

A Refresher on Holiness #3 and #4

A Refresher on Holiness

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

We're in a series tonight entitled "A Refresher on Holiness." Holiness in the sense not of external compliance with rules of conduct, but a holiness of heart; a holiness that is set apart for God with your innermost affections and with the way that you think, in a way that is devoted in your affections and priorities and your love for God, for his Christ, for his word, and that's the kind of holiness that we are after here in this series. We want to see the implications of what it means to be a Christian. We want to consider what it is that motivates you as a believer; what is it that makes you tick; what is it that is important and defines the way that you respond to life and what you seek after in life and how you respond to God's truth. That's really what we're after, it's a heart matter that we're discussing here in this series.

Now, let me say that if you are perhaps here and you're not a Christian, I need to make something really clear, that you become a Christian by laying hold of Christ by faith. There is nothing that you can do to earn God's favor. There is nothing that you can do to make yourself a Christian and earn God's favor by righteous things that you can do. There is nothing that you can do to save yourself because you're lost and Scripture says that none of us do good, none of us seek after God. For you here tonight and you're not a Christian, you need to recognize your sin and repent. You need to turn to Christ and ask him to save you and abandon all of your pride and arrogance and the sin that you love and turn to Christ and say, "I need you to save me or I will be eternally lost." That is your response to the message tonight because only Christ alone can grant you the forgiveness of your sins.

Now, having said that, tonight I'm really here to speak to those of you that openly name the name of Christ and you know that you are born again and you want to grow in your Christian character. That's what we're going to focus on here this evening and here's the starting point, what you need to see is that it is God's truth that ultimately changes your character; it is God's truth that redefines the direction of your heart. Now that you have been born again, now that God has given you a new nature, he's given you something that responds to Scripture and blossoms under the reality of truth, not so much your self effort, your effort has a part but it starts with the heart understanding truth. Romans 6:17, you don't need to turn there, Romans 6:17 helps us understand this. Paul says, "thanks be

to God that though you were slaves of sin," you used to not even be a Christian, he says, "you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed," and he states it in kind of a reverse order to the way that it happens. Here's how it works: truth comes to your heart and your heart, your affections, embrace it and respond to what your mind understands, so teaching is addressed to your mind, your mind grasps it, comprehends it, renewed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, embraces God's truth and you come to love it. Your affections are warmed toward what is true in Scripture and from that position of heart strength, you obey that which God's word calls you to. Truth is addressed to the mind, it moves the heart and issues in life obedience.

Well, what we're doing here tonight and in this series here, is giving you different aspects of biblical truth that your heart can grab hold of, that your heart can embrace, and find in that your motivation to persevere in the midst of trials, to grow spiritually, and to give joyful thanks to God for the position that he has so graciously granted to you in Christ, and this defines everything else about how your life works. And nothing will stir you to spiritual excellence more than the implications of your salvation. You will find power to obey Christ as you contemplate your position in Christ and his work for you on the cross of Calvary. This is where it comes from and that's why we emphasize teaching, that's why we put the pulpit at the center of the platform rather than loud music and colored lights and a fog machine. Those things don't do anything to change the direction of your soul. You know, you can get that at a secular concert, can't you, if you want that. Well, you know, they can go to a concert and they can do it a lot better than what the churches do trying to mimic what they see in the world. So what we're doing here in this series is giving you things that you can meditate on over time. These are things that you come back to and you rehearse in your mind repeatedly until it starts to flow through your mind like spiritual blood going through your spiritual veins and your life just starts to pulsate in response to these things which are so self-evidently true from God's word. And then when duty calls or when temptation beckons, your heart has something to rise up and respond to; it has a platform to stand on so that you can stand firm and be godly no matter what life brings to you. These things have a comprehensive application because your life starts to be framed by truth and the way that you respond to life is now framed by truth and not by your feelings. They are not by your intuition.

Last time we saw four motivations for holiness. We'll review them ever so briefly just to name the points and then move on to four more here this evening. What is it that motivates you to holiness? What is it that prompts a person to persevere in Christ? Well, first of all, you remember the person who saved you, we saw last time. You're drawn and motivated by the love of Christ in your life and you aspire after spiritual excellence in response to the love that the person who saved you has bestowed upon you. You turn away from sin because it would violate the love of Christ. So remembering the person of Christ, his actual love for you, motivates you to holiness in a way that a rule never could.

