

Four Safeguards

So our proclamation this time is the last three verses of Psalm 19. Psalm 19:12–14:

Who can understand his errors?

Cleanse me from secret faults.

Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;

Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,

And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

In the two previous sessions I've dealt with, what I consider to be a serious problem in the first session, and in the second session I've tried to give a scriptural explanation of how the problem arises. In this final session I want to deal with four scriptural safeguards to keep us from the problem. The first safeguard is contained in 1 Peter 5:5–6, starting at the end of verse 5 and going through verse 6.

... God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.

I believe that's the first essential requirement—is that we **HUMBLE OURSELVES**. The Bible says, "God resists the proud..." So if we are trying to get into the presence of God and we have pride, we may push but He pushes against us, and He pushes harder than we can.

In the Bible there's no place where it says that God will make us humble. Always, God puts the responsibility upon us. We have to humble ourselves. It's a decision. We have to make it. No one can make it for us. People can pray for us, and preach to us, but we have to make the decision to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt us in due time.

I said already, I think, pride is the greatest single problem, and the most common problem, and the most destructive problem. We saw earlier that "pride goes before destruction." If we do not turn back from the way of pride, our end will be destruction.

Now there is something in Psalm 25 which I find very helpful and inspiring. Psalm 25:8–9:

Good and upright is the LORD;

Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.

The humble He guides in justice,

And the humble He teaches His way.

It's the grace of the Lord that He's willing to teach us sinners at all. But God enrolls His students, not by their intellectual qualifications, but by their character. A lot of people can go to a Bible school or a seminary or whatever else, but never be enrolled in God's school, because God only enrolls the humble.

"The humble He guides in justice, the humble He teaches His way."

The Old King James used to say the "meek." I find in the modern translations that word "meek" has just dropped out. What's the difference between humble and meek? As I see it, humble is your inner attitude, meek is the way you express it. We don't need the word meek very much now days, because there are very few people to whom it applies. It's very significant the words that we're no longer using. Usually there's a reason.

The next safeguard is in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12.

The coming of the lawless one [that's the antichrist] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

Bear in mind, Satan is capable of producing power, and signs, and wonders. I have frequently commented that the obvious place for the antichrist to arise would be in the Charismatic movement, because most Charismatics seem to think that anything supernatural must be from God. That's not so. Satan is capable of great supernatural signs and wonders. So how do we protect ourselves? It goes on:

and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

So what is our protection against deception? **RECEIVING THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH.** And again, it's something we do. God will offer it to us, we have to receive it. Now those who do not receive the love of the truth, God says this:

And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

That's a frightening verse. God will send them strong delusion. If God sends you strong delusion, you will be deluded.

In 1994, this is a personal subjective comment, I got up one night to go to the bathroom in Jerusalem, and I was walking back to my bed, God impressed upon my mind very clearly that He had sent strong delusion to the present Israeli government. I think everything that has happened since amply confirms that. It's a very significant statement because if God has sent strong delusion, it's no good praying for people not to be deluded. I think there are a lot of sentimental prayers about the Middle East which don't amount to anything.

There are two words that are used in a soulish way to manipulate people. One is peace, the other is love. So the people of the Middle East, and I think probably the people of the world are being manipulated by the offer of peace. You see, if you're against that you're wicked. Anybody who is against peace is a bad person. How can you afford not to agree with it.

There are conditions for peace. In Isaiah, the prophet says, "There is no peace to the wicked." And in Romans it says, "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy." You cannot have peace apart from righteousness. I know lots of Christians that are praying for joy, but if they don't meet the condition of righteousness it's not available to them. I find that peace is a word that's used by politicians to manipulate people. They are deceiving people, because peace will not come to the unrighteousness.

The other manipulating word is love, which is used in the church. We talk a lot about the love of God, be loving, God is so loving, He is so kind. It's all true, but God is also a very strict God. I have personally come to this conclusion on the basis of my own experience and observation of people close to me—you cannot get away with anything with God! Nothing! You may think you've got away with it and God may forgive you, but you'll still expect the consequences. See, God forgives but He does not always release us from the consequences of what we've done. So it's better not to do it. So don't have any sentimental picture of God. He's not a Father Christmas doling out candy to little children. He's very just, very righteous, very loving, but in a sense very severe. You cannot get away with a thing with God. So don't try.

I feel that love is being used to manipulate people at the present time. People are talking about the love of God and God is so loving. It's all true, but God's love is expressed in surprising ways. As I quoted earlier, Jesus said to the church of Laodicea, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." That's love. God is our Father and He loves us, but He also disciplines us.

There are two wrong ways of responding to the discipline of God. We look in Hebrews 12 for a moment and this is addressed to Christians. Hebrews 12:5-8:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Now there are two wrong ways of responding to God's chastening. The first one says, "Do not despise the chastening of the Lord." Do not just shrug your shoulder and say, "Well, so what?" My observation is that many mature Christians don't believe that God will discipline them any longer. The truth is, He never stops disciplining. This was brought home to me so vividly when I was reading the account of Moses. At the age of 80 God chose him and commissioned him to be the deliverer of Israel from Egypt, sent him back to Egypt. But on the way, the Lord met him at the inn and tried to kill him.

