got his attention on the road to Damascus in the early part of Chapter 9. God himself knocks him off the horse. Christ, the second person of the Godhead encounters Saul. So I know this: God doesn't need any instrument of a person to get anything done in Saul's life. He can do it all directly. As a matter of fact, it seems like Paul's even boasting about that to the Galatians churches, that he got his training there in the Arabian desert from Christ himself. Now, that's true. There was a lot where Christ at the beginning and then in this intermediate seminary period that he's in, he ends up having a lot of one-on-one time by himself. Right? God and him.

But that's not how the Christian life is lived. And it's certainly not how God then proceeds to get him to where he wants him to be. In other words, we have him struck blind. And what happens when he's struck blind? Well we learned earlier he's going to have to be led. He can't even now walk into the city that he's going to persecute without someone leading him. So he needs the instrumentality of someone in his entourage helping him in. And he gets in, he didn't know what to do. He's got to wait for God. And God says, I'm going to dispatch a person. Could he have healed Saul's blindness without a person? Well, of course he could have. Right? He blinded him without a person. He could have unblinded him without a person. But he doesn't do that. He says, no, there's going to be someone here, at the beginning of this passage, we see he's going to have to come and lay hands on him. So here's the instrumentality of a person.

And then it starts with talking about the connection. The first thing he says is, middle of verse 17, "Brother Saul." Even that, the terminology of the Christian family is that we are family, "Brother Saul," whether he was technically a Christian at that point or not, the point is he's about to become a Christian. Here is now a favorable encounter with someone in the body of Christ and there's a sudden connection. Now you're in with us. And he becomes the instrument of God's will as well. God has "sent me to you," Christ has, "to regain your sight," and I'm going to be the instrument here in this picture of you being "filled with the Spirit." You're going to be invaded by God's Spirit. And so because of that personal connection, he gets his sight back and he is standing up. "He rose up and he was baptized."

Even that. God could have had a lot of things done to get us identified with Christ. He could have commanded a lot of things. But he commanded this thing where you can't even do it yourself. The point is for you to be baptized, it's a passive verb by someone else. And so he's baptized, we assume, here by Ananias. He's dunked into the water. You are now even seen to be identified with Christ through the community here of the instrumentality of a person, a representative here of the Church. So you're not doing that by yourself. "And taking food, he was strengthened." Well, that food wasn't even his, right? It wasn't in his home. This was in Judas' home. He's being fed. He's been given, you can assume, for the last three days a place to sleep every night. Right?

He's now dependent on these Christians in the city of Damascus and he's dependent on the Christians to be identified with the Church. He's dependent on the Christians to know God's will for his life in the beginning stages of his Christian life. He's dependent on Christians to get his sight back. And then it's no surprise that it says for some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. All a part of this communal thing that he stepped into. And it ends with, as I said, being lowered in a basket. You're not going to jump, you're going to break your legs. It's too high. You got to get in a basket and there are some guys... I don't know, how many guys do you think it takes to lower a guy in a basket? It's going to take a few and they're there lowering him down. He's dependent on them even to get out of the city.

Now, God could have done all of this like we saw even Philip, like it seems like at least who teleported out of the situation. God could have given him his insight back, taught him all he



needed to know and teleported him out of the city. But instead, he said, "No, that's not how the Christian life is lived." And Paul goes on to teach this over and over and over and over again. The body of Christ is a communal situation. It's all of us being interdependent on one another. We're not mavericks. We're not isolated. We're not privatized. We're not just the people that just do it on our own. We're people that have to depend on one another.

And here's the thing. You and I don't naturally like to do that. We have to do that in modern society, at least, most of us. You didn't grow your own food this week. You probably didn't build your own house. You pay your taxes and people build roads for you and you didn't build your own car. We have this kind of interdependence in society. But I just want to be as dependent as I have to be and then I want to be like on my own. Right? I don't want to go to work and then we just kind of all pool our money and just whoever needs something, just take a little bit out. We all share the same checking account. No, I want my own checking account. I want to deal with my own stuff. I want to buy my own things. We love our autonomy and independence, particularly in our Western culture in America.

And we have a bit of necessary dependence on one another in society. But I drive into my neighborhood probably like you drive into yours and I'm not asking people what they want for dinner in my cul-de-sac. It's like, you know, what? "Make your own dinner, buy your own food, do your own thing. We'll do our own thing. As a matter of fact, I'm shutting my garage quick so I don't even have to talk to you." It's just like that's how we live in Southern California, right? We're just kind of on our own.

You step into the Christian life and God says I'm not playing by those rules anymore. You are now going to be increasingly interdependent. You are going to have to be dependent upon, Paul is going to now be depended upon, to take the name of Christ to the Gentiles, to the kings, to the nations, to the Jews and Paul, you're going to depend on people. There's going to be a new set of interdependence because you now are a Christian. And I just want us to embrace that challenge because I'm sure it chafes against your feeling of wanting to kind of keep your stuff your stuff, your life your life, your hurts your hurts, your stuff in your little corner. And you like to be like that because it is not as messy as kind of having my life affecting your life. I don't want to live in a commune-like it seems like they did in the book of Acts, where everyone had a need to figure out who it was and I have to sell a piece of my property or my asset to meet your need, I'll do that. It was really different. I don't really care for that. I want to be dependent until I can be independent and Christianity moves that marker and says, nope, you're going to be more interdependent.