Secondly, you remember the purpose of your salvation, that God saved you to be holy and God saved you to deliver you from the corruption of this world. That is now why you exist as a Christian. You want to conform your life to the reason that you exist. I say that a lot, don't I? The reason that you exist. I like talking in those terms. You know, you just

kind of step outside of yourself and say, "Why am I here? Why am I alive? Why am I a Christian?" Well, you're a Christian because God saved you to be holy; for you to be like Christ; for you to reflect his image and to love his glory as you go through life in the 70+ or minus years that he gives you here on earth. That's why you exist. Well, when life comes to you and tempts you away from that or when opportunity comes to step up and be heroic in your faith, you are motivated by the truth and you say, "This is why I was born. This is why I was born again. Christ saved me just for this." And these are the things that will lift someone up to spiritual greatness. These are the things that motivate someone to deny themselves and to seek after higher purposes and higher aims in life than simply existing and getting the most out of earthly goods that you can while you're here. When you remember that the Son of God loved you and gave himself up for you and that he did that so that you would be holy, that you would be zealous for good deeds, you're on a track to become someone far better than you ever would have been if that never came upon your heart to motivate you.

Thirdly, we said, you remember the purity of your conscience. You avoid that which would wound your conscience, that motivates you to holiness. Who wants to go around with a guilty accusing conscience because you're living in unconfessed sin? Why would you do that? That doesn't make any sense, does it?

Fourthly, we ended last time by encouraging you to remember the prayers of the righteous. Jesus instructed us and commanded us and said, "You are to pray as an ongoing pattern of your spiritual life, you pray, 'Father, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.'" Well, that motivates you to prayer because you start to realize that if you're going to live in integrity before the Lord, 1. you're going to pray that way because that's what Christ commanded. And then you go a step further and you say, "Well, you know, if I pray this way and I'm earnest and sincere in that prayer, then I really can't tolerate sin in my life because I don't want to be a hypocrite in the presence of God, on the one hand, in one moment saying, 'O Father, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,' and then turning around and engaging in the muck of the world. That doesn't make any sense." You don't want to be that kind of hypocrite. I know that. I know you well enough to know you don't want to be like that. Well, you just take that and implement it into your thinking and embrace it and you meditate on that and say, "Yeah, that's right," and all of a sudden like one of the hymns that we sing, temptations lose their power when Christ is near, and these true things are weighing on your mind.

The other thing that we said about that is when you're in a body like this and what a privilege it is for us to be able to be together as a body of Christ in a local assembly like this where we know each other, we love each other and we care about each other like we do, well, what an encouragement and motivation it is to holiness to realize that you're sitting in a room with people who are praying for you, praying for you to grow in holiness and for you to honor Christ in your life. Well, all of a sudden you start to see your own spiritual life in a broader context, in a network of relationships, and it becomes so unthinkable to say, "Well, do you know what? Sin in my life is okay." You can't think that way when you remember the relationships, the righteous people who are in your life and you know they are praying for you and say, "Do you know what? I just can't violate

the love of that relationship by pursuing sin in my life." You know if I and, God for bid, I mean, I've often prayed, "God, before I fall into morally disqualifying sin, kill me first." Don't let that happen because the consequences of that in a position as a pastor of a church, the consequences of what that would mean would just be so bad and devastating. I would rather die than for that to happen, wouldn't you? So in like manner for all of us when we are thinking this way, we say, "Do you know what? I would rather die than violate the love of those people that I know that are praying for me here within the body of Christ." And the prayers of the righteous people that you know and that you love and that you interact with week by week becomes a powerful motivation for you to pursue holiness and to be godly in your life because we care about each other, we love each other and we want to honor those relationships. And one of the things I love about our Tuesday night studies is almost everyone here is an integral, ongoing, deep part of our church. You know what it's like, don't you, when somebody spins off into orbit and their life is not what it is and they suddenly drop out of sight. Well, you're concerned about that. "What happened to So-and-so?" Well, you know, that's just your love showing forth for them. Well, now, take that another step further and realize that if one of you that are here in the room tonight, if one of you were to spin off into orbit, all of the concern and angst that it would create in the people of God that you leave behind. Paul spoke about, "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" Well, one of the things that helps motivate you to holiness is saying, "Do you know what? I don't want to inflict that kind of spiritual pain on the people that have loved me and that we have shared so much together spiritually over the years." It motivates you to holiness and the accountability of a smaller church is a wonderful opportunity for us to grow together spiritually.

