***Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support, No. 13  
Romans 15:30-33  
RO196-02***

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**The Believer's Peace**

Romans 15:30-33, Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support Segment Number 13. The apostle Paul has concluded the instructional portion of his letter to the Christians in Rome with Romans 15:33, where he says, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." He concludes the main body of his letter by commending the believers in Rome to the peace of God. Paul understands that the sin sick soul can find peace only in God the creator. This consists of the peace with God of salvation through Jesus Christ described in Romans 5:1. It consists of the peace of God in the filling of the Holy Spirit, described in Philippians 4:7. Today, we indeed live in a world where all mankind yearns for peace. But it's a world of turmoil and the greatest fear is the consequence of dying. People don't know what awaits them on the other side. Someday, most of the human race that has lived since Adam will wonder how they missed the fact that temporal and eternal peace were to be found in Jesus Christ alone. The apostle Paul pointed out that very simple principle in Ephesians 2:14 when he refers to Jesus Christ and he says, "For He Himself is our peace." The mass of humanity, which will spend their eternity in the Lake of Fire will indeed wonder how they could have missed that self-evident simple truth.

It will then seem so obvious to all of them when it is too late. It will be then that they will realize that they were the victims of satanic blindness, spiritual blindness while they were here on this earth. All the biblical fundamentalist Christians will then have been proven as right as rain about God, Heaven, Hell, sin, salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, and not the least, about the Bible itself. Indeed, at that time, we can only imagine how the lost will weep in their eternal punishment and just wish that they could live their lives over again. The consequence for them will be that they will never know a moment of peace forever. In contrast to them, we Christians have been promised by our Lord that he would give us the quality that characterizes Him, of peace. John 14:27, the Lord says, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

The believer’s peace from Jesus is very movingly described in the song we used to sing years and years ago at Berean Church out of our very first hymnal. We used to sing this 38 years ago when I first came to Berean Church. I've given you a copy of it in your hand out and we're going to sing it a little later. Right now, I just want you to observe the words that movingly describe the peace that Jesus gives:

Like the sunshine after rain,  
like a rest that follows pain,  
like a hope returned again  
is the peace that Jesus gives.

Like the soft, refreshing dew,  
like a rosy daybreak new,  
like a friendship tender true,  
is the peace that Jesus gives.

Like a river deep and long  
with its current, ceaseless, strong,  
like a cadence of a song,  
like the cadence of a song,  
is the peace that Jesus gives.

Oh the peace that Jesus gives,  
never dies, it always lives,  
like the music of a song,  
like a glad eternal calm,  
is the peace that Jesus gives,  
is the peace that Jesus gives.

That is a very moving and accurate description of what the Word of God is trying to tell all humanity today. There is a peace in Jesus. There is no peace outside of Him. So, no matter what our lot may be in Satan's world. Our piece in Jesus is secure, for He has defeated the devil himself.

And therefore, we Christians join our voices together in shouting the victory cry that Paul enunciated in Romans 8:31 when he said, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" And that's a good thing to remember.

Back in 1951, when I became Pastor of Berean Church, I was aware that there were a lot of things under the situation at the moment that I might feel are against me, that we might feel as a church were against us. Without going into the details, one day I took my Greek New Testament and I copied these words out in Greek: "If God is for us, who is against us?" And I sat it right up there on my desk in front of me when I studied, to see all the time. Whatever went on in Berean Church, this phrase was there before my eyes. How true, how true! That is the peace that Jesus gives.

**Peace Comes Only Through Salvation and Fellowship**

The peace that Jesus gives is received by means of God's plan of Free Grace Salvation. There is no other way in the Bible. Jesus Christ draws us to Himself as lost sinners who cannot take even one step toward Him on our own. We come with empty hands, with nothing of merit to offer Him, only to receive the gift of salvation. We come in complete spiritual helplessness, unable to make any previous commitment to Him. We can only trust in Him. To our faith in Jesus to save us, we can add nothing.