Number one, if you taking notes. You and I need to "Embrace the Challenge of Greater Interdependence." Christianity is you and I saying that is the new life I signed up for. And it's a little stinky. It's, you know, it's a little bit not like what I would like. It's a little bit messier to bear one another's burdens, a little bit more uncomfortable for me to be that vulnerable and even things like James having me confessing my sins to one another and praying for each other. It's just I'd like to pray for my things, you pray for your things. Like I do in my neighborhood. But no, that's not how it is in the Church. Matter of fact, your needs become my needs. This is like a family now.



It's the difference between you being some, let's say, you're a competitive ping pong player, which is a ridiculous way to say it, because if you're really competitive, you call it table tennis. But let's just say you're a competitive traveling table tennis player, right? It's your game, your thing. Now, you didn't build the table and you didn't weave together and sew the net and you didn't build the ping pong balls. You probably didn't make your own paddle or maybe you kind of did and you adjusted and modified it. But you get up to play and it's you, you against your opponent, you against the world. And yeah, you didn't build the bus to get you to where you need to go or the pilot, you didn't fly yourself there, but you depend on people to the extent that you have to. But then it's your game and your life and your thing. Now go do it.

Go get your education, go get your job. You got your thing. And if you really aren't cool with that and you need a partner in life, well then you play doubles and you get married and, you know, have a couple of kids that sit and watch you play, whatever. But that's as far as we go, right? I'm not even sure I like playing doubles all the time is how most Americans think. It's just like your life, my life. Maybe you have your checking account and my checking account and we just like our autonomy.

Then you become a Christian. And it's like, nope, we're changing the rules of the game. Life is not going to now be lived with your little tiny, you know, atomic family here. You now are going to join a different kind of team. It's like you now are joining a football team and there are 10 other players. And you can't just you be... your wife hikes the ball to you and you just run. And that's how we play every play. Just kind of take the ball down the field. No, you need running backs. You need tight ends, you need guards, you need wide receivers. It's a whole different game. And we now have to strategize together. I can't even do this without huddling up and figuring out what we're going to do next. I mean, my life is now so intertwined and interdependent on other people, I cannot see life the way I used to.

I guarantee you that Paul with his colleagues as a Pharisee did not deal with his colleagues the way that Ananias is starting out even the conversation, "Brother Saul." And by the way, Paul, you're not going to see unless I put my hands on you right here. I mean, God is trying to make a point here and Paul would preach the point for the rest of his Christian life. And I'm encouraging you and your small groups to go through the discussion questions and I'm going to take you to a lengthy passage in First Corinthians 12 that should be no surprise to you reminding you of the number one analogy for our relationships with each other, the body of Christ. And you can't say, "I don't have need of you. I just want to be this and that's all I want to do. I don't really have to care about everyone else.

Matter of fact, you keep your life over there. I'll keep my life over here. If we like the same preacher and the same church, same programs, we can come, we'll sit, we'll do our thing, maybe stop and get a donut, maybe if I'm feeling a little bit social and then I'll go home and maybe come back in another seven days." That's how a lot of people live their Christian life. And all I'm telling you is that's not how we're supposed to live our Christian lives. No, this sermon was supposed to be this. The sermon was supposed to be let's willingly embrace the challenge of pushing past some of the discomfort of me being interdependent.



But I got to take a minute to say some of us, we've been fighting that so much we've conceded and we just don't even try anymore. You do come and just kind of connect only in a group setting, sitting there side by side, and then you go home and that's it. And I've told you many, many times from this platform, the Christian life cannot be lived that way. It's not supposed to be lived that way. I guarantee you will not hear, "Well done good and faithful servant," if that's your definition of the Christian life. You have to lower this wall of autonomy, kind of running into your garage so to speak, shutting the door and being done with it. An occasional talk over the mailbox is not how this works. Your life and my life, our lives need to be intertwined.

In a church this size we can't do it on the corporate scale with all of us doing it. But you can have a group within the church that is your church and that all of a sudden now, that fellowship within what the functioning body of Christ should look like, if there's a need, it gets met. If there's a problem or a pain it gets prayed for. I mean, there are so many things that need to function that way that you and I should see ourselves as so interdependent that you're saying I just eschew all of the maverick thoughts, all the independent thoughts, all the isolated thoughts, all the privatized life thoughts. I cannot live that way and say that I'm living an effective Christian life or one that pleases the Lord.

Paul was forced to see what it was like to have an increasing interdependence on other people. And I just want us to say, hey, I know it's not comfortable. I know it'd be easier for me to privatize everything. I know that I just want to be dependent only insofar as I have to. But the Bible says you need to push further and we need to accept that joyfully as one of the costs of being a Christian. We just have to do it. And I think that has to be taught in America more than it has to be taught in a lot of other places. It has to be taught in the West, in our independent, autonomous, free-thinking, I'm my own guy. You've got to hear this more, perhaps with a greater, longer extended first point of a sermon than a lot of other cultures where that's the way they live a lot of their lives. They don't have to, they choose to be more interdependent and we as a congregation, of course, stepping into the Christian life, it can rock our sensibilities to know how much God wants our lives to be lived within the intertwined relationships, communication, openness that God expects us to have.

So spend some time in those discussion questions this week, and I do want you, first of all, to be in a small group and interact with these ideas as Ephesians Chapter 4 says that every single part needs to work properly so that everything is building itself up the way that God wants the Church to be.