So those are the first four principles. If you weren't here with us, you've had a brief update, and now point 5 as we move into new material and point 5 is quite the mirror of point 4 but there's a little bit of a distinction. We said in point 4, remember the prayers of the righteous, that righteous people are praying for you, that Christ commands you to pray righteously, here in point 5, we're going to emphasize something just a little bit different and this point I've entitled: the people of God. The people of God, and I really did blend these two points together but I'll show you another Scripture to help you think through it. To see your life in the broader context of the people of God, that you were not saved so that you could live selfishly; that salvation isn't preeminently about you, but that you're saved into a body of people and as I was saying earlier, you consider how your lives affect the broader people of God. Here's the thing, beloved, and it's funny how I'm repeating myself now. I got ahead of myself without even intending to, turn over to Psalm 73 and we'll see this and we'll tie this to a particular Scripture and deal with it this way. Psalm 73:13-15, and one day down the road, we'll teach Psalm 73 when we return to our sequential exposition of the Psalms from The Truth Pulpit. Psalm 73 is designed to teach the principle that God is good to his people.

Look at verse 1, Psalm 73, verse 1, "Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!" That's the principle that this Psalm is designed to inculcate into our minds, but the Psalmist prior to stating that at some earlier point in his life had been going through some spiritual discouragement and in verse 2, he said, "as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the

prosperity of the wicked." He said, "God is good to his people all the time but I had almost stumbled away from that. I was jealous, I was an envious brute because I saw wicked people who did not love God prospering in their earthly existence and I didn't like that and it made me jealous and I started to stumble and question God in my heart." So much so that in verse 13, he describes how he had come to this point in his thinking and he had concluded in his mind, he had come to a conclusion in his mind stating, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning." His earthly circumstances had led him to think that his faith was in vain and that he was foolishly following God when that had led him into suffering when at the same time he looks at wicked people and finds them successful, prosperous and happy. He says, "Why am I doing this?"

Well, here's what I want you to see: what is it between verse 14 and 15 you come to a pivot point and in verse 15, notice what holds him back; notice what restrains him and redirects his thinking in the right direction. He said, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,'" in other words, he came to the point where he said, "This is what I'm thinking in my heart and I'm ready to say it but do you know what, if I say it, what's going to happen? If I say that from my position of spiritual leadership, what's going to happen?" "Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children." He says, "I have an obligation of loyalty to the people of God to encourage them and to be a strength to them. If I articulate and verbalize the thoughts that are in my mind that it has been a piece of vanity for me to follow God, I betray all of those relationships," and he said, "I can't do that. That's unthinkable. I can't betray these relationships that I have within the people of God." For us speaking today in the New Testament times, I can't betray those relationships within the church. I can't do that. You know, I'm mindful, I try to watch my mouth and I try to watch what I say on social media in part because I don't want to say anything that would discourage you or that would make you say, "Oh, how could he say that? You know, he's having doubts? He's having questions? Oh, now what am I supposed to do?" We just don't do that to each other. We watch what we say out of regard for the people of God who are affected by the words that we articulate. So you see there is this deep loyalty that comes from being a part of the people of God by sharing a like, common, precious faith with people like you and me and we say, "Do you know what? I can't violate that." So the Psalmist had questions about what God was doing and was very discouraged. He said, "I'm not going to give voice to that before I've resolved it in my mind because if I do that, I'm going to send other people into a tailspin and that's just not right." So the people of God motivated him to restrain his mouth and to redirect his own heart and mind toward holiness.

