

Dangers of No-Love Religion, Part 1

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Preacher: Jeff Jackson

[0 : 00] We will be once again in the Gospel of Mark as I continue to use Mark's Gospel to reflect on some of these themes I want to emphasize here at the beginning of a new year before I read from the passage.

Where's... oh yeah. Yeah, I got all this getting used to. This is the title of my message. That's the passage. We'll read that in just a moment. Dangers of No Love Religion.

So as we look at where we'll be in the Bible here in Mark 7, I want to just say a few words from Mark 6 in terms of the context and walk you into what's going on.

Jesus has just walked on the water according to Mark's timeline here. He's just walked on the water. The disciples have been greatly, greatly challenged.

I have another message, of course, that deals with this passage entitled, From Ghost to God. Because you see in verse 49 of chapter 6, but when they saw, that is the disciples, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost.

[1 : 28] And they cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified. Well, they're coming off of Jesus challenging them in their weak faith in that instance, to verse 53, that when they crossed over in that part of the Sea of Galilee, or they came to the area of Gennesaret, and they moored there on the shore, and they got out of the boat.

Notice Mark's immediacy again as he moves through the narrative. Immediately then, they were surrounded by all these people who recognized Jesus for who He is, and they brought to Him multitudes and multitudes of people who were sick.

So that, verse 56, whenever Jesus entered villages or cities or the countryside, they were constantly, continually laying the sick in the marketplaces, and they were imploring, that is, they were literally, physically begging Jesus with great, great urgency that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak, and as many as did touch the fringe of His cloak were being cured.

So this is a tremendous sense of electricity in the air around Jesus wherever He goes.

As He lands here in the plain of Gennesaret, He is having this awesome display of healing multitudes of people. And if you can imagine what it must have been like for people in this day who didn't have the benefits of modern medicine, antibiotics, and that kind of thing, or sophisticated surgeries, laser surgeries, and that kind of stuff, you can imagine what it must have been like for people who would die in early age, in early childhood, or even adulthood, from things now that we just take a pill for.

[3 : 17] And we've got this guy, this rabbi, going around the countryside of northern Israel, healing hundreds and hundreds of people at a time. Perhaps hundreds in a day's time.

Can you imagine what the word must have been like as it went from mouth to mouth about what's going on? Especially to those who were infirmed.

If you had a loved one or a relative or a friend that you were deeply concerned about, like we are with Bob and Camille, what we would do right now if we were in this time, we would run up to where the hospital was, and we would grab them if we had to carry them, which many people did, and we would take Bob to Jesus.

Well, we did that this morning. Didn't we? In faith, we took Bob to Jesus. Where else would we take him? And where else will you go? Will I go?

Will our church family go? Well, this is the message this morning. We are being called to go to Jesus with everything that we are meeting in the way of life.

[4 : 24] Well, fortunately, Jesus was well received wherever he went. He was actually mobbed by people. There were times when Jesus would go for a day or more, and there were so many people around him day and night that he couldn't even stop to eat.

He was constantly healing and blessing and speaking and teaching and conveying the truth of the Lord. And all of this without sin.

He never felt burdened to the point of complaining or feeling like, God, people, give me some breathing room here. He never copped in at it. He knew this is why I came.

These people are why I'm here. And while I'm here, I'm going to give them everything that I am. Did you hear how I said that now? I'm going to give them everything that I am.

As we come to chapter 7 then, Jesus is met by quite a different group. They have quite a different opinion and agenda toward Jesus.

[5 : 31] They don't want anything from Him. The contrast in the passage from how chapter 6 ends and chapter 7 then begins, that contrast between what the crowds thought of Jesus and what these religious leaders were going to read about thought of Jesus is deliberate on Mark's part.

That contrast is what he's putting forward. That contrast serves to emphasize more forcefully for you and I the astonishing hatred that the religious leaders of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees, had for their own Messiah.

Out of deception in their soul, out of the deception and greed and sin of their heart, they were darkened in their understanding to see that Messiah had come and was before them and He was doing the very things that Messiah was prophesied to do.

And yet they wouldn't allow for this upstart rabbi to be the Messiah. They closed their hearts and their minds from any possibility of that. You say, well, Jeff, what's behind this?

What's the issue here? I mean, these guys are envious. Yeah. They're jealous. Yeah. The issue, though, if you want to put your finger right on the heart of it, literally the heart of it, is authority.

[6 : 48] These men feel threatened in terms of their authority. Jesus hasn't tried to take their authority from them. He's done this. He has lived and taught the truth and it has exposed these men for the hypocrites they are.

The truth has slammed up against their lives time and again already in Jesus' public ministry so that they're being exposed for who they are. Friends, do you know, that is what the truth does.

And for people who want to hide in the dark and have a prideful agenda, it's offensive. And so those people typically will slink out or slink away if they can't find a way to make that an issue.

You know, this is what happens in churches because we are sinners and not everybody in church is born again. We have people with agendas.