Because, Paul, I don't think it's a couple more things here, at the end of his life, he didn't just say to Timothy, "What I really need are my parchments, bring my parchments, I need to study." He did say that. But you know what preceded it in the request that he sent to Timothy when he was by himself in prison? "I need other Christians here." That is probably not the way Paul thought when he was Saul of Tarsus. But it's like, "I need it. Got to have it. I'm not doing Christian life by myself, not doing ministry by myself, I'm not doing anything by myself if I don't have to, because I need to have the people of God around me." His difficulties were



shared, Second Corinthians 1. The support he knew he needed from God, he got via the instrumentality of people. We looked at that last time, Second Corinthians Chapter 7 with Titus coming. Of course, God is the God who lifts up the depressed, the discouraged, but I know he's going to do that through people. You and I need to see that and we need to gladly accept it because it does come with some difficulties. I get it. There's a price to be paid.

Verse 20. He proclaims Jesus, because that's what we're all supposed to do. You're all supposed to say, I was wrong about God, I was wrong about Christ, now I have to have a different position and I'm going to tell people about it and that's going to cause... I remember my best friend in high school, I go off to college, I become a Christian, I come back, spend the first summer there with my friend, who's just a typical dude from high school I hung out with. And I remember sitting across from him and sharing as I sat in the front seat of my Volkswagen. And I remember talking about the importance of what had happened in my life and that I've become this follower of Christ and how important it was and he needed to.

And I remember his response to all that was just so dismissive. Something now that had become so central in my heart, in my life now, what to him was like... Matter of fact, I remember I've quoted this before. It has been years, I suppose. But Neal says to me, "You know, surfing," because he was a surfer, "surfing is my church, right? The wave is my God." I mean, that's just kind of how... it tells you the quality of the friends I was hanging out with, I suppose. But I mean, to him, it was like, "You're not going to make this God of the Bible and this Jesus of history be the God that supplants... I mean, I think what you're doing is dumb." Now that created a conflict. I'd become a Christian and I proclaimed Christ in the front seat of my blue Volkswagen. And I tell my friend, "Listen, you need to see Christ for who he is. I was wrong when you and I were friends in high school about my view of God. Now I'm telling you what's right." And that instantly caused this problem between us.

And so it is for Paul, right? He proclaims Christ in the synagogues because he knows they have the wrong view of God, just like I had the wrong view of God, because they didn't even embrace his Christ. And now I'm going to tell you, "You guys need to embrace Christ because he is the Son of God," and they start going, "How in the world did you make such a turn around here," like a lot of people said about you and me when we started telling them our conversion story. So he has this amazing conversion and they go, I can't even believe you're saying all this. And it ends with the transitional verse there in verse 23 is they want to kill him. Talk about conflict. Yeah, there's going to be conflict.

Number two. The second thing you need to do. You need to "Embrace the Challenge of More Conflict" because the Christian life is going to be filled with more conflict. That's just going to happen. Right? As I kind of mocked with jest and tongue-in-cheek, the old and very popular tract, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," as the first thing you need to think about, to say God loves you and has a plan of conflict for your future. That wouldn't sell as well, I suppose. Not a great marketing tool, but it's exactly what we need to hear because we need to count the cost, identify it and say I will gladly pay it. When Ananias was given the message that Saul needs to suffer many things, I'm going to show him that he's got to suffer many things for me, then immediately out of the gate, he knows this: "I can't be as



independent as I used to be. God's going to force me to be dependent on these people called Christians. They're going to depend on me and I'm going to depend on them." And you're going to have conflict. All your old colleagues and friends, they're going to think you're crazy. They're going to think what happened to you? They're going to think I don't really like the new you and there's going to be conflict.

Let me share four different categories real quickly of the conflict you're going to have. Let me label these four categories, "A" "B" "C" and "D." Let's go to First John Chapter 4 to identify the first one. It's very simple. One I just described to you in the front seat of my blue Volkswagen when Neal was telling me, "I don't like your theology. I got my own theology. I think your theology is wrong and my theology is right." That's called, let's just label this one then we'll look at the passage, theological conflict. He has a view of God, he even called surfing his church and the wave his God. That was how he viewed his life and that's how he viewed God. And so we had a theological conflict.

Did he believe in God? Sure. Like 90% of the people in our country, he believed in God, like most of your friends believe in God. But you go and tell them now, "I believed in God before, too, but now I had it wrong about Christ. And I'm going to tell you exactly who Christ is and how he has changed my life. My life now is now subjected to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah and I am supposed to live for him." That's going to cause theological conflict. Not everyone sees Christ the same way as that. First one. I love it. You can't believe every spirit. We're not talking about Ouija board spirit here. I can prove that to you by looking at verse 6, the last sentence in verse 6. "By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Is demonic and angelic stuff behind it? Well, sure, but that's not the point. The point here is there's a corpus of teaching about God and people are saying those things and some of them are not true. Don't believe every spirit, every lecture, every philosophy, every theological statement, but tests the spirits to see whether they're from God.

