

02-08-18b Revelation

We're ready now to resume our study in Revelation chapter 2, verse 8 and following the letter to the church at Smyrna. These things says the first and the last. When you see that title of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are many things that you can think about, but think about what Jesus taught his disciples that we looked at before.

Everything in the next life, everything in the eternal future hinges on what we do here. When you think first and last, think last will be first. It is the taking up of the cross and laying aside the things of this life, laying aside our agenda, laying aside things that are a part of my life.

It's the plan of Sam. I always have to ask myself, is this the plan of Sam or is this the plan of God? Because many times they don't coincide and I get the idea that certain things take a priority and certain things ought to be a goal. We have to stop and ask ourselves, I have a deceitful heart.

It is desperately wicked. I can't understand it. I can't always sort out my motivations.

I can rationalize. I've got more tools than you do to rationalize because I can appeal to scriptures that give me all kinds of ammunition to do what I want to do. All of us can and need to be a little bit suspicious when we get really gung-ho and really invested in certain things in this life.

If we find ourselves really feeling strongly about something that needs to be a certain way, that ought to be a certain way, that should have been a certain way, this is the warning light on the dashboard to check and make sure that things are as they should be because it is the plan of God. We are douloi, we are bond slaves. The Bible says you are not your own, you are bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God in what you do. Glorify God in your body. As soon as we forget that, we saw the parable in Luke.

Jesus told the story of the owner of the house who left his slave in charge and he said, I've got to go away, I'll be back after a while. He said, blessed is the master who is performing that stewardship and honoring the master's wishes when the master returns. But if he comes back and finds that that slave has been eating and drinking and beating his fellow servants, what is that all about? The slave has decided that he is the master of the house.

The presence of the real master is such a distant memory and isn't real to him anymore and he says he treats it as his house. He has the decision making ability. Those are his possessions.

He'll eat the food in the larder, he'll drink the wine in the basement there, he'll tell the other servants to come to his beck and call and do what he wants them to do. He said that slave had better watch out on the day that the master returns because he will be cut in two and he will be

apportioned his lot. That's his inheritance.

Remember, apportioning? Any time you see that apportioning language, that's the division of the inheritance. Well, he's going to get an inheritance. He's going to get the inheritance of the hypocrite.

He will be cut in two. That means all of what he took to himself by way of authority and by way of influence will be destroyed and he will be apportioned his lot with the hypocrites. We know better.

We know that God has a plan and a purpose. He's revealed it in his word. He's given us his spirit not only to understand it but to enable us to carry it out.

And if we fail in this stewardship, we are going to regret it for a long, long time. So Revelation chapter 2 verse 8, to the angel, to the messenger, to the pastor of the church in Smyrna, write, these things says the first and the last, who was dead and came to life. How does the Bible picture us? We were dead in trespasses and sins.

Hebrews chapter 6, what is the foundation? When we are saved, what are we supposed to grow into? We lay a foundation of change of mind away from dead works and a faith toward God. Faith that causes us to abide in the vine of Christ and produce fruit. Jesus is our example.

The death he died, he died to sin. The life he lives, he lives to God. At our point of our salvation, we are associated with him.

We died with him. God looks at us and assigns to us the death of Christ and the life of Christ. If we have been associated with him in the likeness of his death and everything that goes with that death, the penalty and the guilt and the shame and the punishment and all of the things that go with that, we need to complete the picture.

We need to also be associated with him in his life. He was dead, he is alive. We were dead and you and I are to be alive.

Dead to sin, alive to God. That ought to be a live thought as we go through a day. What a tragedy to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has literally moved heaven and earth to put you and me exactly where we are. He decided what century we would be born in, what family we would be born in. We are, whether you believe it or not, you are right now in the center of the geographic will of God.

You are exactly where God wants you to be. We face circumstances that God ordained in the sense of allowing. Everything is a pachinko machine of the fall and consequences of other people's failures and our own failures, but guess what? God's mercies are renewed every morning.

This morning when you and I got up and entered into the day, we are right in the center of God's will. We are exactly where he wants us. Every decision we've made, every challenge that we face, the conversations we engage in, the thoughts and intents of our heart are measured against this.

That's what a scientist does when he wants to test for something, what does he do? He sets up an experiment. He says, I'm going to create these conditions and I'm going to see that if I put chemical A and chemical B and mix them together and they react, now I'm going to stick a piece of litmus paper in here and see if I turned out with an acid or I turned out with a base. What do these do when I put them in these circumstances? They put animals in mazes with little things where they can push levers and push buttons.