Extraordinary! Why? Because he had not circumcised his son. He had disobeyed the sign of the covenant that God had made with

Abraham and his descendants. So God would rather have seen Moses die than go through with his ministry in disobedience.

Sometimes we say, "Satan is resisting me" and the truth of the matter is it isn't Satan. It's God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The other wrong reaction is, do not be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. Don't say, "This is more than I can take. God why do you let this happen to me. I can't stand this. I'm not going to take it." Those are the two wrong reactions. Despise it and be discouraged.

What about the love of the truth? The Greek word for love there is the one we are all familiar with "agape." It's a very strong word. It's the strongest word in the Greek language for "love." So it's not just reading your Bible every morning, or going to church and listening to the sermon. It's a passionate commitment to the truth of God. That's what we have to cultivate if we are to escape delusion. God will send strong delusion to those who have not received the "agape" love of the truth. That's more than just having a quiet time or reading your Bible at week ends. That is a passionate commitment to the truth of God.

I think I can say without being boastful, God has given me that. I'm not boasting, but I think God has given me a passionate commitment to the truth. Every time I hear something that I don't think is truth, something in me rises up. So that's something that God can do for you, but you have to let Him do it. So that's the second safeguard. RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH.

The third safeguard is to **CULTIVATE THE FEAR OF THE LORD**. A lot of Christians say there's no more fear in the Christian life. That's not true. Certain kinds of fear are excluded. I'm going to give you a list of Scriptures now. Ruth and I have memorized at least 20 different passages about the fear of the Lord. The promises are so exciting that I can't understand why anybody doesn't want the fear of the Lord. I will give you some of them. Psalm 34:11–14:

*Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
Who is the man who desires life,
And loves many days that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit [guile].
Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.*

So the implication is that the fear of the Lord will cause God to give you many days of good life. The first area that God deals with is what? The tongue. "Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking guile."

Then in Psalm 19:9 it says:

*The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The fear of the Lord will never cease, it endures forever.*

And in Job 28:28:

*. . . 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
And to depart from evil is understanding.'*

Notice that the primary requirement for wisdom and understanding is not intellectual, it's moral. It's to depart from evil. There are lots of clever fools around. Proverbs 8:13:

*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.*

Notice, you cannot be neutral about evil if you have the fear of the Lord. You have to hate it. And the first thing you hate is what? Pride. Arrogance.

Proverbs 9:10–11:

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
For by me your days will be multiplied
And years of life will be added to you.*

So you want a long life? Cultivate the fear of the Lord. And a good life. It's not enough to live long. You can live long in misery. But the fear of the Lord, God offers us a long and blessed life.

Proverbs 14:26–27:

*In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,
And His children will have a place of refuge.*

So the fear of the Lord doesn't make you timid, it gives you strong confidence, and it provides a place of refuge for your children, which in these days I think is very important. The next verse says:

*The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
To avoid the snares of death.*

That's a very vivid picture. Satan has set snares. Snares of death. How can we avoid them? Through the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 19:23 is almost incredible. I can hardly believe, but it's in the Bible.

*The fear of the LORD leads to life.
And he who has it will abide in satisfaction;
He will not be visited with evil.*

How can you turn down a promise like that? "Abide in satisfaction, not be visited with evil." It doesn't mean you'll have an easy life.

Proverbs 22:4:

*By humility and the fear of the LORD
Are riches and honor and life.*

You'll find at least 50 per cent of the time, the fear of the Lord is directly connected with life. It is one primary condition for a good life. And then, I think most important of all, in a way, is the prophetic picture of Messiah. Isaiah 11:1–2, and I think we all know that this is fulfilled in Jesus.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. [All the New Testament scriptures confirm that this is Jesus. Now listen.]

*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit and wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

It's interesting to see that the Spirit that rests on Jesus is seven-fold. Seven is always the number of the Holy Spirit. It says in Revelation 4:5 that before the throne of God there were seven lamps of fire which are the seven Spirits of God. Personally I understand this passage to reveal to us the seven Spirits of God.

The first is the Spirit of the Lord, that is the Spirit that speaks in the first person as God. Then they all come after that in pairs. The Spirit of wisdom and understanding. The Spirit of counsel and might. The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. I think it's important to see that knowledge has to be balanced by the fear of the Lord, because knowledge puffs up. But the fear of the Lord keeps us humble. It speaks volumes to me that that Spirit was upon Jesus; the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. Though He was the Son of God, He had the fear of the Lord. It rested upon Him. It never lifted from Him.