On the other side of the theological viewpoint is what we have been studying, Lordship Salvation, which has interjected the un-biblical requirement of making Christ one's Lord at the point of trusting in Him a Savior. Surrender to the will of God is a spiritual impossibility for a lost person.

All suggestion of adding any human effort or any human works at the point of salvation eliminates the grace basis upon which God alone can save the sinner. Romans 4:4-5, Romans 11:6 indicate that if it's grace, it's not works. If it's works, it's not grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says God will take you into Heaven on grace or not at all. So, if you eliminate His grace basis of dealing with you, you've eliminated all contact with the living God. Therefore, we reiterate most emphatically that only the Free Grace salvation plan can give the distraught unbeliever peace in his soul.

What the Lord is calling us to is fellowship with Himself. In Revelation 3:20, we have a verse that all of you are well acquainted with: Jesus standing before the door, the heart's door of the Christians in the church at Laodicea. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." This is not a gospel invitation to the unsaved for entering eternal fellowship. This is a call to believers to repent and return to temporal fellowship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is speaking to a congregation of Christians in Laodicea; He is not speaking here to unbelievers. I know that this verse is often misused as a salvation verse. That is totally unjustifiable. It has nothing to do with salvation. It has only to do with being filled with the spirit. The Laodicean Christian, for an example of saved people living in a carnal state, is dominated by the sin nature instead of by the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 3:17-18 indicate that. "Because you say, 'I am rich, and I have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see." Now, all of these words are fraught with deep meaning. The gold of the Word of God is what refines us. That's where our true wealth lies. You're not rich because of what you have in the bank. You're rich because of the Word of God you have in your human spirit. Notice clothing yourself, white garments, the symbol of your personal acts of righteousness. You remember that picture we have in the Bible of standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ, clothed in the garments of our righteousness. This is the point that John is making. Do you want to stand up there before the judgment seat in something that crawls all over you like a cheap suit instead of the garments of majestic righteousness? Do you want to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ as a person who had enormous access to material resources in this world, and you come up there in one of these little cheap Kmart operations and dress yourself before the living God? Is that what you want to do?

**Christians Neither Hot Nor Cold**

That is the point here of this passage. 'What is wrong with you people?' And he says, 'Let me give you the eye salve that will open your eyes. Get positive volition and take the Word of God and start rubbing it on your eyes. And suddenly you will see yourself as God sees you.' That's the most precious experience a human being can have. This is the great invitation to the believer, these people living in their lukewarm and carnal condition. Revelation 3:15 says, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

This was a sophisticated Bible church gang. They really weren't too bad carnally, but they weren't hot spiritually for the Lord. They were the kind of people who could get along with everyone. They were the kind of people that everyone liked. When they stood before people and they talked to people, you did not get the idea that they were against the things they were opposed to, or that they were in favor of the things they stood for. They were very middle of the road and they were just the nicest folks. And Jesus says, "You make me want to vomit." Now what kind of talk is that for people who are the big timers here within the Bible church community? The Lord has warned these Christians: if they don't back off when He said, "I'm going to spew you out of My mouth," He was telling them, "I'm going to disband you as a church, I'm going to terminate you as an organization."

If the Laodicean Christians responded with positive volition to the Lord's appeal, He then told them that He would come in and perform one of the most dramatic acts of fellowship known in the New Testament world. 'I'm going to sit down and dine with you. I'm going to have a meal with you.' What a deeply intimate expression of camaraderie this was. That's what He means when He says, 'I knock at the door, I'm waiting for you to let Me in. I'm waiting for you to confess, to admit that you're way off course, to admit that you've got your eyes on yourself, that you have not really played square with Me. You're just pretending that you're playing square with Me. But if you will open the door, I will come in and I will dine with him and he with Me.'