They say, I want to find out what they will do when I create these conditions. Well, guess what? You and I are in conditions that God has supervised. He has either created them or allowed them because he wanted us to be in them.

Sometimes we have a hard time with it. Do you mean God really wanted me to be putting up with what I'm putting up with? The answer is yes, because God is God. To say that something happened that was outside the plan of God is to say that God sort of his grip slipped off the wheel.

He missed something. He got busy. The ancients, their gods would get busy or get drunk or get infatuated with a beautiful human or something and stuff would run amok.

The wheel would spin off its axle and Zeus is coming back trying to make amends for his failures. It doesn't happen with God. God is perfect.

He does not sponsor sin. He doesn't approve sin, but he knows that a lot of what we are facing is the result of sin. But there is grace greater than all our sin.

There is grace greater than everybody else's sin and it is in our weakness that God's strength is made manifest. The greater the weakness, the more we ought to be looking for the grace of God and the strength of God because that's where he sees it. If we were in good shape and had everything under control and were paddling our own canoe, where would our dependence and appreciation for God be? God shows us where we are weak.

He shows us where we come up short. He shows us where we are powerless. We make a choice, moment by moment by moment, whether we are going to rely on ourselves or rely on God.

You can talk about theology and the angels and the letters and the vision of John and the Bible and all the rest of it, but what it boils down to is, what does this mean to me? Why should I care about this letter that Jesus sent to some church 2,000 years ago? The reason is, they were facing

some very difficult things. Look at this, in the New King James it says, I know your works. Well, the word works is in like two manuscripts.

Most of them don't have erga, but two ergu is mentioned like five times in these letters and it was really easy for somebody to slip it in because it sounded like it belonged. But you can put a line through that. Jesus says, I know your tribulation and I know your poverty.

He doesn't say anything else about their works in here. He says, you Smyrnans, remember myrrh? Myrrh was the burial spice, the embalming spice. Myrrh overshadows even at the birth of Christ when the wise men bring it.

You say, why are they bringing myrrh? I mean, it is an expensive perfume type of thing, but it is mainly associated with the funeral home. I know your tribulation, philipsis is the Greek word, t-h-l-i-p-s-i-s, it is a trial just to say the word, philipsis. And I know your poverty, but you are rich.

Well, let's look at this for a moment because this is his evaluation. He looks at them and he doesn't even give them a big, he doesn't say you have done well, I commend you for this, that and the other. He says, I know your trial and I know what you lack.

What is poverty? You should have something and you don't. You feel like you need something and it is not there. Some bare essentials that you would expect to be there aren't.

That is poverty. Some people have a, in the old days, back in the 1700s and 1800s, you read books and people would say, oh, well, the poor man was cursed with a poverty of wit. And it means he just wasn't very smart.

He didn't have the wits, he didn't keep his wits about him, he had a poverty of wit. Well, here, Jesus says, I know your trials, your philipsis, your tribulation. This is the word that is used of people being tortured, of people being abused.

And I know your poverty, I know that you have lacks. There are things that you ought to have that you don't. Jesus says, I walk among the candlesticks, I was the one who was dead.

You want to talk about poverty, how about death? Everything gets taken away when you die. You want to talk about poverty, death is the ultimate poverty. Do you think the Lord Jesus knows about poverty? He says, birds of the air have nests, the foxes have dens, but the Son of Man, even when he was here on earth, had no place to lay his head.

Does he understand what it is like to have something that is your due as the Son of David, the anointed King of Israel, and be treated like a criminal? Be spit on and have your beard yanked out, and be crucified by the people that you were coming to try to deliver the promises of God to? Jesus knows all about poverty. Jesus knows all about philipsis. I know your tribulation, he says.

I know your poverty. JKS sings that song called, I've Been There. And it's sort of the words of the

Lord.

He says, I've walked those lonely miles, I've been through those endless trials. I've been there, Jesus says in the words of that song. I know your tribulation, I know your poverty, and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not.

This gives us a clue as to the source of this. Now, poverty and tribulation can have a lot of different sources, and the principles are the same. In this particular case, in this particular church, the church at Smyrna, these Christians were being persecuted, and had their goods taken away, and would actually end up being imprisoned by the action of the people who were supposed to be their family, who were supposed to be their brothers.