I don't know about here, but I'm assuming that that's going to come if it's not already among us. And people like that look for other people who breathe that same kind of air.

[7 : 53] It's amazing. I've told you this before. You can have a church of 5,000 people. I've seen it. Literally that many people. Actually, it was 10,000, but they had two services that would hold about 4,000 to 5,000 each.

Those people in a crowd that big will find each other. Out of thousands of people, they will find each other. And they'll gravitate toward these people because they're hypocrites and they're prideful and they're not on the agenda of following Jesus and being under the submission of the eldership.

They will find each other and they will start commiserating together and whining together and planning together and then they'll start looking for other people and it becomes an issue of subversion. Oh, but wait now.

All in the name of Jesus. We're just trying to make the church better. We have seen this time and time again. All I'm trying to put forward to you right now is this is alive and well.

Don't allow yourself to think that, oh, this was Jesus' problem back in that day. We're modern people now. We've kind of come beyond that. Not in any stretch. We're still people.

[9 : 01] We still are selfish and prideful and have agendas. We're still fearful. Here, the issue is authority. In the scenarios I just described to you, the issue is authority.

Don't you tell us what to do. We're not going to get under you. We're not going to submit. Now, they may not say that word for word right out, but that's how they live behind the scenes and in the shadows.

You say, Jeff, well, how do you deal with this? Let me tell you how to deal with it. Truth. We don't go find them. We don't go hunt them down. We don't have a God squad that's the KGB in here secretly looking and listening.

We don't have any of that. You know what we do? We just live the truth. We trust the truth to win the day. If we have to go do some confrontation, we do it with grace and we do it in love.

We do it believing the best, but we do it. We've had to do that, haven't we, brother? It's happened. We just keep preaching and teaching and trying to live the truth and we keep trying to bring messages like this that remind us of the main thing, that keep us focused on what this is all about.

[10 : 16] And what happens is people who might come into this particular situation that we're in together, this particular family, if they're struggling that, what we hope will happen is they will repent.

They will sense the warmth and genuineness and sincerity of the pursuit that we're making here for Christ Jesus and it will warm their soul and they'll gravitate toward that and want more of that, right?

That's what we want. We don't want them to come in and just leave. But if they're going to come in and make trouble, then, all right, you know, there's the door. Go make trouble somewhere else.

What we hope will happen is that they'll stay long enough to get a sense of what this is and it will begin to change their heart. We pray for that. We want that. We're not intimidated by that kind of thing.

The way that you help is the way that you pursue the Lord and put a premium on the truth doesn't give any air or oxygen to that kind of stuff.

[11 : 20] It can't develop on the grassroots level because there's nowhere for it to breathe. You won't entertain it. That's the best way to cut it off, isn't it?

And we've seen that. We've seen that in here. If you want to come in and join us and make it about Jesus, brother, sister, you want to come in here and make it about you, we're going to have a problem.

We're all trying to get over ourselves. Join that party. Including your pastors. We want this to be at the shepherding level and move all the way through the congregation because we're coming alongside of you as men.

We're just men. And we're doing our part to contribute to who we are as a church. The issue here, all of that is to say, the issue here that we face is similar to what Jesus himself as the Lord of Glory is facing.

This is an issue of authority. These men don't want to be under Jesus' authority. They don't want their situation and self and agenda challenged by the truth.

[12 : 29] They want to argue the truth. They're going to argue it right now. They're going to take the very Lord of Glory who wrote this and argue with him.

the author of truth and they're going to put it in his face and try to argue with him about it. It's good to keep in mind the greater context of a passage.

Any passage you study by zooming out, kind of taking a helicopter view of it as you were. Get up above it a little bit. It helps you keep your bearings about how the passage you're studying is part of the greater whole of the book that you're studying and maybe the way that it's important to the Bible as a whole.

Why is Mark in the Bible? Why is chapter 7 in Mark? That kind of thing. So as we do that with this passage, we're going to take note of when Mark last mentioned the Pharisees.

We're going to read the passage in just a moment in chapter 7. You have to go all the way back in Jesus' ministry to chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel. Will you go there with me?

[13 : 36] In chapter 3, verse 6, this was the last time that Mark specifically mentioned these guys. And notice what he tells us.

Chapter 3, verse 6, the Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring. See, there it is. With the Herodians.

The Herodians were typically the enemies of the Pharisees against Jesus. And what were they conspiring about as to how they might destroy Him.

That means murder. How they might murder Jesus. This is where it's gotten to. This is all the way back toward the beginning of Mark. So right at the beginning, right at the outset of Jesus' public ministry, as He identifies Himself and steps into the light of public service, immediately those in authority feel threatened by Him.

and now we want to murder Him. We want to take Him out. We're not playing. So you know now as we come into chapter 7 that the scribes and the Pharisees have come together, you know, the enemy of my enemy is my friend kind of thing.

[14 : 49] They've come together and they have a secret shadow plan to murder Jesus. They're just trying to create the opportunity to do it in a way where it won't incite the crowds.

