



True Strength – Part 5

Empowered by Knowing God Sees All

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Well, way back in 1785 a British philosopher, an English philosopher named Jeremy Bentham proposed a new kind of prison for his country. He presented it to the government as something he called the panopticon, the panopticon. He named it that because the new prisons that he wanted to see in his country were arranged, the prison complex, in a big circle. And in the middle of this big circle was a very large and tall singular guard tower. And the way that he presented it and designed it was that the guard tower and all the windows that were a circular set of windows in the guard tower had blinds and a kind of backlighting that was so designed that the inmates who all had a view of this tower, couldn't tell when or if the guards were actually in the tower. And so his strategy, Bentham's strategy, was that the inmates if they didn't know if the guards were watching them, that they would self-regulate their behavior. That was his strategy.

The premise was basically this: as human beings if they think they're being watched they're going to do better than they would otherwise do. They're going to behave better than they would otherwise behave. And that's not a bad premise. That's why you can go this afternoon to Lowe's or Home Depot and you can order any variety of what they call dummy security cameras. Now, they're pretty cheap because they don't work but they look like security cameras. You can put them up all around the perimeter of your home. And of course, the principle is what Jeremy Bentham proposed, and that is that people, prowlers at night, they might see these dummy cameras, the fake cameras, and they might think that they're being watched and recorded and therefore you're hoping that they'll move on to another house that they think is not watching them.

And I guess that makes sense because if I could convince you right now that for the next 48 hours you are going to be recorded everywhere you go. I have a team of people with all the latest micro technology and they're going to watch and record everything that you do, everything that you say, every purchase that you make, every facial expression, every roll of your eyes, every angry word, every kind word, everything that you look at, every web search that you make, every conversation that you have. Everything that you do is all going to be seen, it's all going to be recorded, and it's all going to be played back here next week at church. I think you would probably regulate your behavior. Bentham called it the panopticon, by the way. It sounds like a weird word, but it's really not all that weird nor strange. And, you know, both parts of this "pan," of course, pan means "all" and "opticon" we get words like ophthalmologists, optometry or optics from that. That just means seeing, pan-opticon, is "all seeing," all seeing.

Of course, that's basically when it comes to theology, it's Theology 101. Proverbs Chapter 15 verse 3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." Right? That's just basic, you know, theology that God is a God who is omnipresent. He's omniscient. And at some points in church history, some theologians have liked to talk about the omni-perception of God. Now, I know that's a bit anthropomorphic because, you



know, we're living on a timeline. We're living here in time and space. And so we like to think, even as Proverbs 15 verse 3 says that it's like God's kind of watching everything. Not that he has eyes and not that he's waiting for us to do something to learn of anything. But that's the idea, right? That God is perceiving, "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." And so we recognize that Theology 101 would teach you that you better be aware that you are being watched, that everything is being recorded. You don't need a guard tower. You don't need a camera to figure this all out.

Paul, by the way, passed Theology 101, he had a very good grade. And he knew this. Matter of fact, he lived it. He lived it in a way that gave him a perspective on his own life that demonstrated a kind of character and kind of what we've been studying here in Chapter 12 of Second Corinthians, a kind of strength that we would all hope to attain, an ability to get through certain things in his life because he did live with a knowledge that God was watching all that he did. That wasn't a negative for him. That was a tremendous positive for him. And I'd like to show you a little bit at the end of this discussion, after chapters of him defending himself in writing, he's going to wrap it all up with one verse, basically, and then two verses at the end of Chapter 12 of Second Corinthians explaining his expectations, or at least his concerns about what might happen when he shows up for his third visit.

So take your Bibles out or your devices out and make your way to Second Corinthians Chapter 12. It's also printed on your worksheet if you happen to get that in your worship packet. Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 19, 20 and 21. We'll look at three verses this morning. I'll read it from the English Standard Version which is printed there for you. I always encourage you to bring your devices to church. We have free Wi-Fi, so if it gets boring you can watch soccer or whatever you need to watch. I prefer to keep you engaged here in this though. You can always go to esv.org. That's a free way for you to read along in the version that we have. If you want an inexpensive Bible software program Olive Tree is a great place to download your own English Standard Version and some simple commentaries. Logos.com is a little bit more expensive but worth it if you want to invest in some good Bible software. That gave you enough time to find it, right?

Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 19. Wrapping up this long defense of Paul's reputation, he says this now, "Have you been thinking all along we have been defending ourselves to you?" Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? I'm going to say, yeah, I really think you have. You wrote it in a letter. It's on parchment. You put it in Titus' hand, you rolled it up in this parchment and you sent it all the way from where you're at to where we're at. You instructed him to have it read in the church and we're listening to it now. So weren't you? Didn't you want us to hear it?

Paul says well, yeah, of course, I was wanting you to hear it. And I did want you to process what I'm saying. But really something much more important. This is the way I live, middle of verse 19, "It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ." That's the key. This is all about the fact that I'm always thinking about something far bigger than what you think of us. Even my defense has been something I'm always thinking about. This is done in the omnipresence of God. He is knowing what I'm saying, and it's all done in Christ as though Christ



were standing here knowing that everything I'm telling you is true. He knows, and I'm doing it as though Christ were over my shoulder looking at all that I'm writing. And I've been talking about motives in this whole chapter, "and all for your upbuilding." Now there's a phrase you haven't used or a word you haven't used, "upbuilding." That's a weird phrase. The old translations used to use this phrase, "edification." Do you remember that old word edification if you grew up in church, edification? We don't use that word anymore either.