You know, beloved, and I know you know this from personal experience, even when it seems like your sin or your spiritual mediocrity is entirely private, you know, your own bad attitude or you get into the wrong things on the internet or you're just angry and out of sorts and you won't resolve it with the family that you're upset with or whatever, and you think that it's just something private and it's self-contained, you know by your own experience that that's not true, right? Because when you're like that, what do you do when it comes to the people of God? You want to withdraw. You stay home because you don't want to face the people of God and have to deal with questions, "Oh, so how are you

doing?" You withdraw or you become sullen or quiet and all of that. So here's what I want you to see, is that even the things that you think are private, just things that you're tolerating in your own heart, what you need to understand is that that's affecting the people of God even indirectly because you withdraw and you're not engaged like you otherwise should be. So, you see, the whole point of this is for the concept of unconfessed, unrepented sin in your life as a Christian to be intolerable to you and there are multiple reasons for that and one of the reasons is, "Do you know what? I realize that who I am and the way I live my life overflows and has an effect on other people. It has an effect on other Christians and I just can't bring myself to violate the relational love by tolerating this unconfessed sin and perpetuating and continuing in that which I know that is displeasing to God." So here's what you need to say to yourself as you look in the mirror as you go home before you go to bed tonight, you should say to yourself, "I cannot selfishly tolerate sin in my life in this regard to the other people of God that are in my life." You say, "I can't do that," and that motivates you to say, "Okay, well, if I can't do that, then that means that I need, Lord, I need to get on my knees here and confess this to ask you to cleanse me, to change me, and to reorient my life toward that which is pleasing to God because I understand that I don't sin in isolation," and that helps motivate you toward holiness. So we consider the people of God as we walk with Christ.

There's a sixth principle that I would bring out for you. The same basic principle but a totally different side of the coin. If you were going to flip it and heads came up the people of God, tails comes up the people of the world, the people of the world. And how do the people of the world, how does your thinking about the people of the world motivate you toward holiness? Motivate you to avoid sin? Motivate you to be faithful to Christ and faithful to his people with your involvement in the local church? How does that help? Well, let's think about it this way: as the hymn goes, the whole world was lost in the darkness of sin. Why did God save you? God saved you in part to be a light to that dark world. Again, it comes back to the purpose of your salvation. Part of the reason that you exist is so that you would be a light to those who are in darkness. Now, follow me with this. This is all so clear. It's all just so evident. It's like it's right on the surface. It's like there's these huge diamonds and these huge gold nuggets of immense value that are just right on the surface of Scripture. I'm not quoting anything from original languages to you. I'm not making complex theological arguments, am I? This is all simple, straightforward things that are right on the surface of picture.

Look at Matthew 5 with me. Matthew 5, beginning in verse 14, let's say. Jesus said in Matthew 5:14, talking to those who were marked by the characteristics of the Beatitudes that he had been expressing in verses 3 through 12, speaking to his disciples, he says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." What is he saying here? He says part of the reason that you exist is to be a manifestation of the light of God to those who are in spiritual darkness; that those who are unsaved and bound in sin and blinded by Satan, spiritually speaking, would see in your life, in your words, in your testimony, light that would pierce their darkness. That's why you exist is to be an agent, to be an avenue

of the manifestation of the presence of God to them in a way that would be a testimony to their hearts.

Now, think about that. What does that mean in the context of pursuing holiness? It's pretty obvious, isn't it? When you think about people being lost in sin, headed toward eternal damnation, brothers and sisters in Christ, would you really embrace sin in your life, would you really pursue a sinful course of action at this time in your life and injure your testimony to people who are headed to hell? Honestly, could you and I possibly be that selfish that we would, as it were, put a basket over our testimony and cloak our light in the darkness of sin so that others were not able to see the light as plainly? Do you know what your sinful life does if you were to go out and get involved in wrong relationships and wrong behavior that would be a scandal if they were known, do you know what that does to the people in the world? Do you know what it testifies to them? It says sin is not that serious and the Gospel is not that important because if it were, you wouldn't be doing that.