They want to keep their constituency. So they have to do this in the shadows so that the constituency won't realize that they've hatched this plan and murdered this man who's going around and healing thousands of people literally.

It's pretty popular right now. And they don't want to get on the bad side of the crowd. I said to you before, beloved, the power of bullies and the power of people who want to marshal the crowd for their own agenda, their power is keeping the crowd satisfied.

People like that fear you. They fear the crowd. Why do they fear you? Because they realize the power that you have if you ever marshal that power against them. So they lie to you and manipulate you and keep you needy.

And that's the way they control you. Jesus is not about any of that. Jesus is ministering the truth of God because He loves and cares about sinners and He wants souls saved.

[16 : 08] He's not involving Himself neck deep in the politics of all of this and the nastiness of all of this. Jesus understands it better than they think. But Jesus lives above all of that as God's Holy Son.

So why are the Pharisees, since we haven't heard from them since chapter 3, why are the Pharisees surfacing now? Why does Mark include this particular event in the lives of the disciples and the Pharisees and scribes?

Well, let's read the passage and then I want to take you over to a parallel to it. Mark 7 verse 1 the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Jesus when they had come from Jerusalem.

So they've come from the headquarters and they've come to the place where Jesus is in northern Israel ministering and these men had seen that some of Jesus' disciples, some of them, were eating their bread with impure hands, meaning that is, unwashed.

Oh, well, we can't have that. Now we're going to see in verse 3, if it's like my translation, there's a parenthetical note. Verse 3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders.

[17 : 38] And when they come from the marketplace, heaven forbid, where they risk being defiled or becoming ceremonially unclean by rubbing elbows with common folk like us, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves.

And there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots, because all of those things might have been contaminated and now they have to be cleansed, not just on a physical level, but spiritually, religiously.

Because we don't want to handle, taste, or touch anything that would defile us spiritually. This is the issue. The Pharisees then in verse 5 and the scribes asked Jesus, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?

See, these guys are incensed by that. Verse 6 And Jesus said to them, rightly did I, now notice how he answers them. He doesn't sit down and say, well guys, let's talk about that.

That's not what he does. Look what he said. Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me.

[19 : 00] In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Boy, Jesus just drove right to the soul of the issue. Verse 8 Neglecting the commandment of God you hold to the tradition of men.

There it is. Verse 8 sums it up. You neglect God's truth in order to replace it with your own tradition. You elevate the tradition and creation of the wisdom of man above the truth of God.

And whenever you're confronted with the truth of God, you want to kind of retreat into your own explanations, understandings, and commentary about it. Well, and off to the races we go.

If you turn to Matthew chapter 15, you get the parallel account. I'm going to go ahead and read it because it may give you, and this is a good thing for you to do when you have parallel accounts in scripture, go to the other place where it's paralleled and read it and see if it helps flesh it out or fill in some of it for you.

Matthew 15, beginning in verse 1. Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

[20 : 15] For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. There it is. That's even more plain, isn't it? And Jesus answered and said to them, why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

Isn't that interesting how Matthew words that? For God said, honor your father and mother, and he who speaks evil of father and mother is to be... So Jesus is answering them by quoting the scriptures.

Just like he did in Mark's gospel when he talks about, and he'll do this later, when he talks about what Isaiah said about them. God said, honor your father and mother, and he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.

But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, whatever I have that would help you has been given to God. Isn't that an interesting out? He's not to honor his father or mother.

And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. Wow. You hypocrites. Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you.

[21 : 19] This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Then the Lord called the crowd to himself and said to them, hear and understand.

And what he's going to tell them now is it isn't all of this religious ceremony and all of these little rules and regulations that you go through that makes you pure in heart before a holy God.

Because what comes from the outside in is not what's making you impure in the sight of the Lord. It's what's already in you and working its way out that's the problem.

That's another sermon. That's the one after this. This is where Jesus is going with it. Well, when they hear things like this and they hear the authority with which Jesus teaches and ministers this truth, it blows them away and intimidates them.

You realize he's exposing them as fake. He's saying you're not what you are pretending to be. You're hypocrites. You're not concerned at all about God's word or the truth.

[22 : 25] Really what you're concerned with is your own agenda and your pride. You are looking for opportunities to express your pride in different ways that intimidate people. That make other people feel lesser than you.

You're on display. And the hard part is that some of you are so deceived by this you don't even recognize it happening in you. Others of you know exactly what you're doing and you do it anyway.

Whatever it is, you don't love the Lord and you're not doing it because you love God or his truth or his people. What is the title of my message?

The dangers of no love religion. This is one of them. We're back in Mark now. Let me put this up to remind us of what we're dealing with.

And now that we've read the passage, I want us to remember that the Pharisees, some of us may not know this, the Pharisees were the most highly respected religious sect in all of Israel.

[23 : 31] So they spiritually and religiously governed the people. They had a tremendous amount of sway, control, impact, influence over the people as a nation.