You shouldn't believe what everybody says. You can't say "Your truth, my truth, whatever you want to believe, that's fine." Why? Well, you need to know, first of all, many false prophets have gone out into the world. They're saying all kinds of things that are wrong. They're false. That's a value statement. That's a truth claim. Right? We're saying this truth is incompatible with that truth. For instance, the Jews thought that Jesus was a lot of things. They thought in the end, he certainly wasn't who he said he was. He was a false messiah. Maybe he's a good teacher. Remember, Jesus asked his own disciples, who do people say that I am this, this, this and this? He wants to make sure that you get clear who do you say that I am? And so once we establish that, that then is set and we realize if we're saying the right thing about who Christ is, everyone else who says something different, we're immediately at odds with them. Theologically we are in conflict, just logically so.

The Jews said he's a false messiah. We're saying he's the real messiah. Paul was saying, Saul of Tarsus was saying, "Jesus is dead. I don't know, his body is somewhere." And now he has to say, "No, Jesus is alive." And so he's changed his view here about what is true. Islam, the fastest-growing religion in the world. What do they say about Jesus? Isa is a prophet. Yeah, he's a prophet. Like Moses, like Elijah, like Muhammad. He's a prophet. He's a good



prophet, an important prophet, but just a prophet. And we're saying, "No, no, he's not a prophet. He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah. He's everything the Old Testament looked forward to. He is the fulfillment of the law. That's what we're saying. You're saying something different. We both can't be right."

Some people think that religion is like choosing a car. You pick a Ford, you pick a Chevy, you pick a Hyundai, you pick a Lexus, do whatever you want. It'll all get us where we need to go. Right? That's the Oprah theology, right? Just get in whatever car you want. Whatever takes you from point A to point B is great. The problem is for them, it's very short-sighted point A to point B. They're thinking a very short journey about a crutch to live on so I can feel better about my guilt or whatever it is. When in reality we're talking about what's going to get us across the chasm called death. And there's only one person who has done that. And we've got to think rightly about that one person. And there are a lot of false prophets out there saying a lot of things that do not pass the test. They do not speak the truth about it.

When Hinduism or Buddhism says about Jesus, who is Jesus? Well, they say, "Well, he's an avatar, an enlightened teacher, a guru." We're saying, "No, he's not any of that. He's God incarnate. He's the Son of Man of Daniel Chapter 7. You need to bow your knee to him. He is the ultimate God. There are not many gods, there's one God and there's one Christ and one Lord for us, and that is the king, and you need to bow to him." They don't like that. They don't believe that. You cannot believe both about God. God's either telling the truth about Christ, and I'm affirming that truth or you're saying something different and we are now in theological loggerheads.

"By this you may know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah, "has come in the flesh is from God." Right? We're talking about his fulfillment of Scripture. We're talking about his deity, preexistence and the glory of God. John 17. That's what we're saying. [1 John 4:3] "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus from God," that's a problem. There are the two things. "This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming." We warned you there was going to be theological conflict in your life. "It's now already in the world." It's there. It's everywhere. "Little children, you are from God and you've overcome them." You're on the right side of history. You have affirmed the truth. You believe God's testimony. "For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

A lot of thoughts, lots of spirits of teaching and theology and doctrine and a lot of cult groups and a lot of people saying a lot of things. But if we align ourselves with the truth, we bow our knee to the Christ who is true. Well, then we know we're on the right side of history. We've overcome. "They," verse 5, "are from the world; they speak from the world, and the world," loves that, "listens to them." Notice how they love to applaud every religion but ours. Did you notice that? The world loves that. "We just want to be able to be really loosey-goosey about whatever, you know, someone wants to think about Jesus, it's cool with us." But "We're from God, verse 6. "Whoever knows God listens to us." Wow, how arrogant is that? "Whoever is not from God does not listen to us." Wow. Really? "You Christians are so narrow-minded." We are. We're very narrow-minded about this.



"By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Whether you affirm what the Bible says, what we're saying, what we're affirming, then we're OK. Right? But we're true and you're false. You want to say anything else about Christ other than what God has said about Christ, then you're at theological odds with us and we're never going to say those two can be compatible. If you think pluralism as a philosophy in culture is a good thing, you need to define it simply as this: "We're not going to kill you if you disagree, but we are going to say you're wrong and we're right."

That's not an arrogant statement any more than it's an arrogant statement to be the chief of staff at a hospital and you wanting to get a reference on a surgeon who is applying for a job in your hospital. And when you say, I want to know the reference about him and you go and find someone who knows the background about him and comes and says, here is what this surgeon is. He's this that, this that, the other. And you go, OK, there you go. I'm going to look at what other people say about him. And you find someone who's got the truth and you find someone who's got error. You do your homework and you say this aligns with the truth about this person and this one does not. This guy saying he's a clown, he's ridiculous. He can't even cut a person open straight, whatever.

And I need to make a decision about this surgeon because a lot rides on that. So I'm looking at people giving me a reference. The surgeon is who he is, right? You can't change that. I can't change who God is and I can't change who Christ is. He is who he is. He's the God who's there. And Christ is whoever he is. I'm trying to figure out who that is. Is Hinduism right? Is Buddhism right? Are the Mormons right? Are the Jehovah's Witnesses right? Is Islam right? I need to figure that out. I need to really look at that. Paul has gone from not affirming the truth to affirming the truth, and that puts him immediately at theological odds with people. And if you're not comfortable with that, all I'm saying is you need to get comfortable with that, at least get comfortable with the discomfort of being at odds and in conflict with people theologically, because that's your life, because that's part and parcel of Christianity.