The Lordship Salvation teachers claim that no truly born again person would act like the Laodiceans did. Such a thing as turning away from Jesus Christ, indeed could indicate that an individual was not saved in the first place. That was the case of Judas. But turning away from Jesus Christ could also indicate that you have a believer who is out of fellowship. That was the case of Peter. But the Christian who decides indeed to get on track to walk in fellowship with God, his Heavenly Father has the deep and marvelous experience of God sitting down and dining with him.

Lordship Salvation teachers have a problem, of course, with that Scripture. They have a difficulty in viewing those Laodicean people as born-again believers, which of course they were. That's how the Lord addressed them, and that's why He was talking to them, to get their lives straightened out. The Lord was calling upon them to turn from their evil and to turn back to Him. We need only to observe the fact that the Christians in Corinth were people who were dominated by the lust patterns of the Old Sin Nature. For that reason, in 1 Corinthians 3:1, the apostle Paul says, "And I, brethren, [You get that, brethren. I, my fellow Christians,] could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, [or as to carnal men] as to babes in Christ." These people in Corinth to whom Paul writes have trusted in Christ as Savior. And therefore he repeatedly calls them saints and brethren. Paul, however, classifies some of these Christians as spiritual. Others he classifies as fleshly or carnal. The spiritual Corinthian Christians were those who were yielded to God the Holy Spirit. They were therefore living a godly life and they were serving their Heavenly Father. They were accomplishing divine good works because they were in temporal fellowship: all known sins confessed. The carnal Christians of Corinth however, we're not yielded to the will of their Heavenly Father. They were controlled by the Old Sin Nature and so they were living in sin. And they were not serving God, and they were not producing divine good works. They were out of temporal fellowship.

The spiritual Christians in Corinth were growing in spiritual maturity, while the carnal Christians remained stunted spiritually as immature infants. 1 Corinthians 3:2, Paul says, "I gave you milk to drink, [That's what you give a person when he's first born again.] not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. [That's understandable. But Paul says, "You've been a Christian a long time.] Indeed, even now you are not yet able." You're still on baby food. I can't really teach you the things of the Spirit of God.

You can appreciate that if you stand up here sometimes where I am and we get a stranger, a visitor into the service who has never been taught the deep things of the Spirit of God, who has never experienced sitting and learning the Word of God for any extended period of time. And you can see the fidgeting, the candy wrappers they're opening, the gum wrappers they're opening, the looking around the place after about the first 20 minutes, the getting up to go to the washroom, the checking of everything in the other rooms, the coming back again. What are we seeing? Well, we're seeing people who are babies. They're probably saved; but sitting down at a banquet of spiritual food, they don't know how to cope with it.

The apostle Paul found Christians in Corinth like that. They were horrid in the lives they were leading, but they were within eternal fellowship of salvation. Ultimately, in Heaven, every Christian is going to be transformed into the image of Christ. But while they are on earth, there are varying degrees of spiritual development. The ultimate is described in 1 John 3:2, where John says, "Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." We are going to be transformed into the very image of Jesus Christ someday, every one of us: the best of us, the worst of us.

In Romans 8:29 Paul says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." The word "foreknow" means that God chose you for eternal life, and He intended to make you a glorified being in the image of Jesus Christ.

So, we Christians at times may prove to be unfaithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. We will violate His commandments. But our carnality, I must reiterate the Scripture makes very clear, will not cause Him to disown you. That is the issue that you must understand. There's a lot of misery out in the Christian community now of people who aren't sure they're going to Heaven because they don't think their lives reflect a born-again status, even though they know that they are looking to Christ to save them. Their eyes have been taken off of Him and put on themselves by the Lordship Salvation teachers, and it has completely caused them to become uncertain as to where they're going.

But note 2 Timothy 2:10-12, our Lord can never disown you, no matter how far out you may go. Paul says, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, [chosen unto salvation,] that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us; [in terms of rewards, not in terms of salvation. We know that!] If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." How could you say it more precisely? If we are faithless to Him, He remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself; what is it that He cannot deny? He cannot deny the Free Grace Salvation He has given you and you have accepted. Once you have accepted, He says, 'You are in.' That is the thing that we are talking about.