Now, edification, has certainly given way to a different word that we often use that's similar and that's the word "encouragement," the word that translates encouragement. And it kind of means a bit of the same thing, it has a similar feel to it. We often talk about that being called in alongside of, to put words or actions together that hold you up. Now, upbuilding is more of a building concept. It's a building analogy. Matter of fact, we're called the bricks in this building that God is building to dwell in. It's an analogy, and we're called to be put in place. It's almost like we are being built up as an organization, as a church, and every person who comes to Christ is put in this building. Well, that's true, but when we talk about an individual we would like to see them built up and put in place and to be strong like, you know, a bunch of bricks that are put in with mortar and it's all held together, it's strong and it's the idea of it. We did it all for your encouragement, for your strength, for your maturity. We're doing all of this ultimately with this motive for you. And then he uses this word, "beloved," even that we don't use much anymore. It's a grandma word. But the idea is we love you guys. We love you guys.

Now, this is odd because the previous verses certainly reminded us that he's disappointed. You ought to have commended us. You should have had our back. You should have not listened to the critics who were criticizing me and denigrating my reputation. But you didn't. And instead I've had to do the foolish thing I've been doing now for verse after verse after verse and I've been defending myself, and yet I love you, the illustration last time we were together studying the previous verses, like a parent, right? I'm coming back and I'm not going to pass the plate. I'm going to sit here and at my own expense I'm going to serve you. I'm coming to you again. I'm going to continue to pour my life out, to spend and be expended. Hey, I haven't been defending myself just to defend myself. It's not me that I'm worried about. I'm ultimately doing this in the sight of God. I'm doing it in the consistency and the integrity of Christ. And it's all been for your edification, for your upbuilding, for your strengthening. And I love you guys.

Now he shifts in the last two verses, "For I fear that perhaps when I come, I may find you not as I wish," notice this turn now, "and that you may find me not as you wish." That's a clever way to put it, right? What do you mean that you're not going to find the Corinthians as you wish? Well, "that perhaps there may be quarreling." Now this is an amazing verse of eight things that he says, eight words that he uses. Now, the first one, if you studied First and Second Corinthians, you know this word is a word that characterizes the Corinthians all the way back to the early chapters of First Corinthians they're known for quarreling. And that's not a good thing, right? They're divisive. There are factions. There are all kinds of arguing going on, they're quarreling.



Now, this is a problem and it's a problem that starts in the hearts of individuals and that's where he goes next. Look at these next three words here "jealousy, anger and hostility." Those are sins of the heart. These are things that reside in people's hearts. And just like Jesus taught out of the mouth speaks what? The abundance of the heart, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." And so what comes out of the mouth? Things like this, the next two words, "slander and gossip." So we have the sins in the church of quarreling. That's what they're known for. And it comes from the sins in the heart of jealousy, anger and hostility. And bubbling out of that kind of sin in the heart is slander and gossip. And what does that create? People who are good at slandering and gossip they keep building themselves up, this word puffed-up or pride or conceit. Well, they get more and more conceited and say we're the Corinthian church, and we're coming in from the lobby taking our seat in church. If we have this person, Linda's over here, she's more conceited than she was last month. And Fred over here, he's more prideful than he was last year. And Jim over here, he's more, you know, prideful than he was last quarter. And we have all these people more and more conceited, more prideful, more puffed-up than they were before. What do we end up with? If that's the personal result, what's the community result, disorder? That's the last one on the list.

So the book ends. Quarreling and disorder. Of course, that's what you're going to have with a quarreling church. You're going to have a chaotic church, a disordered church, certainly you're not going to have a harmonious church. This is like an orchestra where everyone's just kind of tuning their instruments. It's a discordant, right? It's not harmonious. It's not unified. Well, he basically diagnoses it with a list of six things: jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip and conceit. It's just masterful. I know there are always two authors to any passage of Scripture here, but the Holy Spirit is making sure that the Apostle Paul just masterfully lists this out, and even in a diagnostic way. It's so good.

So then he shifts from this problem within the church, he says, "I fear," verse 21, this gets even more dramatic. "I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you," which is even a backhanded compliment. Like I'm hoping things are going to go well. I would like to come to Corinth and it to be good. I'd like it to be where everything's good, but I might be deflated. I'm coming over the horizon here thinking that I'm coming to Corinth and it's all going to be good. But it may not be good. I may be humbled. I might be deflated. Why? Because "I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and the sensuality that they have practiced."

So people in your church who were known for sinful things and haven't done anything about it, they haven't repented. I often talk about Corinth being the Orange County of the ancient world, and that's certainly true. They were at the crossroads of a very strategic location that brought a lot of wealth to the area. But it was also, and I sometimes call it the Las Vegas of the ancient world because there was plenty of opportunity for vice. So much so that as you read in First Corinthians there were people in the church practicing some kind of sexual immorality that wasn't even tolerated among most pagans in most places, and they were tolerating a lot of things. And he says, I'm going to have to come here. I've written about these things. You should have had these people repent. But there's a big gap between their sin and



their practice of sin and they're still doing this or at least they've done it but there's been no repentance. So that may humble me. All right.

I just want to take that phrase "in the sight of God" and show you how that is providing a strength, a strength for the Apostle Paul. And that would be a solution that would provide strength for the Corinthians, both with sometimes the respectable sins of verse 20 and the more egregious sins of verse 21. So let's look at this text through that rubric, that lens, and let's start with verse 19 and understand what the Apostle Paul is doing here that does show great strength. He has great composure and strength throughout all of this saying certain things that would be hard for us to say that he's really defending himself, not because of his personal interest in what people think of him, but he's really concerned about what God is seeing and what Christ thinks. This is an amazing thing. "Have you been thinking all along that we've been defending ourselves to you?" No, it's in the sight of God we've been speaking in Christ, and it's all for your upbuilding. That's our motive. And we love you. That's our motive.