All right. The scribes then, let's just give a brief word. The scribes, quote, were the official interpreters of the Mosaic law and the guardians of its sanctity.

That's according to D. Edmund Hebert, one of the commentators I consulted. Much of then what the Pharisees taught and insisted on was based on the interpretations handed down by the scribes themselves.

So that's the relationship between the Pharisees and the scribes in just a quick word, just a quick explanation. Pharisees, highly respected, spiritually, religiously governing. Scribes, they interpret the Mosaic law, the Pentateuch, the first five books of what we have as our Old Testament.

And then they make all these codified kinds of things and they put those things out there. The Pharisees then enforce them and that's the relationship between the two of them. It's very powerful.

[24 : 35] Since Jesus is now being accused of violating the Mosaic law, the scribes, what they're calling the tradition of the elders, the scribes came from Jerusalem then to find fault with Jesus.

They know this is going on. And remember, they're trying to create a scenario where Jesus is going to expose himself in some way as an enemy of the truth, an enemy of what God says.

So here they see an opportunity. Oh, his disciples are violating the tradition of the elders. Well, we can't have that because what they've done is taking this tradition of the elders that we'll talk about.

They've taken this tradition, man's wisdom, and they've put it at least on a par with God's word and in many instances they elevate it above God's word so that it becomes what they use to interpret God's word.

So where's the power? Where's the authority? In the tradition of the elders. Now we have the trump card. Even if you quote scripture at me, I'm going to come back with my trump card.

[25 : 39] Yeah, but I've got special understanding here. And down it goes. And so the people, where are they left? They're like, oh, okay.

Gosh, I didn't know that. Yeah, well, that's why I went to school. I mean, it's ridiculous. Again, the issue here is authority.

That's what these men are worried about. Their authority is being threatened. So this delegation that's been sent down to where Jesus is, because Jerusalem is high, just about everywhere you go from Jerusalem is down.

This is a formidable one. It's very likely that Jerusalem then sent their best and brightest to silence this rebel rabbi once and for all. So they came in their flowing robes and all of their finery, their pride.

And they walk into this situation and immediately they're looking for an opportunity to trip Jesus up. Here's something else I want to share with you. Mark 7 then is a stunning picture of the confrontation between the self-righteousness of the human heart, even in its deception, and the servant heart of the Son of God in his truth.

[26 : 53] It's a contrast then between empty religion and eternal truth and between hypocrisy and humility. That's what we're dealing with. And as I say that, I challenge all of us to think in terms of have there been times in my life or have I developed possibly a habit or two in my life where I'm leaning more toward a kind of an empty religion where it seems to be devoid of the joy and the love and the warmth of me serving Jesus.

It's become more of a duty or just a go through the motions kind of thing. That should be a flag for us because it can happen. Am I being tempted with things that maybe are a little more hypocritical instead of humble?

Am I seeing a humility developed in my life? Am I putting more and more weight in my ability to be used by Jesus to love people to truth and in the truth?

Do I have a clear sense that's growing in me? My patience, my ability to listen, my desire to listen, my desire to minister truth in a gracious way so that even in certain contexts I'm willing to be quiet and keep my mouth shut and even walk away if I have to because I realize that I'm to give grace according to the need of the moment by what the hearer can receive.

And maybe right now they can't. And so I'm willing to take the hit and I'm willing to look more foolish to walk away because I want to please the Lord and honor these people in this moment.

[28 : 34] Or maybe it's that I need to have a little more spiritual love and courage to speak up when the truth is needed to be heard and to do it in a kind and gracious way without the emotion and without all of the coming down on you.

I don't know. I don't know where you are. But as I say this, I don't want us to get so hung up on the religious leaders that we forget to apply this to our own hearts. Verses three and four, as you look at verses three and four, I mentioned this there.

It's Mark's note because it's parenthetical. It's Mark's note to his Gentile readers. Not everybody who's reading the gospel of Mark would be Jewish people who understand all of these tradition of the elders and all these rituals they have to go through as a Jew.

The argument being leveled against Jesus is a very simple, straightforward one. Jesus' disciples are not following the rules of religious purity laid down not by God's word, but by the history of religious traditions which the scribes and the Pharisees revere and uphold that have been handed down over generations.

All these rules and regulations that are supposed to accompany the word of God in order to help you fulfill it so that the rules and regulations accompany all these all these truths of the Lord.

[29 : 52] They become as important or as I said more elevated in importance because they see these rules and regulations as gates and fences and boundaries to help keep you within the confines of doing the truth and being obedient.

So if you start violating some of these rules and regulations they've invented, they see it as tantamount to you of violating the truth. That's where they come. That's where we can get to.

Right? This is how it's expressed here and other places. Well, we've never done it that way before. Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey. Now, this is my ministry.

You go over there and talk to them about their ministry. Don't you be putting your fingers over here in my ministry. Doesn't work. Doesn't work.

It's our ministry. It's our ministry because it's a ministry of Jesus. And if it's not a ministry of Jesus, we don't want it. Simple as that, right? Craig and I are pretty simple guys, aren't we, bro?