You say, "Well, I want to have a baby that doesn't poop his diapers." Well, I'm sorry, they haven't made that kind yet. So you're stuck changing diapers. And all I'm saying is, can't you enjoy the baby and hold your nose changing the diapers? And I get this. You don't like conflict. I'd like to live my life now until the end of my life with no conflict and everyone agreeing with me all the time. I'd love that. It's like you'd like your infant not to poop, that would be great. That would be awesome. But that's not how it works. I become a Christian and all of a sudden, I'm saying Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and a lot of people in the world, matter of fact, most of the people in the world say something different about that. And I'm saying you're wrong, you have a spirit of error. You are the Antichrist.

Start the conversation with Oprah that way, right? "You're the Antichrist. You have the spirit of error, you're speaking falsehood." Now, I'm just saying Christianity may have even been so characterized as that kind of thing and you may say, "I hate that." But I'm telling you, I didn't write this. This is what God has said about the truth. You either believe it or you don't believe it. And if you believe it, then we have to come around and say, "OK, we can't all be right." We can't all be right any more than the references about a would-be surgeon can all be right.



Right? Not if they're at odds with each other. And that's what we're looking for. And we have in Scripture a 66-book library, all of them giving us an accurate reference on Christ. While the world says something different, I'm going to go with God's prophetic reference on who this person is. Right?

And that's what Lewis, this great intellect, this don at Oxford ends up coming to the conclusion, like a lot of people, "I guess he's either the Lord or he's a lunatic or he's a liar." You've got to make a decision. And we come to that and we say, OK, it's going to put me at theological odds with people. Paul had been calling Jesus, I don't know, a lunatic or a liar, one or the other, but now he's calling him Lord, that's going to cause theological conflict.

Go to the next chapter. Chapter 5, First John Chapter 5. Look at verses 9 through 10. 9 and 10. Here's the second level, that was letter "A." If we receive the testimony of men, if you're that dumb, the testimony of God is greater. Don't listen to the crowds, don't listen to the world. We got to listen to God. God has spoken. "For this is the testimony of God that he is borne concerning his Son." This is what the whole letter has been about, it is what John's gospel was about. We have the truth about Christ. "Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself." You bought it. You believe it. Your heart now aligns with this truth. OK? Check this out. "Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar." You're accusing him of being a liar. "Because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son."

Think about that. We've gone from theological conflict to now that something's going to cause social conflict, relational conflict, that's letter "B" because you're calling God a liar. That's why Oprah and I cannot be buddies. We just can't, or anybody else. Oprah, that's so dated that shows how old I am. Pick whoever, the normal... Joe Rogan. I don't know who the cool talk show person is now, but I can't be buddies with you when you're calling my God a liar. Right? I'm willing to evangelize you, but I'm going to be tenacious about who Christ is. And if you want to deny that, then guess what? I guess we're not going to be golfing buddies.

It's like me saying to you about your wife, the wife that you have a photo album and you married her and you celebrate anniversaries and you sleep with her every night and she is your wife, you're loving covenant partner. And I say, "Ahhh, she ain't your wife. She's not your wife. Nah, I don't even know, I don't even think she lives in your house. Maybe she visits every night. She ain't your wife. She's not your wife" You're going to say, dude, "Stop it, actually she is my wife." No, no, no, no, no, no. Eventually you are going to say, "Are you calling me a liar?" And you may want to pull out photo albums and I say, "Like I don't want to even see it, she's not your wife." That is what people are saying about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. They're denying the relationship.

But it's more than just a relational denial. It is an ontological denial. They're claiming he is not the Son of God, that he's not the Lord, that he's not deity incarnate, and that the fullness of deity does not dwell in bodily form. They deny that. So that's like me saying not only is "She's not your wife, but you know what? And she's a dude. She's a guy." Right? I don't know, at some point are we going to stop being golfing partners if I insist that your wife is a dude?



Now, I know this illustration doesn't work anymore, but go back in your mind when the world made sense about 10 or 15 years ago. And let's just pretend we're doing this like in the 90s or something. If I start calling your wife a guy, and you say, "Dude, stop it. She is my wife and she is a woman, I'm telling you that." At some point we're going to have relational problems, we're going to social conflict, and that's what goes on in every...

Guess what my old surfing buddy and I don't do anymore. I haven't seen him since he went to Hawaii and got lost. Probably drowned in a surfing accident, for all I know, and it's not a good thing, I did my best with him. But all I'm telling you is this: we're not going to be buddies. We just cannot be buddies. We can't be. "Ahhh. but what about Jesus? He hung out with the tax collectors and the sinners." He did not hang out with the tax collectors and sinners. You know that, right? We talked enough about this passage from the platform. I know your teenager loves to say this when you tell him not to hang out with these people. And he says, "Well, Jesus," if he's a Sunday school grad, "Jesus hung out with the tax collectors and sinners." He did not hang out with them. Right? That verb, you can't say that. He went to call sinners to repentance. Right? That's a whole different thing, OK?