You can see the standard, the baseline in every one of these points. If you've got the worksheet out or it'll be over my shoulder here. The idea is that because God sees everything, the omni-perception of God, we should, just like the Apostle Paul, number one "Remain Steady in the Face of Criticism." Now, we should remain steady in the face of all things. If I were preaching on Philippians Chapter 4, I'd certainly word it like that. But here the context, at least the immediate context, is Paul's criticism. This is what's been going on in the surrounding chapters, the previous chapters. So now I'm just saying this, that Paul is really remarkable in being able to say after all this is done, I wasn't really doing this so I could feel better that you believe me and you think rightly about me. I've been saying all of this really because I'm concerned about YOU thinking rightly about me for YOUR sake. And I'm saying all of this really thinking over your shoulder, looking over your shoulder about what God is seeing. I'm doing this all for God, and I'm doing it all really with a motive for your upbuilding, your sake.

This is great. This provides a kind of internal fortitude, a kind of strength amid all the criticism that he's gotten. And really, the key to it is living in light of the presence and knowledge that God sees all things. But to drill down one level we have to go back to Second Corinthians Chapter 5, because this is what he fixates on. He fixates on one primary thing that he said just verbatim, he said it outright in Second Corinthians Chapter 5. I want you to look at it in verse 9. The context here is, of course, something broader when he's talking about the resurrection and about the intermediate state, about the spirit leaving the body all that. Great. But that's the phrase "home or away." We'll look at that here as we read this verse, Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 9. He says, "So whether we're at home or away," so if we're in this body or whether we're in the intermediate state away from the body, and we're going to get our body back, a resurrected body, here's the point. It's not like I'm for the rest of my life going to be this way. But no, this life, next life, whatever comes, here's our bottom-line intention. "We make it our aim to please him." We make it our aim to please him. That's what we're all about. That is our aim.



So we need to, like the Apostle Paul, say if God is watching, what we really want is not to say, oh, I better straighten up, because, you know, I don't want people to think... No, it's God. There's one person we want to please. Now what's interesting about this word "Eimi," it's only used three times in the New Testament. It's almost a sanitizing of a classical Greek word. This is a compound word and you know the first part of this word "Philo", right? We all know that word at least from the city in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, "Adelphos" in Greek is "brother." But the first half of that word "Philo" is "love." It's one of the words for love. And you call Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love, right? "Adelphos" is brother. Philo is love. Love and brother. Brotherly love. Okay, philo, we know that. The second half of this word "Timé" is the word "honor," love, honor. Well that's weird. That's the word "aim." Yeah, I make it my aim. Love, honor. Well, that in the secular context is really something different than what Paul is saying here because the object becomes, We "make it our aim to please him," please God. I want to please God. So it's not like I'm seeking honor for myself, but I would find it my highest honor to please him. I would like him to be honored with my life and that would be my greatest honor. So the honor isn't for me.

A lot of classical Greek words enlisted in the New Testament have this pattern. They're kind of turned on their head and used in this very godly, sanitized way. And here's one of the examples of this, I "make it my aim," I make it my greatest honor to bring honor to God in a world that's all about self, which it was then and it is now. Here is a great word to say my ultimate honor is to honor God. It's like the old catechisms, the old Protestant catechisms some of us learned as kids, right? What is the chief end of man? "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." To glorify God. We use that Bible word that biblical churchy word "glorify." All we're talking about is this right here, right? To please him. We want to please him. We want him to be honored with our lives. We'd like him to say good job. That's good. What you've done there is good. And to honor him, that's our greatest honor. What's the chief end of man? What's the most honorable thing a human being could do made in the image of God? The greatest honor we could have, the greatest honor, that's the aim we have, the greatest honor could be to honor him. And Paul says that's my honor. So if God is watching, if he's perceiving all that I do, I'd like him to look at me and say that's it, that's what I want.

Some people ask me why we called Compass, compass, right? Why did we name the church Compass? Why didn't you name it protractor or, you know, ruler or something? Why Compass? We have a theme verse that talks about being directed to God's holy hill. The idea is clearly about direction, and I just want you to understand there's something about a compass, particularly back in the day, if you were a hiker before GPS or a sailor back in the day, if you looked at a compass, you didn't look at a compass once and then pack it away and just now you went hiking or now you went sailing. A compass was something you would have at the ready to pull out over and over and over again to continually calibrate your direction. You needed to look at the compass all of the time. The compass was the thing that would give you all these micro-changes, you know, of your direction to calibrate where you were going.



See, and the middle name of the church is "Bible," Compass Bible Church. And then the point of that was to try and capture in the name of the church the idea of what we really are stuck with here in the present age, and that is that God has revealed himself. There is a God. He has spoken. He's revealed himself. He's given us his Word. He's revealed his Word. What would not otherwise be known he's now given to us through the apostles and prophets. And now we have his mind here on paper, he has spoken. And now if I want to know what would bring honor to God, my job is to try and make the highest honor of my life to honor him. So it doesn't really matter what the critics think or what the Corinthians think, although I'd like them to think rightly about me, I'd like the church to think rightly about me. But I need to now bring honor to him. That's my greatest honor, and I have to be able to take the right steps.

So maybe it's a lot like Psalm 119 verse 115 that says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Now that's helpful. It lets me see where I should be going. And that's good, right? But the compass is even more helpful as an illustration because it's pointing to the right direction. So I can see where I'm supposed to go. And there's an arrow, there's a pointer, it's telling me you go here, this is the way to go that's right. Now, the Apostle Paul has dropped so many good theological points throughout this whole section of Scripture, like, why should I be doing what I'm doing? I should be doing it for you, like a parent does things for his children. I'm willing to "spend and be spent." We've talked about the critics who saw leadership as the Gentiles saw leadership, and as Jesus talked about how the world sees leadership and that's the wrong way to see leaders.