Who were the first to be given the truth about Christ? It was the Jews. Who were the people of God who were the custodians and the heirs of all of the things of God from 2,500 years of Old Testament history? It was the Jews. And who is it that has put these people in tribulation and poverty? It's the Jews.

The people who were supposed to be a benefit, and supposed to be a blessing and a light to all nations, are impoverishing them, and are torturing and persecuting them. Those who say they are Jews and are not. Now, time is going to reveal who is a Jew and who isn't, but he goes on to say they are a synagogue of Satan.

Well, the synagogue, this is like saying they're the church of Satan. They say they're the church of God, or they're the church of, you know, pick your denomination, but they're the church of Satan. Well, turn with me to Romans chapter 2, verse 28.

As soon as you hear Romans 2, you know we're in that chapter that says, you old man who are busy looking down your nose at other people. Who is Romans chapter 2 written to? It's written to the Jews. It's written to those who think they are standing on the law, and think that they are a guide to the blind, and all of that.

You remember Romans chapter 2? He says, verse 17, Indeed, this is Romans 2, 17, Indeed, you are called a Jew, and you rest on the law. Now, what would be the analog to that today? We have people who claim Christ as their Savior, who claim to be Christian, claim to be religious, claim to be the great light of truth on how the Christian life is to be lived, right? And yet, there is character assassination, there is denigration, there are people pointing fingers saying, you're doing everything wrong, you're not coming up to this standard that everybody agrees is the right standard for whether or not you're a good Christian, whether or not you're spiritual, whether or not you're faithful. You're not busy enough, you're not evangelizing enough, you're not giving enough, you don't dress right, you don't show up when we want help down here, you're not very spiritual.

Well, we can take that to heart and really grind under it when we feel like people are looking down on us and thinking that we're not what we should be as believers. Well, we have not

suffered to the point of blood, we haven't had people actually lock us up in prison, actually take away our property because of our faith. But there's an analogy to it in the spiritual world, we have people who look down on us, who talk bad about us.

If we seek to understand and to follow what the Scripture teaches, and it's different from what they believe, what they've decided is right, what their tradition tells them, then there's a lot of blood spilled in conversation and in attitude. But we think, well, I need to put my sufferings in perspective because I'm not like these people. But look at this, Romans 2:17, you are called a Jew, you rest on the law, and you make your boast in God, and you, he's sort of quoting him now, you know His will, and you approve the things that are excellent, you've got it all figured out, you've got all of the right understanding of Scripture, you've been instructed out of the law, and you are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind.

This is the problem of people who don't understand apostleship in the New Testament, and who think that every believer should say what Paul said, follow my example, regard my lifestyle and do likewise, let me mentor you, let me disciple you, do as I do, I will model the Christian life on your behalf. This was a function for apostles, and one of these days we'll categorically study the gift of apostle, and the office of apostle in the New Testament church, and we will show what Scripture says about what belongs exclusively to apostleship, like binding and loosing, and setting examples, and delivering inspired instruction from God to a church, and what is not, people who are not qualified to do that. And we are not qualified, you and I, to stand up and say that we know all of the things that we should approve, and are excellent, that we are totally instructed out of God's law, and have confidence that we are a guide to the blind, and a light to those who are in darkness.

This is irrigating to ourselves a function in pride, and in self-sufficiency, and in a false, we saw this in Ecclesiastes, were the ones who went down to the temple, and approved themselves, came out patting each other on the back, and saying my what good fellows we are, and they had no righteousness by faith. An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge, and truth in the law, having the externals, great looking bark on that tree, as long as you don't look for any heartwood. So this is sarcasm, this is mocking, if you haven't already detected the tone.

He says you, you who are the Jew, you the great high and mighty, having the form of knowledge, and truth in the law, you therefore who teach another, why do you not teach yourself? You're so busy telling everybody else, and being their light, and their guide, and instructing the foolish there, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? What is stealing? Stealing is irrigating to yourself things that belong to another, and in the spiritual realm, we irrigate to ourselves what belongs to God. Who's the most important person in the equation? Is it me or is it God? If I say well, when I look at this equation here, I am really the most important person, I am the center of that particular solar system, and there are certain things that ought to be coming to me that are

not. What have you done? You have stolen God's place, you've said excuse me God, I know you're wanting to sit on that throne there, but I really need to sit there in this particular situation, that's really my spot.

That's stealing. You who say do not commit adultery, do you commit, what is adultery? Adultery is breaking your vow, breaking your promise. You pledged yourself to be faithful and you are unfaithful.