I called my buddy Neal to repentance and he refused. He didn't have any interest in that. He wanted to call God a liar and called Jesus something other than what he was. And at some point that affects our relationship. Matter of fact, really early on, that affects our relationship. I would take a call from him any day of the week if he's still alive and say, "Let's talk about the gospel, let's talk about Christ." That's not fanatical, that's like me saying before we can really have a cool dinner together, we really need to have some discussion about you calling my wife, you know, not my wife and a guy. At some point, we're going to have to deal with the elephant in the room. Theology has to be that important to you. And for Paul, guess what? He lost a lot of friends over saying Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

All I'm telling you is you got to be brave. Right? "If the world saw you as one of its own," Jesus says, "then it would love you as its own. But as it is, I've chosen you out of the world therefore the world hates you." Some of us don't think, "Well, I don't know, if I get looked over for promotion, I can claim that verse." This ought to be the reality of us thinking that's just part and parcel of how this happens. Being a Christian creates theological conflict and social conflict.

Letter "C" drop down to verse 18 in this passage, First John Chapter 5 verse 18. "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning." It's a different topic, one he talks about throughout the book. "But he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him." That's a strong way to put it because the evil one is certainly throwing a lot of stuff at us. You read the book of Job, right? But ultimately, he does not overcome us. He does not have sovereignty over us. "We know that we are from God," verse 19, "and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." There is the dichotomy. There is the bifurcation. There's the "A" and "B" and there's no in between. You either are from God and you are a part of God's family or you are not and you are under the power of the evil one.



Conversion, according to Ephesians 2, is you no longer are being led by the spirit that's now at work in the Sons of Disobedience. I'm no longer a part of the world system. And while the spirit of First John 4 was not the "whoo-hoo-who" spirit, this one is. This is a direct discussion about Satan in the world. The Second Corinthians 4:4 Satan, the God of this world who blinds the eyes of guys like my friend Neal. He's a part of that system and I'm no longer a part of that system and because of that, I not only have theological conflict and social conflict, I'm really having a battle not just with my friend Neal, because I don't really ultimately battle against flesh and blood. I battle against spiritual forces of darkness in this world.

And therefore I know this: Satan now and demons hate me since my conversion at age 18 and the same goes for you. You've stepped out of a world system. And when you did much like with that discussion in Job Chapter 1, Satan is not real keen on that. Matter of fact, the more you grow, the more productive you get, as we'll learn later in the book of Acts when the seven sons of Sceva in that whole weird situation say, "Yeah, we know about Paul." Why did they know about Paul? Because he is a defector. He was a part of the world system and Satan was pleased with him persecuting the Christian Jews and now he's defected. He's gone AWOL and they don't like that.

Matter of fact, they're throwing darts at him. So much so that he says in Second Corinthians Chapter 12, one of his physical ailments, the reason he was in the hospital was because he had a messenger of Satan that was attacking him, just like in the book of Job. Now, who's sovereign over all that? Satan's on a leash. I get that. God says you can do this much. I get that. Not only that God is so wise, he uses the messenger of Satan to do something good in Paul's life. And if you know the passage in Second Corinthians 12 that I'm talking about, you may throw a flag and say, "Ahh, I don't get that." He calls it a messenger of Satan. Why? Because Satan hates you. We use that illustration like when Trump was the president. Why did they hate Barron, his son? Not because of any of his policies, not because of any of Barron's speeches. They hated him because he was attached to Trump.

So what's the point? The point is you attach yourself to Christ and you aligned yourself with the testimony of Christ and you say now God is true, he's not a liar, and now all of a sudden, the father of lies, the murderer, the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy, says, "I don't like people aligning." So there's a spiritual battle. How does that manifest itself? In a million different ways. You've got a lot of problems at work and you got a lot of problems in your health. You got a lot of problems in a lot of places. Not all of them, but some of them can be traced back to the fact that you are in a spiritual war. You better put your spiritual armor on every day, Ephesians Chapter 6, because you are going to have the fiery darts of the enemy. You didn't have that as a non-Christian. You did not have that as a non-Christian. Right?

"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." More interdependence on other people, right? More conflict theologically, socially, and what did I call this one? Spiritual conflict. A lot of spiritual conflict. I have spiritual conflict in my life manifested in a ton of different ways. But you and I need to know that we're at war with the cosmic forces of evil in this world. You don't need Ouija boards to figure this out. A lot of harassment going on.



Second Timothy Chapter 2, there are people held captive to do Satan's will in our environment. Paul warns Timothy, "Man, don't be quarrelsome. Call them to repentance. Do it thoughtfully, strategically, carefully, because, man, they're out there and they're being tools and instruments of the enemy to attack you, Timothy, and your work and your ministry."

One more, let me end with this one, go back to First John Chapter 2. We're in First John 5. Go to First John Chapter 2. A very familiar passage, probably the most familiar one I'm quoting from First John this morning. It says in verses 15 through 17, "Do not love the world." Do not love the world. We're not talking about sunsets or beaches or trees or forests or parks or mountains. We're not talking about that. We're talking about a world system. We're going to see it here in the last verse, verse 17 of this paragraph, talks about the desires, right? The world is passing away along with its desires. So there's a set of philosophical desires, axioms, principles, virtues, goals, priorities, things that say this is how the world works, this is how human beings on the planet should function, and that's the world system. We'll call it philosophy. And you're going to have not only theological conflict, not only social conflict, not only spiritual conflict, but you're going to have philosophical conflict.

You're not going to be able to be comfortable and let your guard down living in the world and watching a commercial. Can't let your guard down. I mean, think about it. The whole world system from advertising to marketing to the way that people think you should function at work, all of these things are based on some basic motivations and they're all going to appeal to these three things. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world," here are the three things, "the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life," those three things, "is not from the Father, it is from the world." The world is pushing that philosophy "And the world is passing away along with desires." And no one's going to say those are cool things to live by a thousand years from now, I guarantee it. "But whoever does the will of God abides forever."