So by your own sinful life, you diminish the urgency of the Gospel to the unsaved people who know you. That's not too good, is it? I'm being rhetorical here. Who would step forward and defend that and say, "This is justified. I am justified in my pursuit of sin. I am justified in my ungodly attitudes and behavior even though I know from God's word that it diminishes the importance of Christ and diminishes the urgency of the Gospel on those who are headed to hell." That's indefensible, isn't it? Well, realize that that needs to inform the way that you pursue holiness and the way that you respond to temptation in your own bad attitudes and behavior, those pockets of sin in your life. You just come to the point where you say, "God, with the help of the Holy Spirit and with all of my might, I want to put that away and not justify it anymore because even if I don't completely see it, even if I can't make a one-to-one connection with an unsaved person in my life conduct, I do not want to make it easier for them to go to hell and for them to think the Gospel and that Christ is not important and urgent." You say, "That's unthinkable."

So you ask yourself the question as you're looking in the mirror tonight before you go to bed, "Could I really diminish the gravity of sin by indulging in it myself?" because that's what you testify with your life when you allow unrepentant sin to take root in your life. You're saying, "This isn't that big of an issue." Well, it is, though. You know, isn't that why Christ died? Isn't that why Christ left heaven above? Isn't that why he went to Calvary? Isn't that why he groaned under the weight of sin? Isn't that why he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as he hung on the cross? That's no light matter. The travail of the soul of the Son of Man was directly related to the sins of those for whom he was dying. It's not a casual matter. So you remember the people of God, you remember the people of the world as you contemplate these things, and all of this motivates you toward holiness.

You know, the thing of it is, I'm ultimately going to give you 11 points and finish up next week, we've gone through six right now, and here's the thing about this as you're thinking through the broad scope of what Scripture would say to believers and inform the way that we think about life and our affections and our priorities and what we love and what's

important and what we shape our life around, here's the thing, beloved: just one of these, just one of these would be enough to orient you in the right direction but do you realize when you start to add one and two and three and six and 11, the cumulative impact of this is where the real power of this is. It's everywhere you turn in your biblical thinking, you're confronted with that which turns you to holiness. And the reason, you know, I know that for most of you your heart is drawn to the things that you're hearing tonight, I know that because you're born again; it's the nature that God has given you. You are wired to agree with what Scripture says about these things, aren't you? You know, most of you aren't sitting here resisting it, you're agreeing in your mind. Well, it's because God has given you a nature that is like unto his holiness. When you were born again, God gave you a new nature that is wired to holiness. That's why this resonates with you. Well, recognizing that, take the opportunity to embrace the full cumulative impact of this and let it shape the affections and directions of your heart from this day forward until God calls you home to glory because everything you need to push you in the right direction is right here in God's word.

Let me give you a seventh one. I like all of these. I like this one as well. Point 7, you know what you should think about when you're thinking about what am I going to give my life to? Am I going to give it to an earnest pursuit of holiness or indifference and spiritual mediocrity and tolerating sin? Here's one more thing that you need to think about and that's this: it's the providence of God. The providence of God should greatly motivate you toward holiness. Now, I love this one. There is just no escaping. God's word comes and in a sanctifying way puts us in a corner and says there is nowhere else for you to go but to move forward in holiness. It leaves you no other option. The providence of God and here's where this goes: God is sovereign over everything and that means in his sovereignty he is also omniscient, he is omnipotent, he's all-powerful, he's everywhere present, he knows everything and do you know what that means? It means that he knows your secret life as well. He knows the private aspect of your life that no one sees and even more than that, he knows inside your mind. He knows every word on your tongue before you speak it. He knows the motions of your heart. And here's the thing: God will either reward you and honor you for your obedience to him or eventually he will expose your sin. One of the two.

Look at Proverbs 10:9. Keep your finger in Matthew because we're going to come back there. Either keep your finger in Matthew or bookmark your current spot and come back to it on your iPad, I don't care. Me, I'm a book guy. Hard copy pages and that kind of stuff, that's what motivates me. Proverbs 10:9, but it's not anything against electronic stuff. I'm just a creature of my past, I guess. Proverbs 10:9 says, "He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out." Scripture is saying, "You may hide your crookedness for a time but it's going to come out." Why? Because that's what God does. He exposes sin and whenever you see a prominent spiritual leader who has been found out to be a phony, God has simply honored Proverbs 10:9 and those who have perverted their way by living an ungodly private life while standing in a pulpit of God, he exposes them and they bear the brunt of the shame and embarrassment and for some, the loss of their eternal soul that that brings to them.