[30 : 57] We're pretty simple men. We're just trying to keep focused on what Jesus tells us is the main thing. As the disciples leader, as the rabbi, as the teacher of these men, Jesus then was implicated in this same crime against God.

So today's message is emphasizing three dangers of religion without love. Three dangers of religion without love. And it's all based on the wisdom of man or the teachings of man.

And it is crazy, crazy scary how quickly we can slip into this kind of a heart attitude. Even in church.

The first one that we're going to just look at here real quickly is religious knowledge without love. What do I mean? Well, this is the bottom line. It's pride in what I know.

It's pride in what I think I know. And I use it. My confidence is in what I know so that I, here's what I do, I weaponize my knowledge.

[32 : 00] I weaponize it. It's not a tool to be used in a gracious, kind, or loving way, even though I might try to convince myself that. I use this to cut your knees out from underneath you and close the argument.

In my favor. Every time. So this delegation from Jerusalem is modeling this. They knew something about, they did, how a rabbi and his disciples ought to act.

They knew about what God expected of devout Jews when Jews were falling short of a devout life. They did. They knew some of that stuff. They considered themselves the guardians of the law of God.

And so this is why they felt qualified as well as morally and spiritually responsible before God to go down to Capernaum and expose Jesus as a false prophet.

Now, were all of these men truly convinced in their heart of hearts that Jesus was a fake? Were all of them truly convinced of that? We don't know how to answer that question because what we're told in Scripture is that Jesus is exposing these men for what they are.

[33 : 12] But how many of them actually were so deceived that they felt like they were sincerely on a mission for God to eradicate Jesus? Remember the Apostle Paul?

A Hebrew of Hebrews before he was converted? He did everything he did in the name of God. He was murdering Christians in the name of God and he says in his testimony, I thought I was serving God.

Getting rid of these people. I imagine that some of them, some of these guys feel the same way. They're doing God a favor by exposing this this rabbi.

Then there are others of them that I think they're very calculated. They know exactly what they're doing and it's all about power. I don't know how to divide that up for you.

I just know that that's probably going on just like it does in our hearts. At any rate, Jesus accusers were trapped or trying to trap him in a theological box.

[34 : 13] They were trapped in that box themselves even as they tried to build one around Jesus. That's what they don't realize. The same prison that they're trying to put Jesus in is the one they're living out of.

It's a theological box that shrinks God to their own agendas. If you look with me, for instance, at Romans chapter 10. I think I have this referenced in a slide for you.

Yeah. Romans chapter 10. Verses 1 through 3. You get a little bit of a sense of what Paul wants us to know about this issue with these people.

He is describing these leaders in this description here. Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them. Them who?

What's the antecedent to them? If you go back into verse 31 of chapter 9, you see Israel. But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.

[35 : 13] Why? Because they didn't pursue it by faith. So he's talking about the people in Israel who are unbelieving and yet religious. And what does he say? My prayer to God for them, for these unbelieving Israelites, is for their salvation.

For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God. See there? That's religious zeal. But not in accordance with what? Saving faith. Knowledge.

For not knowing about God's righteousness. That's the issue. And seeking to establish their own righteousness. They did not subject themselves, submit themselves to the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law. For righteousness to everyone who believes. So it's not about Jesus with them. Paul said. This is what we're seeing here. It expresses the sad reality about these people.

Their knowledge didn't lead them to a right relationship with others based on the love of God. It did not do that. Our knowledge of God that we gain from His Word is designed and purposed to lead us in a greater love for God and others.

[36 : 27] If Grace Church Williamsburg is not growing in love, something's amiss. We're not firing on the cylinders. We need to. If Grace Church Williamsburg isn't warmly coming to the place where we love the Lord, love His truth, and love one another, we're missing something.

We might be super religious and busy and we might have all these wonderful things that we do and people come in and say, wow, these people sing and they do this, that, and the other. But if we're not growing in the love of Jesus toward each other, the truth, and the Lord, what's it all about?

If it's not about that, this is the problem. In 1 Corinthians 13, I'll take you there. Don't ever worry about whether or not I get through all my points in a sermon.

You know why? Because I'll just draw a line and pick up there next week. It doesn't bother me at all. 1 Corinthians 13, This, again, is the Apostle Paul.

Now he's not speaking strictly about unbelieving Israel and the religious zeal getting in the way of their love for Christ. Now he's talking about people who claim to know Christ and yet he's rebuking them for a lack of a display of love and how they go about living their lives as quote-unquote Christians.

[37 : 55] So he comes to verse 4. Love is patient. 1 Corinthians 13, 4. Love is patient.

Love is kind. It is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not arrogant. It does not act unbecomingly.

It does not seek its own. You see, there's no self-agenda in love, y'all. It's not provoked. It's not easy for you to provoke people to sin or self or pride when they're looking at you in an attitude of love and a sense of forgiveness.