How did Paul know that? Because Jesus made that clear, and it's certainly illustrated in an Old Testament narrative, right? For Moses to be a leader, for Jeremiah to be a leader for, you know, any of the kings to be leaders. They were shepherds. They were laying down their lives in many ways for leadership. And certainly Jesus said if you want to be a leader you'll be the servant of all. And so the idea that Apostle Paul was going to calibrate his leadership based on principles and precepts and truths from God's Word. And everything about the Apostle Paul was to bring honor to God, he had to keep checking God's Word, God's truth, to be able to make the right steps. And so it is for you and for me that we need to be spending time in God's Word all the time, and it should affect what we do. You can't read the Bible just for knowledge. You have to read the Bible for the knowledge that's going to direct the decisions that we make, the values that we hold, the priorities that we ensconce in our mind and say this is what we do because this would please God. Is it going to be rightly understood? I hope it's rightly understood.

Think about First Samuel, First Samuel Chapter 16. I know we quote it often, actually one of the pastors spoke on it here from this platform not too long ago. And when you think about Illium, for instance, Jesse brings his son out and he's sure, even Samuel, this has to be the next king after Saul. He's tall and handsome and big and strong. And this has to be the next king of Israel. And God has to respond in verse 7 of First Samuel 16 verse 7, he goes, no, don't look at the outward appearance. You don't see things the way God sees things. I know "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Now, you read that passage and if you just look at the surface of that passage, you think to yourself well, you know, we look too often at the outward appearance, you know, the beauty or the brawn of



someone. That's not how we should look. We should look at their heart, what kind of character they have.

Well, let's go a layer deeper on that. People were looking at the Apostle Paul, the critics were, right? How he did ministry, how he spoke, whether he picked up a salary or not while he was there. And the decisions that Paul made the critics were looking at the external, you know, decisions of the Apostle Paul, and they were making a judgment. Well, this is great to know that the omni-perception of God doesn't just look at your behavior, but it looks as the second part of this passage says it looks at the motive. He said we were doing it for your upbuilding. Well, that's the right thing to do. He was doing the right thing and he was doing it for the right reason. And God sees that right reason. As a matter of fact, in First Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 5 he said this, "don't pronounce judgment before the time," because the day is coming when God's going to surface all of those motives.

Now, you know what your motive is. You can do the right thing with the right motive. You know what it is. But other people don't know. And sometimes they think I don't like what he did because I think he's probably doing it for the wrong motive. But they don't know the motive. And the good news about that passage in First Corinthians is one day the motives will be revealed, right? And then his commendation will come to him. Right? The commendation will come from God and God will say this was good. And everyone else says, oh, okay, this was good. And we can know that because God's going to bring the secret things to the surface. God is looking through and through at everything you do all the time. And if you know it's right because you calibrate it with the principles of God's Word, you know the motive is right because you know how you should be functioning in your job, or when there's a problem in your marriage or your teenager's going nuts. And what do I do with this? And people are judging you for whatever reason they're judging you. You can say I know it's the right thing. Well, then you look very strong. Very strong.

True strength is that you're not ruffled. You're not in any way freaking out because people think wrongly about your decisions when you're calibrating every step by knowing exactly what God would want of you. Right? Your highest honor is to find the honor of God. And you know it because you check what he's revealed. You know this is the right thing to do with your business. You know what the right thing to do with your money, or with your time, or your effort, or your vacation this summer. People don't understand it but you understand it.

And this is just interesting and not that I have time for it, but as I often say that never stops me. So let me just go to Job Chapter 34. We're going to get to it in the Elihu speech this week in our Daily Bible Reading. We were just introduced to that this morning when Elihu is introduced, who steps up. And he's the only friend of Job, not even introduced that way, but he comes and rebukes the three friends of Job, but he is the one spokesman at the end of the book that God does not rebuke. He says something here in Job Chapter 34. Look at these three verses if you're quick to get there.

We'll start in verse 21. Job 34:21. And I want to show you something, there's an interesting way that this is said. People are always wondering and they want to investigate what you do



and they're trying to figure you out. I love this passage. Verse 21, "For his eyes," God's eyes, "are on the ways of man, and he sees all of his steps." And again, there's an anthropomorphic way that this is reading. A lot of things in Scripture are anthropomorphic. "Anthropos" is "man" and "morphic" is in the form of the way you would say it if this was talking about a man. Of course God is not a man, right? The eyes, God has no eyes. But God is perceiving and he's not even perceiving the way we perceive. We're waiting to see what people do. God's not waiting to see what people will do. We understand God is different than us. He's transcendent. But let's just buy it for what it is because that's how we understand it. "For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all of his steps. There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves." Now, that's a basic implication, obviously. Right? Like the panopticon. Right? That makes sense. Maybe bad people will do better if they think they're being watched.

Verse 23, "For God has no need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment." That's so great. That's profound. Think about it. "God has no need to consider a man further." He didn't ask to investigate anything. I love the way the English translation of verse 24 reads, "He shatters the mighty without investigation and sets others in their place." He doesn't have to investigate anything. He sees through you. He knows everything about what you do. All that does is help you align everything. Align what you do, calibrate it to God's Word. Align why you do it. Align the motive to God's Word, right? And then just do it. Everyone else is going to investigate. Everyone else is going to guess. Everyone else may need an explanation. Paul is explaining, but that explanation is done in the sight of God because God already knows and it's done in Christ. Christ knows the truth. And I'm just saying this is just a beautiful way to put it. "He has no need to consider a man further." Why? Because he already knows you through and through. There's no investigation needed for anyone because God's already investigated you from eternity past. It's so good. All right. Maybe it's not as exciting to you as it was to me, but yeah. So keep living for the good of others.