**The False Premises of Lordship Salvation**

Interestingly enough, Dr. John MacArthur accuses Lewis Sperry Chafer of Dallas Seminary of originating in the earlier part of this century, what Dr. MacArthur considers the unbiblical idea of 2 kinds of Christians: carnal Christians and spiritual Christians. On page 23 of Dr. MacArthur's book "The Gospel According to Jesus," he says, "Prior to this century, no serious theologian would have entertained the notion that it is possible to be saved, yet see nothing of the outworking of regeneration in one's lifestyle or behavior. In 1918, Lewis Sperry Chafer published 'He That Is Spiritual' articulating the concept that 1 Corinthians to 2:15-3:3 speaks of 2 classes of Christians, carnal and spiritual. Chafer wrote 'The carnal Christian is characterized by a walk that is on the same plane as that of the natural unsaved man.' That was a foreign concept to most Christians in Dr. Chafer's generation. But it has become a central premise for a large segment of the church today. Dr. Schafer's doctrine of spirituality, along with some of his other teachings, became the basis for a whole new way of looking at the gospel. Because Chafer's teachings have so colored the modern view of the gospel, it is essential to confront what he taught."

So Dr. MacArthur, interestingly enough, says that there is no such thing as a carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian. If you're born again, you're not going to be a carnal person. But again, I must point you to 1 Corinthians 3. Those first 3 verses make it very clear that Paul says some of you are spiritual, some of you are fleshly or carnal. Verse 3 indicates they indicate their carnality. "For you are still fleshly. [or carnal] For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly [carnal] and are you not walking like mere men? [That is like mere unsaved men.]" Paul makes it very clear indeed that there are Christians in fellowship/Christians out of fellowship.

So, what would Dr. MacArthur say to this? Because it seems self-evident that something is wrong here. It seems the Bible is very clear that there are 2 kinds of Christians. But what he says, on the basis of an assumption he makes, is that the Christians in Corinth were not constantly living in sin. So, they were really saved.

Furthermore, he observes, that they even had spiritual gifts. On page 97 of his book, he says in the footnote number 2 "Paul's words to the Corinthians 'are ye not carnal and walk as men?' 1 Corinthians 3:3 King James Version, were not meant to establish a special class of Christianity. These were not people living in static disobedience. Paul does not suggest that carnality and rebellion were the rule in their lives. In fact, he said of the same people, 'You are not lacking in any gift or waiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall also confirm you to the end blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.' [I Corinthians] 1:7-8. Nevertheless, by having taken their eyes off Christ and created religious celebrities [I Corinthians] 3:4-5, they were behaving in a carnal way. Contrast Paul words with the incestuous man in Chapter 5. Paul calls him the so-called brother, verse 11. He doesn't say the man is not a Christian, but because of the pattern of gross sin, Paul could not affirm him as a brother."

You'll see at the end of that quotation that Dr. MacArthur recognizes he has a little problem in 1 Corinthians 5 about the man who was guilty of incest in the family, who is a member of the congregation. And MacArthur finds it difficult to say this man guilty of incest was a Christian. Yet he recognizes that Paul deals with him as a brother. If he's unsaved, then Paul has got nothing to say to him. You don't have a right as a Christian to tell unbelievers how they should live. But if you're a member of this congregation here in Corinth, Paul says, and you are a Christian, then when we know that you are living in willful sin, it is our obligation to call this your attention and to tell you to change your ways. And that's exactly what Paul did. So, Dr. MacArthur himself, you see, doesn't say this man was not a Christian. He just leaves it hanging out there that Paul couldn't treat him as a Christian. But of course, he was a Christian, and what Paul was saying was that it was a gross example of carnality.