Love does not take into account a wrong suffered. Love isn't keeping a record of your faults and failures and wrongs done to it. No. Verse 6. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth.

You see the emphasis on truth again. And then in 7. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures.

[39 : 06] What he's telling you in verse 7 is love goes to the greatest extent, the greatest lengths. Love doesn't say, alright, that's it. I'm drawing a line.

That's enough. What does it say in verse 8? Love never fails. Then he starts talking about the gifts. Paul tells us that when we use our spiritual gifts, the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we've received in our salvation, as we use those to serve God and each other, it doesn't matter how outstanding the gift is.

It doesn't matter how wonderfully we put it to use if it's not done in love. It doesn't matter. To God. It's not being done to the glory of the Lord if it isn't being done out of love.

If it's being done out of duty or ritual. Look, we want to be obedient. Say, Jeff, what about the times in my life when I don't feel like it? When I just don't feel the love.

When I, I just talked to one of my dearest friends the other day and he shared with me about a time that he went through in his life for several months about this time last year and he said it was a spiritual funk.

[40 : 21] It was this spiritually depressed time when he just, he said, Jeff, I just didn't feel the nearness of God in my life. I'd never had that since I'd been a Christian. But I just, I didn't, and I, several months, he said, now looking back on it, I came out of, looking back on it and he shared a number of things with me.

And he said, man, it was tough. What did that man do during that time though? He tried to stay obedient. So here's what I'm not saying. I'm not saying if you don't feel like it then you don't have to do it.

I'm not saying that. You're not going to base your Christian life on your fifis, are you? You're going to base it on faith. So you're going to walk with the Lord in faith whether you feel like it or not.

And then you let your feelings catch up with you. So it's okay for you to be obedient to the Lord even when your fifis aren't involved as much as you'd like. Okay?

Or to say to yourself, well, somebody hurt my fifis and so now I don't have to be faithful to Jesus. No, no, no, no. We have to, that's the world talking to us. Put a lot of emphasis on it.

[41 : 28] Have you ever noticed that when you see people interviewed on the news or TV or movie stars or different people in politics right now and they ask a thinking question, what do you think about, well, I feel like this should be.

People are constantly answering life's issues from feeling standpoint. Feeling, feeling, feeling. It's highly overrated. At the same time, we want our hearts to be warmed in this wonderful love of Christ and for Christ, don't we?

Serving and relating without love, according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, serving and relating without love is just a bad noise.

Just a bad noise. It's like a gong. Gong! That's out of tune. It's a vain show of self. It's an empty exercise in God's sight.

Jerry Bridges offers us a really good... Did I put that 1 Corinthians up there? Jerry Bridges offers us a really good word on this and so I came across it and wanted to pull it out and share it with you.

[42 : 38] Look at this from Jerry Bridges. He's going to help us understand this idea of us doing religious stuff. Being religiously busy.

Either as individuals or a church. But it's not being done out of love and warmth for Jesus Christ. It's not being done out of concern for the goodness of Jesus working in my heart.

And here's what Jerry offers. It's really good. He says, here's an exercise. Write down in your imagination or literally on a sheet of paper a row of zeros. Go all the way across the paper.

He says, keep adding zeros until you fill the whole line on the page. So you can imagine what he's saying? You put zero, zero, zero all the way across a notebook paper till you run out of room from margin to margin.

A whole row of zeros. Now what does he say? Keep adding the zeros until you fill the whole line on the page. What do they add up to? Exactly nothing. Even if you were to write a thousand of them they would still add up or be nothing.

[43 : 41] But if you put a positive number in front of them and immediately what happens? They begin to take on. What if you put 25 zeros across this wall right here? You know they don't add up to anything but then you come over here and you put a one right in front of that first zero.

Now what happens to all those zeros? Woo! I can't even say that number. Right? That's what he's saying. Look. This is the way it is with our gifts and faith and zeal.

Remember the zeal Paul talked about? The zeal without knowledge? No. They are the zeros on the page. Without love they count for nothing. But you put love in front of those zeros and immediately they have value.

Just as the number two gives more value to a number of zeros than the number one does so more and more love can add exponentially greater value to our gifts.

Isn't that good? Jerry Bridges starting up in another week. Going to get more of him. All that Jesus said all that Jesus did was out of love for the Father and for the people around him and because he loved the truth.

[44 : 54] Now you'll remember that in the last few scenarios that I've preached about from the Gospel of Mark Jesus showed us a tremendous compassion from his heart for other people.

He lived out of and ministered out of who he was. He's a compassionate God. And all of this is to say that Jesus' knowledge wasn't based on man's wisdom.

It wasn't based on man's agenda but on God's. He lived by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. Boy, what an emphasis in Christ's life on the truth. He didn't come to do his own will.

He said, I have come to do the will of my Father. That's Jesus. I didn't come to do my own will. It's not like I have some separate agenda that I'm working here and I'm trying to get God in on it.

You ever prayed like that? Lord, I got a great idea. Just came to me. And I want to get you in on it. Lord, I think it would be really, really cool.