So we need to be countercultural and that means there's going to be conflict. Paul's going to live by a different set of principles. Whereas before we learn from his testimony that he retells the Philippians in Philippians Chapter 3, there are a lot of things that he did that he thought under the guise of religion were good, but they ended up being self-aggrandizing, self-promoting. And he says, "Listen, that I've counted as rubbish and loss for the sake of gaining Christ."

So he's changed his whole philosophy of life and all the things - false religion, education, career, family, relationships, recreation, entertainment, they're all designed around these things. At some level they are. The lust of the flesh. The old days we used to call it, "if it feels good, do it" philosophy, right? If it feels good, if it makes me feel good, there's pleasure involved, if it's pleasurable, I'm going to pursue that. Lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and if it looks good, I want that, whatever that might be. I mean, that's really the ultimate priority. The idea is whether it's a house or a wife or myself in the mirror. It's all about that's got to look a particular way. The things in the world. And Satan uses that. He used it from the very beginning where Eve said she saw the fruit and it was pleasing to the eye. Right? Here was



this thing where Satan goes, "Look at that. Look at it. It looks good. You want it, you should have it."

So you've got this idea of if it feels good, you should do it, and if it looks good, you should have it. Here's the third thing - the pride of life, the pride of life. If it promotes you. Right? Well, then you should go for that. Right? You should do it. If it's going to make you go up, then that's a good thing. And so it becomes promotion. And the world's always trying to promote you. I mean, even everything about how it tries to sell you widgets, "You deserve it." The philosophy of education in the world. It's all about training our kids to respect themselves and love themselves, have a good, healthy self-esteem. It's not about you singing a song, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." That's not part of the curriculum you've noticed. That's not how we teach people to think. But Christianity does. Christianity has a whole different philosophy. And we should know this. You're never going to feel at home in this world, EVER, if you are a Christian.

Paul no longer did he feel at home. Matter of fact, he said, "My citizenship is now in heaven." Not just this little sub-group called the Church within the world. Really, I'm a stranger, an alien in the world, I just don't fit in anymore. And that's part of the problem that some of us have because we're moaning and complaining about that or fighting the reality of that. And I'm saying we've got to just joyfully embrace that. It's OK. We're not going to fit in. Get used to the conflict, say it's OK. The conflict is like the dirty diaper with the baby. It just goes with the package. And one day it'll be done and we will have a kingdom where none of this is going to happen. No more theological conflict, no more social conflict, no more spiritual conflict, no more philosophical conflict, because Christ will reign and so will his philosophy, his law, his truth.

All right, that was longer than I want it to be. Let's go back to verse 23. As if I had time for this. Verse 23. "When many days passed, the Jews plotted to kill him but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching through the gates day and night in order to kill him, but the disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket." And I did this simple observation in reading it at the outset of this sermon, how humiliating that must have been. In a trash basket, probably, maybe an oversize laundry basket, but likely a trash basket. A wicker basket used for trash lowered down the wall by the people he was trying to kill when he came to town, when he was heading to town. And now he is escaping under the cover of darkness like a fugitive. We've gone from you riding in on a horse with authority, with letters from the high priest, with everyone scared of you to you now looking like you're scared, running under the cover of darkness away from the authorities at the town. How humbling is that?

Well, if you know anything about the Christian life, that's all part and parcel of the Christian life. You can't even get saved unless you humble yourself. You certainly are not going to grow in Christian life unless you, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you at the proper time." I mean, we've got to get to the reality of saying that's part of the Christian life, and while the world system is we just kind of dovetailed from the last point, there's no way around the fact we will never fit in with the world. Because I know one thing,



they're always pumping themselves up. self-promotion, self-aggrandizement, get the best, do it for yourself, you go around once in life, grab all the gusto you can. All of that is this. And Christianity is you've got to see yourself in perspective. You got to see yourself for who you are. You're so dependent on God.

Matter of fact, Lamentations 3, if it weren't for his great mercy, you would be consumed. Every day is a gift of God. You hear people say that trite little thing, but it's certainly true. How are you? "Better than I deserve." Well you deserve to be in outer darkness under the threat and weight of all of your sin and instead you're not, you're breathing and you're here. You can go out and have a barbecue tonight. All of that, think about that, is a gift of God. Who thinks that way? We ought to think that way because that's what the Christian life is all about, and you ought to embrace that challenge. It's a challenge to think humbly about who you are, but you need to do that. Number three, "Embrace the Challenge of Increasing Humility" I just need to be increasingly humble. That's how I started the Christian life. I counted all lost, Philippians 3. Whatever was counted to my credit, I'm saying, No. I cash it in, "that I might gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteous as my own that comes from the law but the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ." All of that. That's how I start.

Now, I start to live the Christian life. And let's just say I start being productive in the Christian life and people start saying you're doing a great job. You got great insight into the Scriptures and you're doing good things. You're winning people to Christ. Well, you might be tempted then to not be so humble and so God will use even things like the messengers of Satan to let the leash out a little bit so that you can say with the apostle Paul, "I recognize that all of that was so that I would not become conceited. Therefore, I'm going to be glad, almost gladly boast of my weaknesses," and calamity and difficulty and distress. I'm fine with that because I know one thing, what's really important is that I learn to hate the things that God hates and God hates, hates pride. God is opposed to the proud.