Dr. MacArthur also criticizes Dr. Charles Ryrie of the Ryrie Bible fame, for many years a teacher at Dallas Seminary. He criticizes Ryrie for suggesting that experience demonstrates that Christians do fall into carnality or spiritual reversionism. On page 97 of his book, Dr. MacArthur says, "Opponents of Lordship Salvation admit that one of the reasons they exclude obedience from their concept of saving faith is to make room in the kingdom for professing believers whose lives are filled with sin. 'If only committed people are saved people, then where is there room for carnal Christians?' One leading advocate of anti-Lordship view, pleads." He is referring to the footnote to Dr. Charles Ryrie, who makes that statement in his book, "Balancing the Christian Life." Ryrie said "If only committed people are saved people, then where is there room for carnal Christians?" And MacArthur takes this and says, "Dr. Ryrie feels he has to make room for carnal Christians. So, he adjusts his theology to say that a person can still be a Christian and be living a sinful life. It so happens that Dr. Ryrie is right about observing that we have many examples in Scripture of saved people who were living in very sinful conditions."

Dr. MacArthur also claims that the Free Grace Salvation teachers’ view of carnal Christians causes them to accept every profession of faith in Christ as genuine, regardless of the evil lifestyle of the person. On page 97, MacArthur says, "This willingness to accommodate so-called carnal Christians has driven some contemporary teachers to define the terms of salvation so loosely that virtually every profession of faith in Christ is regarded as the real thing. Anyone who says he has accepted Christ is enthusiastically received as a Christian, even if his supposed faith later gives way to a persistent pattern of disobedience, gross sin, or hostile unbelief." Now, it is not true that those of us who hold to the biblical doctrine of Free Grace Salvation are so naive as to think that anybody that professes to be a Christian is really a Christian.

That's simply not true. We know better than that. And if you are in a church which gives people the wrong impression on how to receive Christ as savior, (like please raise your hand, walk down an aisle,) I guarantee you that you will bring unbelievers into the congregation who think they're saved. But we do not think that everybody who makes a profession of salvation, especially when he has been misdirected, is necessarily a Christian. Yes, we do take some concern if we see somebody who says, 'I am a Christian' and then he still lives like Al Capone. That makes even free grace salvation nuts like myself suspicious. We do not think that your life is irrelevant to your profession. What we are saying is that it doesn't confirm it or deny it.

A Christian can be just as bad, Paul says, as the natural man, which is the unbelievers. All you have to do is let your sin nature run the show and we won't be able to tell the difference between you and every unbeliever. You'll love the same kind of entertainment, you will love the same kind of literature, you'll love the same kind of movies, you'll love the same kind of activities that are degrading to the soul as the grossest, sinful unbeliever does. There'll be no difference between you. All you have to do is let the sin nature run your life instead of God the Holy Spirit. All you have to do is take that cocky attitude that there is nothing supernatural in this world such as the moving of the Spirit of God. You're wrong! That moving is real and that moving is something you will be very much aware of and alerted to if you are on track and you are connected. MacArthur is not right on that. Free Grace Salvation teachers do not accept every profession as genuine.

MacArthur attacks Colonel R.B. Theme of Berachah Church in Houston. He really comes down hard on him. Theme is a great teacher. He is my friend and we were fellow students at Dallas Seminary in those halcyon days immediately after World War II when the campus was flooded with ex-military men: officers and enlisted men of all ranks, men who, because of that military background, have repeatedly demonstrated that they are the most effective when it comes to understanding the business of being the PT in the Lord's work. Out of that group, came some of the great teachers of the Word of God with their orientation of a military background. Colonel Theme was one of them. He was in the Air Corps and he was in charge at one time of all the cadet training of the United States down at Randolph Field and Kelly Field in South Texas during World War II.