I often talk about cat videos on YouTube disparagingly, but I've seen a couple. I don't own a cat so I can't confirm this but I've seen the videos on YouTube. Cats seem to chase the laser dot. Can you confirm this or not? I've seen them in videos. Is that just a circus trick or do they actually do that? They do that, right? You're not willing to admit you have cats. (audience laughing) I understand, this is more of a dog church. I get it. I'm kidding, you own cats, it's okay. We will not excommunicate you for a cat. You moan at that? I just said we're not going to, so... I see the videos, right? The cats chase the little laser around the living room. Wherever the dot goes the cat goes crazy all over the living room. And I think you're no different. I'm no different. Wherever we point the target of where we want our approval, that's just where everything goes. So put the target, light the target right where it should be. Your greatest honor is to get the honor from God. You want to please him. And I love the way Paul puts it. Not just in this life. "Whether in the body or out of this body," for eternity. I just want to please him. That's my aim. That's my greatest honor. True strength remains steady because God's approval matters more than anything else. More than any person's, it matters the most.



All right. Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 20 Paul wraps up his defense of those who had falsely attacked him. Now he gets very practical about his visit. He talks about fears, two fears. And the great thing is he does some great diagnosing here. This is a short point. I won't spend long on it, but in verse 20 he says, "I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish," because I may have to do some calling out of sin. And he lists things that he hopes he's not going to have to point out but here he goes, right? Perhaps "There may be quarreling," that we know has been a problem. And then he diagnoses "jealousy, anger, hostility," and then we know stuff that comes out of that, "slander and gossip." We know what that results in. The personal result is "conceit" and we know the community result is "disorder."

So this is masterful. And there it is. Two passages, really three, but I want to point out in Hebrews Chapter 12, if you go there real quick, Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 14, here's a very strong word, this particular word, "Diōkō" this strong word only used, I don't know how many times, let me find out. It doesn't matter how many times, but I think it's fairly common. 45 times just for fun. Verse 14. Strive. It's a strong word. Strive. Chase hard after. Go chase it like you're chasing a guy who stole your wife's purse. You're chasing it. "Strive for," run hard after, chase peace, chase after "peace with everyone." Now the everyone here I think is qualified by the context and the context is dealing with the community of believers. Not that you shouldn't have peace with your boss or your non-Christian neighbor. That's true too. But I think the context here is the community of the redeemed, the church, right? You can check the context to prove that. He says, "Strive for peace with everyone."

Now that's helpful. Now, if I'm striving for peace I want something different than the ending word "disorder." I don't want community disorder. I'd rather have harmony and unity. Right? I need to know that God is looking at everything including the interior of my life. So drop down to verse 15. He says this, "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled." Now let's just take that a person at a time. If I'm talking about let's start with you and then go on to the next person. If it's you as an individual let's talk about the illustration of a plant. Under the soil, I can't see what's under the soil but maybe there's a root under there and bitterness is going to grow up just like he's so masterfully said. Jealousy, anger, hostility that's under the surface but maybe what springs up are bitter things like slander and gossip. And guess what it causes? Trouble. It causes quarreling and disorder in the church. It "springs up to cause trouble, and by it many become defiled."

Okay, number two, because God sees everything you should, here it comes, work hard at this, strive for it, chase after it, "Protect the Unity of the Church." Protect it. Strive after it. That should come with all capitals. Protect it. Protect it as though you're chasing after it. You have to get it. And how do you get it? Well, number one, you have to make it your aim to go after the opposite of disorder and that's peace, unity, harmony, whatever you want to call it. It's a peaceful church, a peaceful community. And then you have to go to the X-ray under the surface of your life and say do I have any bitterness under the surface? This is so hard to do. I guarantee you, you could write a book on stuff under the surface and no one will buy it, I guarantee you about this. Write a book on envy, for instance. No one will buy it (audience



laughing) because what they'll do is they'll say I really need a book about the problems of gossip and slander or conceit and disorder. What they don't want to deal with is the thing he spends the most words on "jealousy, anger, and hostility," the things under the surface.

Because people are always looking at the impact of the expression, what comes out of it. Well, that's why the early church talked about the seven deadly sins. Those are the root causes, the fountainhead of all these other things. So we need to get to the root of bitterness, the root of what comes up that causes the other things. So we have to root out the problem in our heart. Now, I said, there is another passage and it's over instead of Hebrews Chapter 12, go to Romans Chapter 12. It says it in a different way but I like the way it's put and it's not two verses later, it's two chapters later. But I'm going to look at Romans Chapter 12 and Romans Chapter 14. So Romans Chapter 12 verse 18, look at that verse with me first. Same goal, the opposite of quarreling and disorder. And it's again the word "peace" only as an adverb here. So here it comes, verse 18, "If possible," Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." And again, I think all here may kind of leak over into your non-Christian neighbor but primarily we're talking about the community, although the enemy gets quickly in view. So but I think verse 16, "Live in harmony with one another. Don't be haughty, but associate with the lowly." I think we're talking about people primarily. They are, at least in the preceding context, the body of Christ. It doesn't matter. In their church, clearly like, "If possible, so far as it depends on you," you should do everything you can to, "live peaceably with all."

Now, the first part of this in Hebrews Chapter 12 was to look under the surface to see if there's anything negative that might be causing a problem, root of bitterness, and we have three words in our passage that help. Is there any jealousy in your heart? Is there any anger in your heart? Is there any hostility toward people? Let's root those things out. Let's pull some weeds up from the root. Okay. Now go to chapters later, Romans Chapter 14. This is the inverted side. This is the other side of the coin, which by the way, kind of comes back to where we started. The same word here is used 45 times, I just educated myself, in the New Testament, same word. Run hard after, chase after, strive after, here it's translated "pursue." Verse 19, Romans 14:19, "So then," let us chase, "let us pursue," let us strive for, "what makes for peace and for," here's the phrase again that we have in our passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 12, "and for mutual upbuilding," which again is a phrase we don't use much, but for edification. I want the church to be built up. I want people to be built up. I want them to be strengthened. I want the church to be not in disorder and quarreling. I want us to be strong and together and unified and harmonious.