So here are people who pledge and claim all over the place that they're faithful to God and that they know the truth of God and that they seek the will of God, and they've broken that pledge. That's spiritual adultery. God specifies that as such throughout the Old Testament.

He says, tells Israel over and over again, you're adulterers, you're whoredoms, you're spiritual whoredoms are gonna come back to haunt you and discipline. You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You say, oh, these gold and silver idols and these things that should be set up and worshiped, do you go down to the temple and the adulation and the respect and the honor and the attention that should go to God, do you irrigate that to yourself? Do people come down to your church and get more impressed with the preacher than they are with the Lord? That's what he's talking about here. Do you rob the temple? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? So is it possible to say you are a Jew and not be, but instead be a synagogue of Satan? That's what he's talking about here.

And would these people say they were a synagogue of Satan? Oh, no, we're gonna see that here in a minute. Jesus is gonna have a conversation with them. But you can read the rest of Romans two to see that.

Same thing in Galatians chapter six and verse 15. Galatians 6.15, in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a new creation. You can't just rest on your laurels or rest on your traditions or rest on the understandings that were handed down.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Are we living like a new creation? Jesus says, I was dead and I am alive. That's a new creation.

Are we dead to the old things, dead to the things that enslaved us, dead to Egypt and bondage and alive to the promise of living in Beulah land? That's the question we have to ask. Philippians chapter three, verses two and three. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation.

And when he says mutilation, he's talking about people who have taken the right, the act of circumcision, which was a biblical concept, Genesis 17, sign of the covenant, but because they do it for the wrong reasons, instead of being a sign and seal and a wonderful spiritual symbol, it has become just a form of self-mutilation. What a terrible thing to take the very same action and convert it from being obedience and being symbolic and having great spiritual significance and

turning it into, Paul says, you've taken this beautiful holy sign and turned it into an act of self-mutilation because you're doing it for the wrong reasons. That's what saying you're a Jew and not being one.

And there's an analog to us. We can say we are a Christian. We can claim Christ as our savior, but if we don't honor him as Christ, if we don't put ourselves as eschatos, as last, and submit ourselves to the will of God and seek the will of God as a bond slave and let his will come first and his desire come first, we are as bad as these people.

It's the same as if we were mutilating the things that God has given us as precious in Christ. We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit. We are the circumcision who rejoice in Christ Jesus.

We are the circumcision who have no confidence in the flesh. We're not turning to human solutions for our answers. We're not turning to human beings to straighten out our problems.

We put our confidence in God, not in the flesh. Paul says, if you want to talk about somebody who could have confidence in the flesh, and then he lists out all of his qualifications as a Jew and as a Pharisee. And he says, you know what? All of these things that look like a gain, he says in verse seven, he says, what things were gained to me, these I have counted as loss.

I wish I could give you a literal translation of what the Greek word is there for loss. A very rough and gentle approximation might be fertilizer. And it's a strong word.

And I would love for us all to speak Greek and to just get a little film clip of Paul delivering this statement, because it would shock you. People who are saying, wow, you know, boy, I didn't realize he was, you know, a Pharisee of the Pharisees and circumcised on the eighth day. And these people are getting more and more impressed with him and he says, you know, all these things I've just told you, all of my qualifications, they're crap.

And that's a mild form of this Greek word. I have counted it as crap in the light of Christ compared to Christ. Do we take these things that we invest ourselves and put them in the proper spiritual perspective? That's what a slave does.

A slave, you know, how many stories can you think of about somebody who is in some form of subservience like that? And they have hopes and dreams and they have things that are legitimate that they feel. But listen, if you've been purchased and if you belong to Christ, and if you have been called and given a task to be the steward of until Christ returns, it's pretty arrogant for us to set that aside and say, well, you know, he's not here right at the moment and I'm in the household and I really need to do a little eating and drinking and I need to get these other slaves to follow my wishes here for a while. Jesus says, watch out when the master comes back.

Paul says, Paul, the great apostle says, all of these things that you look at and are impressed, I

have counted them as loss for Christ. I count all things loss because what is Paul looking at? The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have willingly suffered the loss of all things. And I count them as dung, rubbish.

It translates it here, so that I may gain Christ. You don't gain Christ just because you're saved. You gain Christ when you realize what is eschatos and what is protos, what is last and what is first, what we need to put as last and what we need to put as first.