Colonel Theme has written a little booklet from which Dr. MacArthur quotes. In his book on page 97, he says, "One anti-Lordship writer." And I want you to notice how Dr. MacArthur says, that, "anti-Lordship writer." He does not say 'one anti-Lordship Salvation writer.' We are not anti-Lordship. Colonel Theme is not anti-Lordship. I know. Nevertheless, MacArthur says, "One anti-Lordship writer perfectly distills the utter absurdity of his own view. And he's quoting Colonel Theme here from his booklet: "It is possible, even probable, that when a believer out of fellowship falls for certain types of philosophy, if he is a logical thinker, he will become an unbelieving believer. Yet believers who become agnostics are still saved. They are still born again. You can even become an atheist. But if you once accept Christ as Savior, you cannot lose your salvation even though you deny God.' That is a damning lie." says MacArthur. He's quoting from Theme's book "Apes And Peacocks, or The Pursuit of Happiness."

Now Theme has put this in the worst case scenario; and it happens to be that he's right. You indeed have heard me say many times that once you're in the family of God, you may stray so far afield from the leadings of the Spirit of God that you may, in fact come to the place, as I have illustrated by people I have told you about, who had decided they didn't believe the gospel. They didn't believe these things. They were against Jesus Christ. I have told you repeatedly that those people, having made a genuine trust in Christ, have somehow, someway become totally disoriented in reversionism, are still saved. And they are going into Heaven if they have to go in kicking and screaming. Can you imagine what MacArthur would do with a statement like that? God's going to take you kicking and screaming into Heaven. This is the glories of grace. This is the tragedy of Lordship Salvation. That is clouding the magnificence of God's salvation. This is what all the human race suffers from.

Dr. MacArthur actually argues that since salvation is the exclusive work of God, which it is, it cannot contain anything defective. He puts it this way on page 33 of his book. "We must remember, above all, that salvation is a sovereign work of God. Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As a part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since he is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God." What he has said is that since salvation is all the work of God, it can in no way be defective.

Well, let me ask you something. When you as a Christian sin, is that a defect or not? Is that a defect in your experience as a Christian or is it not? It is indeed a defect. So, does that mean that the saving work of God is not perfect? Not at all! This line of reasoning, you see, eventually will lead to the need to claim sinless perfection if people are convinced that their performance must confirm their salvation, and they really want to go to Heaven, what do you think they're going to do? They're going to con themselves into thinking that they are sinlessly perfect, that they will have an Old Sin Nature that no longer is functioning. Lordship Salvation teachers, therefore, are forced to say that while Christians do some sinning, it does not indicate that God's saving work is defective in them, they are still saved. God's work is not defective. They do admit that Christians sin. But the problem is, they say if they sin a lot, if they have really gross evils, then they indicate that they were never saved. But you see, with God, all sin is a defect. All sin is a gross evil, whether it is in the eyes of people or not. What Lordship Salvation teachers have done is set themselves up as if they were God to decide what level of sinning is acceptable before God.

**Believers Accepted By Christ**

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says if you'll open the door, confess your sin, and let me back into your life and fellowship, I will sit down and dine with you. In New Testament culture, fellowship between people was expressed by sharing a meal. One did not intrude on such an occasion unless you were invited. But inviting a person to a meal indicated acceptance of that person. For that reason, 2 John 10-11 says: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, [true doctrine] do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." Don't invite him in, don't have a meal for him and don't even bid him God's speed. If he's a false teacher, that he's teaching what is not true doctrinally, you are commending his falsehood before other people. You don't pretend to have fellowship with someone like that. Dining together means I approve you. So, here's the significance of Jesus saying I'm going to come and have the intimate occasion of dining with you: very close fellowship with them. In John 14:21, He said "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me, shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and disclose Myself to him." Then in verse 23 He says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him [our abiding place with him]. This is a personal individual invitation to a believer, to a special camaraderie beyond the fact that Jesus permanently indwells every believer. This is an invitation to a special camaraderie with the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Obedience Is the Objective of the Christian Life**