Well, I like the way this is written. "Let us pursue," or let us chase after, "what makes for peace." Now the question is open-ended. What does make for peace? He doesn't tell us. You're going to have to sit down and scratch your head a little bit. What's the root of bitterness? Well, I don't know, you have to do some Psalm 139, "Search me ... try me and know my thoughts. And see if there's any grievous way in me." This is the invert of that. I have to scratch my head and say what would make for peace. Now I've got to think of some positive things. Are you following the logic of this? You're going to have to spend some time with the open Word, with the compass saying okay, God, I have to start with some



foundational things that no one can see. It starts in my heart. Start to work in my heart, transform the invisible things under the surface of my heart to first of all, pull up the weeds by the roots. Let's get rid of the bad things that are going to cause all the stuff like slander and gossip that'll end up with pride, conceit, and disorder. So I need to look for the jealousy, the envy, the anger, hostility, all that.

Now what's going to make for peace? What can I do? What are the positive steps I can take? What does the Bible teach me? I mean, you can start in Galatians Chapter 5 and start to look at the Fruit of the Spirit. How can I put that into action in the church to go for peace, which is the opposite of disorder and quarreling. So if we're working on that, well we would stop having people walking into the auditorium with more and more pride and more and more conceit. We'd have people coming in more and more peaceable, more and more harmonious, more and more unified. That'd be a whole different church experience. And just like I said last time we were together as the love of the world grows colder, the warmth of love within the church should be growing warmer. So it is for this. The world is more fractious. The world is more splintered. The world is more hostile. The world is more disordered. The world is more quarreling with one another. The church should be more unified, right? It should be more clearly contrasted with the culture. It should be more together, more harmonious, more connected, more peaceable. And so we're going to have to work on this. What is causing a problem in my heart that's fighting against it and then what do I do? What's the vacuum that needs to be filled? What are the things that are going to make for peace?

Now, it doesn't say whatever because it's not whatever. There are certain things within the bounds and parameters of Scripture. What does though? What's allowable that makes for peace? And let's fill that out and figure it out. Do you follow the logic on that? There's the negative. There's the positive. That's helpful. All right. That's homework. And that's all I'm going to say on this because true strength is pursuing peace. I know it feels like we're losing, but true strength pursues peace because God's evaluation of a peaceful church matters way more than you winning an argument, way more than you feeling better than someone else, way more than you saying I'm more superior than that person. That weakness makes you pursue conceit. It's true strength that's willing to say what God wants is a unified church. I'm going to pursue it. I'm going to chase after it.

Verse 21, "I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced." Now this one should be easy to figure out as it relates to the theme of Paul always living with this sense of God's omnipresence. Paul is saying hey you guys, you should know that if God sees everything, you should be repenting, not leaving it on the back burner and maybe getting around to it. You ought to, as the first word in the third point says, and I've already written that one for you, but fill in the rest. If God sees everything you should "Quickly Repent from the Sins You Commit." Quickly repent because God is saying, okay, okay, you just sinned or you practiced sin. You were in a season of sin. Can you please quickly repent? As used to be set around the church a lot, keep short accounts with God. Yeah, you messed up. You sinned. You transgressed God's law. Can you quickly repent? God is so ready. "He's faithful and just to forgive us our



sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Can we just move forward? But what's the key? You have to repent. You have to repent.

A couple things that should be helpful just in verses 21 and 22, dispelling a couple myths that I think are pretty prevalent, at least throughout church history and some in the modern day. This one's less than the second one but let me give you the first one. I once knew a guy, I actually lived in my first year at the university, I was rooming with this Christian guy. He was an elderly man, kind of a quid pro quo in several ways. But I was living with this guy and he had the doctrinal belief that he was sinless. Now there's no better way to test a man's theology about sinlessness than to live with him for a semester. I learned real quick that's a great claim to make but it should certainly be tested. And the reality is there are still people who think that Christians, if they're Christians you get to a place where you don't sin. You may be sitting here today and if I said tell me about the sins you committed this week, and if you have to fumble around in your mind then I think there may be a problem. Maybe it's back to you not doing what I said you should do in the second point, and that is sit down often and say what are things in my life that need to be extracted? And maybe even when it comes to virtue, what are the things that need to be put in my life and maybe even confessing the absence of virtues that need to be there? Maybe I don't see enough of the Fruit of the Spirit in my life. God forgive me for that.

So we should be sensitive enough to the presence of the Spirit who's the Holy Spirit and I know I'm not yet wholly perfected, I just need to be responsive to the fact that I sin. And if you wonder do Christians sin? Let me quote for you a leader in the church, a very important leader in the church, James, in the book of James Chapter 3 verse 2, who said, "we all stumble in many ways," first-person plural pronoun "we," he's including himself, James, the half-brother of Christ, leader in the church. "We all stumble in many ways." So James is admitting, just like the people he's writing to, we all stumble in many ways.

And then if you know anything about the book of James, James Chapter 3 begins there in talking about your mouth, the easiest way for you to sin is with what you say. Stuff comes so easily out of your mouth. Which, by the way, as I quoted at the outset in the reading of this text, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." It will reveal what's in your heart. And as Jesus constantly said there is so much sin still rattles around in your heart and your mouth is going to reveal it. There it comes, there it goes. There's another sin. Deception, boasting, conceit. All these things come out of your mouth.