And it is such, it is the paradoxical nature of God's plan that the elder will serve the younger, that the last will be first. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. Well, this is not just wonderful, high sounding things for me to say today.

This is something we all should think about tomorrow and think about on Tuesday and think about on Wednesday. Let me try to implement this in my practical daily life. Are there things here that I am really elevating and saying are important and I have neglected the truly important things of God? Have I developed my own agenda and am I spending my efforts and my resources on my agenda and I am neglecting my responsibilities as due loss? I've got to remember my place.

I am eschatos and if I can keep myself as eschatos, keep myself as last, that's why Jesus tells this church. He says, I am the first and I am the last. He came and was the servant of all and now he is the head of all things to the church and God the Father puts all things under his feet.

Why? Because he spans that distance from last to first and those who follow Christ and take up their cross, deny themselves, remember that phrase is in there, will deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Jesus says, the last will be first. Well, look at John chapter eight.

Now this is a fascinating, if you've ever wondered about some of these chapters in John, this will shed a little light on this one. Look at John chapter eight, beginning in verse 33. John 8, 33.

Here's Jesus, these who say they are Jews and are not, come up together in a group and start talking to Jesus. Jesus is talking about the Father and talking about the fact that he was sent from the Father and that the Father has not left him alone and that he does the things that please the Father. This is Christ's example that he left for us when you look at verse 29.

He says, I always do those things that please the Father. Jesus said, that's what I do. As he spoke these words, many put their faith in him, many trusted him.

So then in verse 31, Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, if you abide in my word, you are my followers indeed. You are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

You know, they've got universities where they got this up over the library because they think the truth is in the books. They forgot the first part of the verse. Why didn't they put the whole thing up there? If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed.

If you abide in my word, you will know the truth. If you abide in my word, that truth will set you free. They left off the condition.

This is just so frustrating because how many times as Christians do we leave off the condition? We say, oh boy, we're all gonna inherit the promises. And the Bible says, if you endure, if you are faithful unto the end, there's a big if clause there. You have need of faith and patience so that you can inherit them.

But people say, well, I don't really remember that part. I just remember the inheritance part. I remember the big land flowing with milk and honey.

I don't remember the thing about, you know, trust God on the journey. Well, look at the, what's the biggest picture in the whole Bible? It's Israel coming out of Egypt and dropping like flies in the wilderness and not making it because they were all ready for the milk and honey, but they didn't feel like doing what it took to get there except for two. If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed.

If you abide in my word, you shall know the truth. If you abide in my word, the truth shall make you free. By the way, I will just give you a 15 second aside here.

In seminary, they tried to tell me that all truth is God's truth. So, you know, mathematical truth, scientific truth, you will know the truth. The truth will set you free.

The truth has power. God's word is, you know, truth. And well, listen, there is truth that I can say two plus two equals four, and that's a truth.

That is not an empowering truth. That is not a truth that sets me free. And people say, well, you know, if we just give people a good, in Christian education, they say, give people a good education because you shall know the truth, and the truth, all truth is God's truth.

No, it isn't. This book has God's truth. The word of God is alive and powerful.

Now, I don't see anywhere in the word of God that gives me the Pythagorean theorem or the formula for the circumference of a circle. But I promise you, there is a huge segment in Christian education that says, if you can teach people geometry, the power of God's gonna come into their life. They believe that, and that's why they're in Christian education.

It's just very strange. Well, okay, I went over my 15 seconds. Look at verse 33.

They answered him, we are Abraham's descendants. We have never been in bondage to anyone. They have not read Jeremiah 17, have they? They seem to have conveniently forgotten their entire national history.

Where were they when the first Passover was observed? Where were they when the 10 plagues hit? But, you know, I think if you look back in Exodus, you'd find out where they were. We've never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, you will, we, see, what is the principle in every health program, even secular health programs, AA, 12 step of any, what's the first thing that is a prerequisite to solving a problem? You've got to admit the problem.

Have these people admitted that they have a problem, that they have a bondage to slavery? They have not. When were we ever in bondage? What are you talking about? We don't need to be made free. We have no problem.

Well, there you go. Now, it's an easy thing to look at them, but let's look at ourselves. Let's turn the laser beam of our vision on our own soul.

Do we turn and say, it's not my problem, it's their problem? If these people would just do what I want them to do, I wouldn't have a problem. Well, I'm the slave sitting in the master chair. The master's gone and I am abusing the slaves.