[45 : 53] And then off to the race as we go with our wonderful idea. In 1 Corinthians 8, I'll take you back there real quickly.

In 1 Corinthians 8, verses 1-3, I can already see that I will be ending my message after point 1. That's okay.

We took some extra time this morning to brag on Jesus and honor each other because of what God's doing in our midst and that's... I wouldn't take that back for anything. We're just trying to honor the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 8, verses 1-3, Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, Paul is going to wade in and start talking to the Corinthian Christians, particularly those who are less spiritually mature, about what needs to happen here in the way that they're handling this idea of meat that has been sacrificed to idols in a pagan situation, should Christians wade in and eat that meat?

Should we be distributing that to the poor among us? The widows? The orphans? Well, here's what he says. We know that we all have knowledge.

[47 : 12] This is another way of Paul saying we all have opinions about it. We all think we know something about how to handle this meat sacrifice to idols thing. We all have an idea.

Okay. Now, what does it say? Knowledge makes arrogant. Love edifies. What does that mean? Somebody tell me what that means.

What does it mean knowledge makes arrogant? What's another way of saying that? Puffs up. Makes prideful.

Elevates self. So, there is a danger that spiritual knowledge, biblical knowledge, religious knowledge will puff you up and cater to your pride.

And so now you become the voice in the room. Well, you studied at seminary or you're a Christian or you've been... What do you think about this? Well, that's great. Hey, weigh in for the Lord with grace and kindness and humility and patience and be concise.

[48 : 19] See, my challenge is I get in preach mode. Here we go. I had to tell somebody recently that I was meeting with, I promise I won't preach to you because they know I'm a preacher. And I have to consider that, right?

This isn't the moment for Jeff to be preaching. I'm preaching now. That's fine. We need to be careful about what he's saying here. Concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge, but you need to realize the danger.

That knowledge can puff you up and make you prideful, but not love. Love builds up. Edifies means build up. And so his counsel is, if anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.

Isn't that good? Boy, that puts us right where we need to be. As soon as you think you know something, you better back up. But if anyone loves God, he's known by it.

Now, isn't it interesting that in the argument that he moves from that puffed upness to love? But if you're putting a premium on love, then that love will help navigate your knowledge.

[49 : 27] It will help define it. It'll help keep it in the boundaries of building people up. Even when you have to confront them. Even when you have to go to somebody and deal with them on the level of something going wrong in their life or sin in their life or something that you're concerned about for them.

If you go out of love checking the log in your own eye before you ever open your mouth because you've done that diligence in prayer. God, check my heart. Check the logs in my eye before I go point out the splinter in my brother or sister's eye.

Help me do this with humility and grace and a broken heart, Lord. But help me do it. See? That's the attitude of humility. This is what Paul's trying to put forward to us now.

This is one other issue where good spiritual knowledge was applied without love. And Paul's rebuking them for it and saying, hey, wait a minute. I want you to just take note at how deceptive this can be for us.

This is happening in the church. This instance in 1 Corinthians 8 is happening in the church among these Christians. They had, some of them had a mature spiritual knowledge about this.

[50 : 37] They were saying that they knew that meat offered to idols didn't amount to anything. The more mature ones were saying, look, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. That's not the issue.

Eating meat or in terms of offending God or anything like that. These are spiritually, no, no. Then you had some spiritually immature Christians and they're getting offended and worried about it and get over it.

Can you see that happening? The more mature Christians are looking at the meat offered to idols and said, that ain't nothing, man. Come on. You know why? Because those gods don't exist. Yeah, yeah, let's take that meat and eat it.

Bring it on. Bring the ribeye. Set it down. I'll be first. It's no problem. But the less mature who hadn't grown up in the Lord as much yet, they're looking at that and going, oh, is God going to be offended?

Now, you can appreciate that heart, can't you? You can see in these younger Christians the heart that says, oh, I don't want to do anything to displease the Lord. And so Paul is going to move through the argument.

[51 : 36] He's going to say, yeah, you know what we need to do? We need to meet in the middle here and we need to make this issue about not offending each other. So more mature guys, if what you're doing is being something that draws these people down instead of building them up, then are you willing to let it go?

Are you willing to give up the ribeye so that they, yeah, yeah, I'm good with that. Okay. You lesser ones, are you willing to look to these older ones who've walked in the Lord longer than you and are you willing to learn and grow and let them bring you?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. All right. There we go. Just make it about the Lord. And that's, see the brilliance of Paul bringing those people together. Making it about Jesus.

That's what's going on. They were putting a greater emphasis not on love but on themselves. Well, here's what I think. Well, wait a minute. Here's what I think.

Yeah, well, that's fine but who's to say? Hold on a minute. I'm going to quote chapter and verse. Right? Throw the trump card down. Paul says, stop it. Stop it.

[52 : 42] Where's love in this? Knowledge without love is going to puff you up. It's going to inflate self. It's going to cause you to behave badly.