And so, of course, we sin in many ways. As in First John Chapter 1 verses 7 through Chapter 2 verse 1, there's a good section of Scripture to go home and study, we have this repeated refrain if you say you're without sin, you're lying. And in all of that he's still saying I'm writing this stuff to you so that you won't sin. But if we do sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. What's the point? Yes, of course, everything about church, every sermon you hear, every Sunday school lesson you hear should be about saying hey guys, stop sinning. But the reality is that may lead you to the first theological error. You think, oh, we don't sin, but we do sin. That's why we find right in the middle of that verse 9 in First John



Chapter 1, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So don't fall for that first theological error.

The second theological error that I think we might have is when Paul says, I will "mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and haven't repented." Why would you mourn over that? Why would you mourn over that? Because I've heard this. Matter of fact, it's more prevalent than the first theological error. The second theological error is when people think, you know what? When Jesus looks at me, actually, let's put it the way I often hear it. When the Father, when God the Father looks at me all he sees is Jesus. Have you ever heard that one? All he sees is that I'm clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and because I'm clothed in the righteousness of Christ, when God looks at me, all he sees is perfection. Well, praise God for that, right? That sounds like a pretty good thing. All he sees is perfection. I mean, that's been really popular. Really popular. Well, that means God doesn't see my sin.

You talk about "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." Then all those verses about God seeing everything must only be for non-Christians. Even in Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 12, which talks about "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." Verse 13 says, everything is laid bare before God. It uses a superlative, everything and everyone naked and bare before God, "to whom we must give account." Well, it can't mean everyone because I'm clothed in Christ. He doesn't see me. I'm behind the big billboard of Christ. I'm back here in the shadows. He doesn't see my bad behavior.

Not only does he see our bad behavior, he feels our bad behavior. But we are made in the image of God, intellect, emotion and will. Let me quote for you Genesis Chapter 6 verse 5. It first diagnoses the problem and I get it. It's a really bad chapter in human history. It says that man, humanity's thoughts and "intentions of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually." So that's a pretty sweeping indictment of humanity. So they're really bad, thinking of creative ways to be bad all the time. Really bad. The next verse says, here's how it ends, at least I'll quote verse 6 for you. It says, "it grieved him," God, "to his heart." Now you could have just said it grieved him but it adds this other phrase "to his heart," to his "Lēb," the Hebrew word *lēb*, to the interior part of who he is now. He has no heart, right? What we're talking about really affects him to the core of who God is. Ontologically, this is really hard for God, right? This is a weird way to say it. That might be a bit anthropomorphic as well but it's trying to communicate to those of us who know what it is to grieve. And he's saying this affects God, the sin of mankind.

Well, I'm glad it's grieving God, but it's only non-Christians. Well, I think you know, Ephesians 4:30, you know that verse, right? Here's the last part of that verse. It says this: those who are "sealed for the day of redemption." Who are those sealed for the day of redemption? Non-Christians or Christians? Your non-Christian neighbor who's washing his car in the driveway right now. He doesn't care about God. The atheist. Is he sealed for the day of redemption? Answer, no. Hopefully it's you trusting in Christ sitting at a Bible-teaching church with an open Bible on your lap, you're sealed for the day of redemption because you put your trust in Christ.



Well, the first part of that verse says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit." Same concept, different language, of course, because it's the New Testament. And what about that? We have to look at the context of this. Why would I grieve him? Here's the next verse. It talks about "bitterness, and wrath and anger and clamor and slander." That all has to "be put away from you, including all malice." You have to instead "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." So Christians who are sealed for the day of redemption can grieve God's Holy Spirit if you're bitter, have wrath toward each other, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. Instead, you should be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving. All the things we talked about in Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 19 and 20, well 20 in particular. Yes. Don't fall for those two theological errors. Quickly repent.

Well, the problem may be that we're not thinking about our sin, and it's good for us to think about our sin because we need to get to repenting of our sin. But if something comes to mind, we say, oh, I guess I have sinned, right? We can flippantly just say, oh God, I'm sorry. That's not repentance. Let's end with this. Go to three verses. Second Corinthians Chapter 7. We have to repent per Paul's earlier instruction, which of course are the Holy Spirit's instructions. Repent according to Second Corinthians Chapter 7 verses 9, 10 and 11, here are three verses. The first two are about one thing. I'll list eight of them. There are eight things listed here. Let's cover them all really, really quick, I promise. Really fast.

Here's the first one. I'll give you one word for the first one. Grief, right? He talks about grief and a grief that doesn't matter to repentance and that's the grief that is just like I feel bad I did that. Real grief is the grief that's going to lead to action, the action that's called repentance. So what kind of grief should you have? Well, I think we're talking a lot about God's grief over our sin. I think you should have the kind of grief that God has. But the whole point of confession, the word confession itself, "Homologia" means we're saying what God is saying. And I think now we're feeling what God is feeling. We're agreeing with God. This is bad, I feel bad, I feel bad that I've done this. I feel bad, this is bad. It's grief. I should feel grief over grieving God. I mean, this is just basic, verse 10.

Look at verse 11. "See what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you." Earnestness? What is that all about? Earnestness. There's another word we don't use very often. Earnestness means we're serious. We're really sober. What does that mean, serious? We're serious about what? About the sin. This is a big deal. We don't just say hey, sorry God. No, we're serious about this. We take it seriously. And then it says, "what eagerness to clear yourselves." So eagerness now. Eager to clear yourself. What are you talking about? I'm ready to be done with it. I want to get this behind me. I'm ready to restore my integrity. I want to move forward. And then it uses these words, "what indignation." You know what indignation is. It's justified anger. Justified anger. This is a great word here, indignation, because there should be some anger involved in this. When you really repent of sin there should be anger. I even like the way the Old Testament put it. God says through the prophets they don't even know. Well, one thing is, "they didn't know how to blush." There's the grief part, he says, and they don't even know how to say, "what have I done?" What have I done? That's the anger of



like, I can't even believe I did it. What have I done? I'm angry. So indignation is having that anger at sin without excuses, without rationalizations.