Indeed, walking in obedience to the Word of God, walking in subjection to the Spirit of God has great value. This is the objective of the Christian life. Nobody is saying that you should be born again and then live like the devil. This is a very precious and special invitation. In verse 23, that "if," if anyone loves me and will keep my word, is a third class condition if. Which means that some Christians never invite Jesus in for a meal. Some Christians never dine with the Lord. Some Christians never experience the intimate fellowship that Paul describes in Ephesians 3:14-19 between a believer and his Lord. This close relationship is entirely dependent on obedience to doctrine, not to one's words or to one's beliefs. In John 13:37 and 38, Peter says, 'I'll die for you, Lord.' In Matthew 26:56 we're told that all the disciples fled from Him. Every one of them abandoned Him. You can have your words, but God says, 'It is your performance that counts.' And the performance that counts with the Lord is obedience to the Word of God. That is fellowship on a maximum level. Yes, there were 12 apostles in the group, but you know, that 3 of them were inner circle. Peter James and John had a camaraderie, a dining fellowship with Christ that the rest of them did not have. The Lord Jesus Christ is really giving His love to us His regenerated disciples.

We conclude this study with John 15:1-8. In this passage, Jesus uses the analogy of the vine and the branches for bearing spiritual fruit. As we read through this, with what you know, what you've learned, I want you to interpret this and I want you to think like a Lordship Salvation person. What would Dr. MacArthur say about these 8 verses? What do these 8 verses mean? "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. [Israel proved to be a false vine. Jesus comes along. He is now the true vine, and the vine dresser, the caretaker, is God the Father.] Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

Please observe that on this occasion Jesus is speaking to 11 born again men. Judas has gone to set up the betrayal. Abiding here does not refer to remaining in the eternal fellowship of salvation, but in the temporal fellowship of being filled with the Spirit. This is not in any way teaching the possible loss of one's salvation. Such a teaching would be contrary to what John himself has already taught in his gospel. For example, in John 6:39-40, in John 10:28-29 he makes it very clear that those who are in the family of God are preserved in that family of God by the Father Himself. They can never again be removed. So, what He is dealing with here is the issue of a true disciple, a true pupil, a true follower of Jesus Christ, those who are really following the Lord Jesus Christ in discipleship, which means in spiritual education. The disciples are told in this passage to maintain their temporal fellowship with Christ in order to have a faith which is alive and bearing the fruit of divine good works. That indicates that a believer can fail to abide in Christ. If He says to His disciples, "see to it that you abide in Christ," as He says to us, that also tells us it is possible not to abide in Him.

This is what He means in verse 1, 'He is the vine.' Verse 4 says 'abide in me and I in you. You cannot bear fruit unless you abide in Me.' Believers who are in temporal fellowship, are filled with the Spirit, are going to bear fruit. Then God the Father prunes them so that they bear more fruit. Every branch, God treats every one of you in such a way that He brings things into your lives so that you begin thinking in the direction that you should be thinking. You make readjustments that you should be making. You come around to doing the thing that is maximum blessing for you, sometimes through painful agony and misery, so that He gets your eyes off the things that you should not have them on and gets them focused where they should be. But God prunes the people in His family and He is going to see to it that we increase our fruit bearing production.

All the disciples, of course, are declared to be morally clean. Verse 3 says, 'you're all born again. That is not the issue.'

**The Judgment of the Loss of Temporal Fellowship**

He calls these who are born again to act as true branches in the vine, Jesus Christ. Because no Christian who is out of temporal fellowship, out of the life of Christ flowing through him can bear any fruit. Verse 5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him. [And you understand the word abide there does not mean who keep saved, but it means who keeps in fellowship.] he bears much fruit apart from the you can do nothing. A branch cannot bear fruit if the life of a vine is not flowing through it. You must be in temporal fellowship with Jesus Christ for the life to flow. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches.