I want you to do what I want you to do and then I'll be happy. We're just like these blind Pharisees who say, you know, Jesus told them, he said, if you were blind, you wouldn't be charged with sin, but because you say we see, your sin remains. That's what Jesus told them.

So we don't want to do that. Let's learn from their example. Jesus said, most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

Let's see, how many people are in that group? How many people are in the group that commits sin? Let's have a show of hands. No, let's not. Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits a sin is a slave of sin.

Now, there's a lot of things we could go to Romans chapter six, seven, and eight and talk about here because we have a deliverance, but Jesus is talking to Pharisees who haven't laid claim to that deliverance yet. So he says, look, whoever of you commits a sin is a slave to sin. You and I are not slaves to sin or we don't need to be.

Sometimes we fall into old habits and we act like we are, but we're not. That's the whole new creation. A slave does not abide in the house forever.

What does that mean? You've got a limited time of opportunity here, but if you stay a slave and you don't become a member of the family, you're going to be leaving the house. You're going to be in the darkness, which is outside. Therefore, if the son makes you free, and you are a son that abides forever, you will be free indeed.

You can convert your status from slave to son. Slaves come and go, bought and sold. Wear them out, get another one.

Sons have an abiding relationship that never changes. I know that you are Abraham's descendants, he says in verse 37, but you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you. What a tragedy.

Remember the good comes near and they do not see it in its day in Jeremiah 17? When good is near, you can't see it. They're staring at the son of God. They're staring at their salvation.

They are looking on the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, and they don't even recognize him. And they are claiming to be Israel of the Israelites, Jew of the Jews. You seek to kill me, and why is this the case? Because my word has no place in you.

Something else is more important to you than understanding the word. It wasn't true of all Jews, there were a lot of people that recognized Christ, but these did not. I speak what I have seen with my father, and you do what you have seen with your father.

And he's going to go on, and they say, well, Abraham is our father. He says, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. What were the works of Abraham? Works of faith.

He climbed the mountain. He raised the knife. He claimed Isaac as his son instead of Ishmael.

He obeyed God. But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

You do the deeds of your father. They said to him, we were not born of fornication. We have one father, God.

There are many people who think there's a suggestion here that there was innuendo floating around about the Lord Jesus because of the virgin birth and the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy that Jesus' enemies had been cranking the rumor mill that he was illegitimate. And they say, virgin birth? Yeah, I don't think so. I think he's illegitimate.

And this comes up here. They say, we were not born of fornication. Ahem, ahem.

We have one father, God. Jesus says, and notice he ignores it. This is an ad hominem argument that is possibly that they're bringing up here.

He doesn't defend himself. He doesn't go back and teach on the virgin birth. He sticks to the point.

If God were your father, you would love me. For I proceeded forth and came from God. That's the answer to this innuendo, isn't it? I proceeded and came forth.

These are the same words that are used when people are born of a family or a clan. But see how Jesus answers their innuendo, but he's sticking to the point. He's not just defending himself for

self-defense sake.

Why do you not understand my speech? I'll tell you why, because you are not able to listen to my word. What a tragedy to be a believer and not be able to hear and heed the word of God. You are of your father, the devil, and the desires of your father are what you want to do.

He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. He comes up with his plans.

He comes up with his ideas. He synthesizes his plan and his philosophy. He didn't get it from God.

And when we act that way and we come up with our plan and we synthesize our priorities from some source other than God, we're following in the footsteps of Satan. Doesn't mean we've lost our salvation, but we're acting more like a son of Satan, you know, a son supposed to emulate the father. And you say, well, you know, if you're a chip off of some old block, you look a whole lot more like this old block over here, than this block over here.

Do you look like a piece of the solid rock or do you look like the devil? He's a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears God's words.

Therefore you do not hear because you are not of God. The Jew said, do we not say rightly you are a Samaritan and have a demon? Says, I do not have a demon. I honor my father, you dishonor me.

I do not seek my own glory. There is one who seeks and judges. Most assuredly I say to you, and look at this, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death.

These are some strong words, never see death. You keep the word. The Jews call him on this.

Now we know you have a demon. Abraham is dead and the prophets. And you say, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never taste death.

Are you greater than our father Abraham who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do you make yourself out to be? Well, what a pregnant question that is. Why don't you stop and think and try to answer it for yourself.

Jesus answered, if I honor myself, my honor is nothing. And we ought to put this on our refrigerator. If I honor myself, my honor is nothing.