And the next one is "fear." What fear? Fear. Fear of what? If there's "no condemnation for those in Christ"? Well, there is that servile fear, as the Puritans put it. But then there's also the familial fear that we should have as a son of God, a daughter of God. You should have a fear of God, a renewed fear of God. It's the beginning of wisdom. I'm doing wrong to the King of the universe. I humbly stand before God. I'm repenting as a humble servant of God. "What longing" is the next thing in the middle of verse 11. What longing. Longing for what? I long to be restored. I long to be in right standing with God. I long to be in right standing with God's people. Certainly Paul had that in view because the whole point of Second Corinthians is God's people to be in right standing with the apostle, but most importantly, of course, right standing with God.

"What zeal." Zeal for what? Zeal on the other side? I don't want zeal for sin. I want zeal for righteousness. So there has to be the zeal, this renewed energy, this renewed passion for what's right, pursuing what's right. And then he adds one last thing, "what punishment." What punishment. And all that equals the last sentence. "At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent." You're getting this behind you. Well, the punishment, I thought there is no punishment. I can't punish myself. Is this like that old movie and slashing myself on the back? No no, no, no, not asceticism. It's not punishing yourself. Punishment is the idea that there's anything that can be fixed, anything that needs to be done, any restitution that needs to be made, any apology letter that needs to be written, any money that needs to go in a certain way, is there any justice that needs to be done? What needs to be done? The punishment, of course, is on the cross if we're Christians, but there needs to be something that needs to be fixed, or there needs to be something that may need to be done. Maybe there isn't. Who knows? But oftentimes there is.

Grief, earnestness, eagerness to clear, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, punishment. Those are the seven, what, eight traits of biblical repentance as Paul described just chapters earlier. True strength is doing that. Do you know what doesn't take strength? Sweeping your sin under the carpet. We don't want to deal with that. There's no better time to repent and do the self-introspection than when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's a very, very important and sacred time for us to consider where the punishment goes. The real punishment, the condemnation for sin goes on a cross 2,000 years ago and these elements represent that. These elements represent the promise and the transaction that was made on that cross. And I want you, if you are a Christian, to take these elements and to spend some time with Psalm 139 in mind, God, search me, try me. If there is sin, maybe you don't even need that at this point, it's already there front and center in your mind. And if it is just now it's time to repent. Grief. Earnestness. Eagerness. Indignation. Fear. Longing. Zeal. Punishment. And say God, I repent. The great news is that if we live knowing we're fully seen, the great news about the Lord's Supper is we can now slide it over into being fully paid for. Think about that. Fully seen, fully paid for. It's all been paid for. Christ has paid it all. And we're here today to celebrate the Lord's Supper with great relief that God has done this.



I know that the call to examine your heart, confess your sins and to repent, can feel like such a negative, feel like such a painful assignment. But I'm reminded of really a counterintuitive reality that Jesus points out to us at the end of Luke Chapter 7. Most of the translators of English Bibles will put at the heading of that last section of Luke Chapter 7, they'll title it something about a sinful woman. She's just known as a sinful woman. But I really think that's a bit of a misnomer. Certainly she was a sinful woman, but Jesus points out that she is an amazingly, tremendously thankful woman. I mean, that's the point. She's extravagant in her thanksgiving. And as Jesus says in verse 47 of that passage, he says to Peter, you know, people who "are forgiven -- for she loved much." And he's explaining the extravagance.

And you can leave a time like this where maybe the Spirit points out things in your life that you hadn't thought of and you close the gap and kept a short account with God now. I mean, maybe it was a long, open account, and like the Apostle Paul was saying about some Corinthians, you did this, you didn't repent and you finally did. You leave feeling better than when you came in and yet you dealt with something bad. It seems so counterintuitive, but you go away loving God more because this surfaced, not less. Sometimes you look at the life of David, for instance, in the Old Testament. You think, oh yeah, he was great, except for those bad chapters. Yeah, but there's something to the fact that those who are forgiven much, they love much. We read the worship songs of David and there's something to the reality of knowing the depth of love and thanksgiving that comes from being forgiven. The inverse is those who are "forgiven little, loves little." I'm not sure exactly all that Christ was getting at with that but we know the inversion is certainly true. She was willing to go to the extreme.

This meal has been called, if you can call it a meal, the "Eucharisteō" or the Eucharist. Eucharisteō means thanksgiving. The extent to which this feels like thanksgiving is really the extent to which we identify sin and confess it, repent of it. And then I think what floods in is real, genuine, loving thanksgiving. And it's based not on some kind of penance. It's not based on asceticism and punishing ourselves. It really at the core is based on the fact that these elements represent the fact that the punishment was paid. Fully seen is a scary thing, but fully paid for is an amazing comfort. He separated from us, the Bible says, our sins as far as the east is from the west. Stand with me and we'll pray and sing one last song.

God, we are grateful for the reminder of the great lengths to which you went to express your love to us and solve our sin problem. We pray now that we would leave with a deeper love and thanksgiving for what you've done for us. That we would live in light of your presence, your knowledge, your perception of all that we do. That you lead us to be bold and strong. Strong enough to live with integrity. To not care so much what people think. To be able to root out the problems that would tempt us to live in discordant relationships and quarreling, and God that we would have short accounts with you because we know you see all things, the strength not to sweep our sin under the carpet. So God, thanks for this reminder from your Word. Thank you so much for this study on true strength through these 21 verses, I pray that it would come back to mind as we refer to these verses again whether it's Daily Bible Reading or just cross-referencing. Let it be a great installment in our spiritual growth.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.