Now, if there's a Christian who persistently so lives that he produces no fruit (And this really upsets some people. I had a man became very upset a few months ago. We were discussing this passage and I didn't quite know what upset him so much. But he says, 'You mean to tell me to hear that this is somebody bearing no fruit and this is a Christian?' I found out subsequently that he agreed with Lordship Salvation. And Lordship Salvation says 'this is impossible - you cannot be a Christian and bear no fruit.' But the Lord says, 'Yes, you can. You can so center in on yourself that you are no earthly good.' And when we are no earthly good, you belong in Heaven. Jesus says, 'It is your business to see that you abide so that you bear fruit. Now, if you do not, if the life of Christ is not flowing through you, then God the Father takes actions. The vine dresser will remove you.

The fire here in verse 6 should not be viewed as the fire of Hell. It is the analogy here of what is done in agriculture. You break off a branch that is not bearing fruit. Its fate, dead, so to speak, and therefore it's thrown away. It's burned and that just means it's discarded. This is the judgment of the loss of fellowship, not the judgment of the loss of salvation. So, it is to a saved person's responsibility to abide in Christ, to fulfill his mission in life or to experience the fire of God's divine discipline. And you'll notice the progression here: that you start in the Christian life with no fruit. Then you go to fruit, then you go to more fruit, and then you go to much fruit. Each of these words is included in these 8 verses showing that there is a development, a progress in bearing fruit.

Dr. MacArthur, in championing the concept of Lordship Salvation, guess what? In his whole book, pretty good sized book, does not discuss John 15:1-8. Guess why! You see the problem that this passage has to everything that he is contending for? Here is a command to abide in Christ, which indicates that one could possibly not abide. MacArthur is not prepared to say that casting off of this branch means the person is lost; he knows that's not true. But he has the problem of interpreting this as a sinning Christian who is out of touch with the life of Christ so that he is not bearing fruit, so that the power of God is not flowing through him. That counters the whole principle of Lordship Salvation. So, he never touches it at all. Yet it is a critical, most dramatic illustration of a Christian walking with God being productive or being unproductive.

A Christian not abiding in Christ can be restored to the place of fruit bearing by repentance, using 1 John 1:9 and confession of sin. The analogy here of this agriculture picture doesn't fit. Parables never fit exactly. In the natural realm, you break a branch off and you burn it, it can never be put back in. But in the life of a Christian, he can be out of touch with the Lord, but he can be brought back in. Now, the eleven disciples all failed to abide in Christ after Gethsemane. They abandoned the Lord to His enemies. Matthew 26:56 says they all fled from Him. The disciples, at that point, had severed themselves from the vine, Jesus Christ. And they would wither out of fellowship and ultimately even to the point of physical death if they did not repent and rejoin themselves to the vine through temporal fellowship. Laodicean Christians in Revelation needed to repent, to be restored to the abiding life power of Christ, or they would lose their rewards, and the Lord says, "I will remove you from the earth."

**Temporal Fellowship is a Moment By Moment Decision**

So, we Christians make our moment by moment decision as to how intimate we want to be with Jesus Christ. We make our moment by moment decision as to whether we want to come into that closest camaraderie as illustrated by 2 people sharing a meal together. We make our moment by moment decision about whether we are doing our thing or we're going to do his thing. Every one of you this morning is somewhere on that scale. At one end, the people who are doing their own thing and that's it with them. At the other end are those of you who are very much involved with doing God's thing. And all along, Christians are finding their place. Those who are plugged in most completely into the life of Christ are those who are doing His thing. Which means your employment, which means you're going to school, which means your social life, which means your family life, which means everything that surrounds you in your life is structured together on the will of God and focusing on that great day before His judgment seat when you will give an account for how you handled what He entrusted to you. Peace with God through salvation is to find moment by moment expression as the peace of God permeates our souls in our daily walk and in our daily service. The Christian who abides in the vine is the Christian who knows the peace that Jesus gives.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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