Now, with your finger in Matthew, flip back to Matthew 6. We'll see the positive side of this. We saw the negative side, "he who perverts his ways will be found out," well, there is a positive side to this as well and this is so precious from our Lord Jesus as he's teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:3, the whole passage verses 1 through 8 should be expounded here but we'll leave that for another time. Matthew 6:3, Jesus says, "when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Jesus says, "Don't make a public display of it. Don't blow a trumpet and call attention when you're doing a good deed. Don't broadcast it on social media. 'Hey, do you know what I did? You know, hey, look at my open Bible and my coffee here in this selfie picture and you can see I'm doing my devotion.'" Jesus said, "Don't do that. Do it in secret because when you approach it that way, God will reward you. God in his providence will manifest these things."

He goes on in verse 5 and says it's not just a matter of giving, it's a matter of praying. Verse 5, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you," by contrast, "you when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret," where no one notices, where no one has any idea that that's what's going on and what's the promise attached to that? Jesus says, verse 6, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." You know, Scripture is filled with these kinds of things in the historical narrative. God exposed Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery. God brought to light David's sin with Bathsheba even though it had been hidden for many months. The prophet Nathan says, "You're the man," and nailed him in that and, you know, while the sin was covered up for a time, eventually it was exposed. So Scripture gives you this picture of saying that a life of private sin will be exposed by God's power, by his omniscience, by his omnipotence. In ways that you could never anticipate God will make it known, the negative side. The positive side, Scripture says God sees when you're righteous in private and in secret and he will reward you. Promise from a God whose word cannot be broken. He sees what's done in secret and he will reward you.

Here's the question for tonight as we are considering a refresher on holiness, here's the question I encourage you to answer carefully: which side of providence do you want to be on? Which side of providence do you want to be on? Do you want to sow toward that which would bring about God's convicting, exposing of sin to the disgrace of your soul and the dishonoring of the things that you said that you believed, or do you want to be on that side of providence that is content to let God bless you in the way that he sees fit, quietly carrying on in the holy direction that Scripture points you to without regard to whether men see or not? You're cultivating, you are sowing seeds one way or another, you're either sowing to that which will expose you in shame eventually or you're sowing to that which God will bless in ways that we couldn't predict. You're doing one or the other and you just need to deal honestly with the question, "What side of providence do you want to be on?" Galatians 6:7 says, "Don't be deceived, God is not mocked, for a man will receive that which he sows," Galatians 6:7.

So, beloved, here it is, here it is, as you're sitting here tonight, God has brought you to a fork in the road. You're either pursuing that secret, private devotion and obedience and faithfulness which is what I trust is true of the vast majority of you, but I don't know, I mean, God knows, I don't know. But if there are those of you that think that you are getting away with secret sin, understand wherever you're at, you're at a fork in the road now because God's word has brought this to you so clearly. Here's the thing, you're at a fork now with a decision to make, with a heart commitment to settle in your mind as you go forward out of this room tonight. You can either trust God's providence to bless you in your secret obedience or you can trust God's providence to expose you in shame because of your secret disobedience. The choice is yours. Which will it be? But understand that the providence of God will not be trifled with. God will not have his holiness mocked. God does not lightly bear along with hypocrites. So for your own good now, I'm just speaking on a purely human level as a pastor who cares about your life, your soul and wants to see God's blessing upon you, that's the only reason I'm saying this at this point now: wouldn't you want the anticipation of God's blessing rather than the certain expectation that he will expose you in your hypocrisy and sin? Take him at his word that he will do both and then ask yourself, "Okay, what do I want to give my life to? What do I want to devote myself to?" Do you want to perpetuate the backbiting gossip that you whisper in people's ears? Do you want to perpetuate the cultivation of wrong thinking and lustful thoughts in your mind and perpetuate that knowing that somehow sooner or later you think that no one sees but God sees it and he says, "I will expose it." Why would you want to do that to yourself? That's not even in your own self-interest. That doesn't even make sense. It's like slitting your own wrist. Why would you do that? It's indefensible, isn't it? And it's not just that it's indefensible, it's irrational. That's just incomprehensibly ignorant. You see, and that's the nature of sin, that it perverts your reasoning powers and that's why you need God's word to bring it up to you.