But knowledge with love builds up others for the glory of the Lord and they're good. They're not mutually exclusive. You can honor the Lord and build each other up when you're making it about Christ. In love, you use your spiritual knowledge to serve the best interests of others out of your growing love for the Lord.

You know, one of the things that we want to encourage here in our church family is Greg and I have served together with you for six years developing and trying to clearly spell out a statement of faith that many of you who visited our church and read about it, you've appreciated the fact that we're putting out in written form a statement of faith where we're saying here are the doctrines that we subscribe to as a church family.

Here's what we believe about them. Here are the scripture references we take that from. Here's how we understand how to apply. We put all that on so you can see it. Right? And so when people come in and want to join our church, one of the things that we ask them to do as they sign off on joining our church is follow the teaching and leadership of the eldership.

If you can't do that, this isn't the church for you because this is what we're supporting and this is why. If you have a problem with that and you can't find yourself coming up under the eldership and letting us lead you, this is not an issue of agree to disagree.

[54 : 20] If you can't get under these things and follow the elders with humility and kindness and graciousness and trust and believing and hoping and enduring the best with us, this may not be the place for you.

We're okay with that. If that's the way it is. What we hope will happen is you'll see how we're trying to follow the Lord and be accountable to you and to each other in what we believe so that if we've gotten something wrong, if we're off base in something which could be, we can make that adjustment in humility and go to you and explain it.

Say, hey, in this paragraph right here where we said this, here's what we intended and here's what's been brought to our attention and we happen to have come in prayer to agree with what they're saying and so we're going to modify this and here's why.

What do you think? Now, what's the premium here? The pride and ego of the eldership or love for Jesus Christ and His truth?

See? You know, it's just not that hard if we can get over us. That's the hard part, isn't it? I give you these examples to help us understand together that we're all working on this and we're all a work in progress but God has asked Greg and I through the calling that He's put on our lives to lead out in this and so we have things that we subscribe to and believe in.

[55 : 51] We have doctrines that are important to us or we wouldn't publish them. We just keep it willy-nilly and let people come in here and say, well, whatever you want to think, brother. Well, sister, whatever you, you know, have at it.

No. That's not going to promote love for God and so we care about the truth. We're trying to minister that truth. We want you to use your spiritual knowledge to serve the best interests of other people and their best interest is that they will grow in the love for Jesus Christ.

Now, I'll ask you real quickly before I stop, let me just put this up there as a question. What was the payoff in all this? What was going on with these guys? What was the payoff?

There it is. The payoff is knowledge is power. Knowledge is power.

I'm going to stop there and I want to come back and give you the others.

[57 : 01] I want to say more about this but I'm aware of when I got started and so I'm going to hold fast and hopefully you'll be like, okay, we'll come back and see.

I want to talk to you about the payoff and the product under this first point and then I want to take you to the other two and do a similar thing with you because I want to really draw out Jesus' point as He confronts these men and says to their faces, you hypocrites.

That's powerful stuff. You hypocrites. Here's what I know the payoff is for you and here's what I know the product is for you. I know what you're looking for. I know what you want. I know what you want to do with these people.

And He just exposes it for what it is. He doesn't yell. He doesn't scream. He doesn't lash out. He doesn't call them names. And they get it.

They get it. Well, let's pray and just thank God for His goodness to us. And again, we'll pick up here for next week. Just draw a line in your notes and say, long-winded pastor, he had to stop here.

[58 : 12] And we'll get into it more next time. Thank you for your kind attention. Almighty God and Father, we thank You for the joy that it is to sit under Your Word and to take time to try and understand how these truths can be applied to us as Grace Church Williamsburg.

Each of us have challenges that we face and trials that we are enduring in our own spiritual walk. And God, I can say, starting with me, in all earnestness, the issue of pride is a problem for every one of us.

And so we pray that You will help us not to live under the deception of satanic schemes that wants to stroke our pride and build it up and feed it, but that You will search our hearts and reveal in different ways through different circumstances, people, trials.

You will reveal to us ways that we've exalted ourselves, the ways that we've insulated ourselves in behaviors and attitudes that foment pride, that constantly stir it up and keep it alive in our lives, so that we can repent of that and be built up in humility and in a love for Jesus.

We want to make this about loving Jesus. We don't want it to be about religion. We want it to be about loving You as we follow You and seek to be obedient to the truth.

[59 : 37] We follow You because we love You. We obey You because we love You. This is how we want to live the next year of our lives if You grant us breath for life. So help us to do business with You this month.

help us to set our hearts to say, hey, You've given us the opportunity to at least start a new year. Help me deal with these things, God, that plagued me last year.

Help me deal with these things that have dragged me down and kept me from this kind of warmth and love in the truth. I pray this, God, as Greg and I shepherd here, we're so thankful for our friends, our soul mates, as it were, as we rally together to serve one another and build each other up in the faith.

Thank You for making this an exciting place to come to and to be a part of as You grow us and show Your faithfulness. We love You and we honor You in Christ's precious name.

Amen.