Matter of fact, jot this one down. Proverbs Chapter 6 verse 16, 16 and 17, but 16 starts it this way, "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him." If I was going to say make me a list of seven things you really hate. I mean, really hate. I'm not talking about food. Just think about things you really despise. Think about that. If God were going to make a list like that, and he did and we know it, it's found in Proverbs Chapter 6, "There are six things Lord hates. Yes, seven that are an abomination to him." What would be at the top of his list? I just wonder and you already know because where this whole question is framed in the sermon. Do you know how it's put? It's not even put in some egregious way, "Someone who is so reeking of his pride." No. He says this: "haughty eyes," haughty eyes. When you start reflecting, even in your disposition, in the visage on the front side of your melon, you start showing like you're better than the next guy. Like you deserve it, like you earned it. "That is an abomination to me."

I'll bet it's also an abomination to the archangels, to the Cherubim, to the Seraphim. Do you think that they maybe are a little bit miffed at you when you go through the whole day without ever saying thank you one time for the things that God has given you? When you're not really sitting there thinking we're it not for God's mercy I would be consumed. When the Seraphim



are flying around as we saw last week in Isaiah 6, covering their faces, not even willing to look at the manifestation of God's glory in that vision that Isaiah had. I just wonder what they think when you walk around with a little bit of haughtiness on your face, like you're better than, like you're all that, like you deserve a few good things in life.

And if you want to test that theory, just let a few bad things happen in your life. And let me ask you, do you ever have the temptation to say, "Why me God? Why did you let this happen?" I really put the question to you, why didn't this happen sooner to me? Really, because I know who I am. I mean a sinner, saved by God's grace by the death of Christ on the cross. I want you to think about that, right? "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." Who can really say... A person who says that has started to have a perspective that's right. Because the Seraphim, Cherubim and archangels aren't looking down at you when you think you've done a good job in your education and your job and you lean back in your desk at work and go, "Man, I've really done it." They're not going, "Yeah, man, get it." They're going, "Who do you think you are?"

And Paul, who was so humble as God continued to do things in his life to remind him who he was, he could say this to the Corinthians in a very wealthy place. He can say, "What do you have that you did not receive?" And "if you received it," it was given you, all a gift of God, if it's God's grace, even you being alive and having whatever you have, "why do you boast as though you didn't receive it?" Why do you act like you earned it? We didn't earn our Christianity, we don't earn anything else in our lives. I mean, God is gracious to us to let us still live on his planet and breathe his air and eat his food. That's a humble perspective, but you're never going to get applauded by your friends at work for that perspective on life. And yet that's what God is going to continually do to the circumstances, problems, the illnesses, the sicknesses, the economic problems, he's going to lead you to continue to say, by God's grace, I'm a part of his family. Just think for a second about that perspective. Because guess what the angels understand? They understand who they are. And they're a whole lot more all that than you are.

I don't want to offend them, let alone the God who gave me them. So I'm going to say, you know what, humility is not a popular thing, conflicts are not something I want, interdependence is not something I'm super comfortable with, but all of that is part of what God asks me to do. Be a part of this thing that forgives my sin, that puts me in right relationship with my creator, that secures heaven for me, that lets me know the truth, that frees my conscience. Man, if that's what you want, it's worth it.

You've heard the nutritionist, the coach or the trainer say, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels." You've heard that, right? Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. When you're dying to have a bowl of ice cream. Well, nothing tastes good as skinny feels, so this will be worth it. That's what they're trying to do in giving you that line. And a good friend or whoever might say that kind of spiffy thing is trying to remind you it is worth it. This is so much better. To have the thing, even though you go through the pain of not getting what you want. I don't want conflict, I really don't on many levels want interdependence, and I really don't care for humility because I'd rather be following the pattern of the world, putting myself on a pedestal and



wanting the world to rotate around me. But I'm ready to give all that up. Because nothing is as good as being a part of God's family, nothing is as good as being forgiven, nothing is as good as having heaven secured. So let's gladly embrace the challenge of those things.

The pastor is long-winded. I'm sorry about that. So let me stand you up and we'll pray and dismiss you. Sorry about going long here today. Can we just be more optimistic? Can we be less complaining? Can we embrace these things? And even like a mom who is downplaying labor pains because of the joy of having a child. I know it's kind of reversed for us because even that sequence was, you know, the child is there, makes her forget her labor pains. It's reversed in the statement God makes in Hebrews 12 about Christ, "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame." I want to have that perspective. To say we can get through this because of what's coming.

All right, let's pray. God, teach us afresh that truth of Romans 8:18. There's really no pain, no suffering, no trials, no problems in this world that are even "comparable to the glory that's to be revealed to us." It's going to be good. We have even times now a foretaste of how good it is to know that we're in right relationship with you. So, God, we will be glad and content and even as Paul said we'll boast in the fact that we've got a few conflicts in our lives we wouldn't have if it weren't for our Christianity. That we got people in our lives and our lives are more messy than they would have been if I were just a non-Christian living independently. And I'm someone that recognizes lowliness before God. So let us be comfortable with all those things, God, as we continue to live for you this week. Let's do it joyfully and gladly.

In Jesus name. Amen.