But on the positive side, for those of you that are walking faithfully and you're persevering even though the winds of life are blowing against you and you're being faithful even though you're not finding much support maybe from inside the walls of your own household, I know some of you are dealing with that directly. You're working with Christ and people are critical of you and mocking you and asking, "What's wrong with you?" because they don't share in this life that God has given to us in Christ. Well, beloved, let your heart find profound encouragement right here and realize that God sees your private obedience. For a time he might allow you to suffer the taunts of those who oppose you and mock you but you just keep doing what you're doing with the certain expectation that God will bless you and reward you in the end and don't give up because God promises, Jesus himself said, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." And beloved, don't back off of that. Don't step back from your current devotion to Christ. Stay in that so that you'll find out what that blessing is like. On the authority of God's word, I can promise you that it will be better than what you think. So you just walk out of here those of you that are in those shoes and you just walk out, "Do you know what? I'm encouraged to continue on. God sees, God knows, Christ said he will bless me. That's all I need. I have Christ's word. It's settled. I'm convinced to move forward undiminished, undeterred, unafraid because I believe my Savior is true to his word." That's a great place to be, a shelter in a time of storm, our Lord Jesus and his promises to us.

Do you know what? I'm going to stop there tonight. I know this is not what they teach you to do in homiletics in seminary. You're supposed to have a nice smooth conclusion but I'm going to stop there. I want you to go out on that positive note. The next point is a little more difficult. I want you to go out on that positive note. I want you to go out contemplating the providence of God as you look into your future. As you're contemplating, you know, to truly settle it in your heart, what is it that I want to sow to? I'm planting seeds with my thought life, with my words and with my conduct, what is it that I want to reap down the road? Obedience. Faithfulness. Loyalty to the people of God. Loyalty to God's word. That's what you want to focus on. That's what you want to direct your thoughts toward, beloved. Why? Because your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Let's pray together as we close.

Our Father, what a position is ours in Christ. Thank you for your salvation which you have given to us in our Lord Jesus, that one who lived a life of perfect obedience to your law, who suffered on the cross to wash away our sins, and now the full merit of his righteousness is accounted to those who put their faith in Christ, not by works of hands that we have done, our God, but by what Christ has done, a righteousness outside of us are we saved and justified before you. Thank you for that. And we thank you for your eminence, your presence in daily life in the details of life. You know us. You know our lives. You know whether we're living in sin or living in obedience. And Father, you see the simple faithfulness of your people, of those that are gathered here in this room, those who have borne insult and injury at the hands of others and yet rather than giving into bitterness, Father, walk in sweet obedience to you and become an aroma of Christ to everyone who knows them. I thank you that so many people in this room are like that. Father, I pray that you would affirm them in their hearts. Give them the sense by the power of your Holy Spirit that as they rest in the promise of God, that their faithfulness to Christ is not in vain. Encourage them and uphold them and make them even more faithful and bold and devoted to Christ.

Father, perhaps for a few, a very few, I trust that are hiding sin and walking in disobedience, Father, I pray for just such a great spirit of conviction upon their hearts of the fear of God, the fear of eternal judgment, the fear of being exposed providentially, Father, would so motivate them and convict them that they would fall at the feet of Christ and confess their sins and repent with the permanent intention never to come back to them again. Yes, Father, let your word have that kind of decisive impact on our lives, we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would sanctify our church, sanctify it in truth. And Father, we ask you to lead us collectively as a body, individually as men, women and children, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Yes, Father, indeed order our steps providentially through the working of your word, through the ordering of your providence, through our interactions with the people of God, order our steps, O God, so that we might have that safe arrival into your heavenly kingdom of which the Apostle

Paul spoke. Father, we ask you to work in our lives so that when we step out of this life and draw our next breath into eternity, Father, that that transition would be wondrous, glorious, and far beyond all that we could ask or think because Christ has been good to us and you have directed our steps to that end. Yes, Father, we give ourselves to you freely, gladly, unconditionally tonight as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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