It is my father who honors me. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to reach the eternal future and be honored by the father because we honored him here. Of whom you say that he is your God.

Yet you have not known him, but I know him. And if I say I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day.

He saw it and was glad. The Jews said to him, you're not yet 50 years old. Have you seen Abraham? Jesus said, most assuredly I say to you.

Before Abraham was, I am. Then they took up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple and going through the midst of them, he passed by. Good can be in front of you.

Good can pass you by. What a tragic thing. And these are the supposedly the people of God.

Those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. I think this is a pretty clear description. And we don't want to just be throwing rocks at them.

It is possible for any one of us. Jeremiah 17, nine, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. We can fool ourselves.

We can think, we can rationalize. How do we escape from that? We don't have the power. It's the power of God.

And the one thing we do have the power to do at any time is to ask. We always have the power to seek. We always have the power to knock on the door.

And the level of our concern in this area will reflect itself in whether or not we go to God and say, Lord, if I am blind, please open my eyes. If I am following my own agenda and I'm bringing in the plow and break up the clods in my heart so that the seed can take root and grow. I don't have the ability to prepare my own soil.

I don't have the ability to come to an understanding of these things apart from your grace and apart from your spirit and apart from your word. And I promise you, what did Jesus say? If a child goes to his father and asks for bread, what's he going to get back? Is he going to get a rock? Is he going to get a snake? Is he going to get a scorpion? No, God is canvassing the earth, looking for some of us who will go to him and ask for the bread of life, who will seek his will and his word, who will knock on the door so that there can be fellowship and there can be service and there can be reflecting of the glory of God now and in the age to come. Well, if you go back now to Revelation chapter two, verse nine, I know your works.

I know that you're suffering. I know that you're short of things that you ought to have. That's what poverty is.

But you are rich. Galatians 4, 29. As he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so it is now.

Nevertheless, what does the scripture say? Cast out the bond woman and her son for the son of the bond woman, these are the religious types who are far from God, who throw rocks at people who are trying to live by faith. The son of the bond woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman. So then brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free.

So Galatians 5, 1, stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free. Where is that liberty? Abide in my word, you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free, give you liberty. Where is that liberty? People just say, oh, well, I'm in Christ, I've got liberty.

Liberty is in the word, abiding in the word, holding the word, knowing that truth. And that's where the freedom comes from. Do you want to be free of oppression? Do you want to be free of problems? Do you want to be free of the sin that so easily besets? There is a freedom, but it's not automatic.

And it's not just a matter of convenience that, well, when I get uncomfortable enough, I'll just go get some of this freedom and fix myself up. It is in the interest of God. It is for the plan and purpose of God that we have been set free.

You liberate someone from bondage. God liberated Israel from bondage in Egypt, not just because he thought they needed a good deal and a great real estate opportunity, because he wanted the people in which he could place his presence and from whom he could manifest his glory. And that's what we are.

It's not freedom for our sake. It's not getting rid of oppression for our sake. He says, stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

I say to you, if you get tangled up with this bondage, Christ will profit you nothing. I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised. This was the particular kind of bondage.

He is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ. Estranged means cut off in Greek.

What an awful thing. The most terrible thing that happened to Christ on the cross is being cut off from his father. The most terrible thing that can happen to a believer is to be cut off from Christ.

And it can happen. You who attempt to be justified by a human standard. I've got an idea of what will set me straight.

I've got an idea of what will improve my status. If you pursue that, instead of the liberty that's in Christ and in God's word, you're cut off from Christ. You have fallen from grace.

What does he go on to say? We who through the spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. That's where the inheritance is. In Christ Jesus, it's not circumcision or uncircumcision

that avails anything.

It is faith working through love. The Ephesian church had lost their love. The Smyrnan church is encouraged to faith.

He says, stick with it. Don't fail. Look at what he says now in the closing verses here.

He says, don't look for deliverance. You're going to be thrown into prison, but that prison is going to be the place of testing that is going to reveal the glory of God. That's what happened to Daniel's three friends and himself in Daniel chapter one.

10 days of testing that revealed the power of God. It isn't deliverance out of trial. It is deliverance through trial.

In our weakness, God's strength is made manifest. That's our opportunity each and every day. We're going to have to stop here and we'll resume next Friday night with what the Spirit says to the churches about not being hurt by the second death.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for your grace, your faithfulness and the incredible plan that you have seen fit to include us in. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will remind us and encourage us and instruct us in these truths.