Continuing with the fear of the Lord, the fear of the Lord is a counter balance to joy. It's very important that we don't just get excited, but we're anchored by the fear of the Lord. Again, I think this is a tremendous weakness in the Charismatic movement. People get all excited and happy and clap their hands, dance around, which is wonderful. But, not without the fear of the Lord. Psalm 2:11 says:

*Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.*

Now that seems to be inconsistent, but it's the balance. You rejoice but with trembling. You stand in awe while you are rejoicing. This is carried over into the New Testament in Acts 9:31 it describes the growth of the church in Judea, and it says:

Then the churches [or the church] throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified [or built up]. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Again, notice the balance. The Holy Spirit comforts us, but we have to walk in the fear of the Lord. We can be encouraged, we can be built up, but that must be balanced by the fear of the Lord.

Well you might say, "Well, Brother Prince, I've been redeemed. I'm a child of God. Surely I don't need to fear God anymore." The answer is you do all the more, because you are redeemed. Because of the price that God paid to redeem you. That's stated in 1 Peter 1:17-19:

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work [and each one includes you and me], conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay [or sojourning] here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

So the very fact that we've been redeemed is a reason to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, because God invested so much in us. He paid for us with the blood of Christ. So we have no excuse to be flippant. You see flippancy is really a denial of the fear of the Lord.

Then the fourth and the final safeguard is **MAKE AND KEEP THE CROSS CENTRAL**. I looked at the example of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or wisdom declaring to the testimony [or mystery] of God.

You have to bear in mind that in that culture the highest achievement was oratory. If you were anything, you were an excellent speaker otherwise you were probably despised. So Paul when he says, "I laid aside excellent speech," in a sense was saying "I am not bowing to this culture." For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

We looked at the fact that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. When we have all the strength we need of our own, we don't need God's strength. God has to bring us to the place where we don't have strength. I have seen in my own experience in ministry continually, if God is going to use me in any significant way He has to bring me to the place where I know I can't do it. Where I know I am totally dependent upon Him. That I am weak, then His strength is made perfect in my weakness.

Let me say something else in this connection. I just discovered that the opportunities to serve God seldom suit our convenience. Generally speaking, if God gives you an opportunity to serve Him, it will be inconvenient in some way. That's to test the sincerity of your motives. But if we want God's strength manifested in our lives, in our ministry, in our congregations, we have to cultivate the fear of the Lord.

We have to cultivate a sense of dependence, an acknowledgment of our total dependence upon God. This is just personal, but every time before I preach, I tell God I know, "I don't have the ability. I'm totally dependent upon You. If You don't anoint me, if You don't inspire me, if You don't strengthen me I cannot do it." Every now and then I may stand up to preach and forget to do that. And mentally in my mind while I am preaching I'll say, "Lord, please remember I'm dependent upon You. I cannot do it in my own strength. And then Paul goes on to say,

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And I pointed out, the key to releasing the power of the Holy Spirit is to be focused on the cross. There's a hymn which says, "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory die. My richest gain I count by loss and pour contempt on all my pride." When we really see the cross we have nothing to boast of. It's interesting, the original version of that hymn, which was written by an Englishman, was

"When I survey the wondrous cross where the young Prince of glory die..." He was pointing out that Jesus was cut off in His prime. He died in His very best age. I believe one of our greatest needs is to focus on the cross.

I've seen people very ambitious, striving for success, wanting to build a large church. Sometimes they succeed. But unless the whole message is focused on the cross, they don't have much but wood, hay, and straw.

I'm reminded of a well-known English preacher of a previous generation called Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist, and he was continually emphasizing to his students the importance of focusing on the cross. One day he said something like this, "To preach the principles of the Christian life and make no mention of the cross, is like a drill sergeant giving orders to a squad of soldiers who have no feet. They can hear his orders and understand them, but they lack the ability to carry them out. And it's only through the cross that we get the ability to do what God tells us to do."

So let us look again at the first five verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 2. These are some of my favorite verses because I came to the Lord sovereignly from a background of Greek philosophy. And when Paul speaks about wisdom as he does, he's talking about Greek philosophy. So I think, I'm particularly able to appreciate the impact of what he says about wisdom.

We need to understand when we read these verses that Paul is speaking about a certain part of his ministry journey. In Acts 17 he was in Athens, which was the intellectual center, the university city of the ancient world. He preached a sermon unlike any other that is recorded. It was a somewhat intellectual sermon. He adapted himself to his audience and even quoted from a Greek poet, which I don't think he ever did at any other time. I wonder whether Paul was really led by the Holy Spirit. At any rate, the results were very disappointing. Just a few people believed.

From Athens Paul went on to Corinth. Now Corinth was a port city, somewhat like the major port cities of our present world. A very wicked city where every kind of sin flourished. Somewhere between Athens and Corinth, Paul made a decision which is recorded in these verses.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the mystery of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words or human wisdom, but of demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

So Paul made a revolutionary decision somewhere. He wasn't going to preach that kind of message in Corinth that he preached in Athens. He said something which, for a Jew, is remarkable. He said, "I determine not to know anything." And basically the Jews are a people who know a lot. Often their confidence is in what they know. He made an amazing statement, "I determine not to know anything. I forget everything I've learned at the feet of Gamaliel, in all my studies. Forget it all. I'm only concerned with one thing—Jesus Christ. And not just Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ crucified. That's the center and the focus of my message."

I believe it should be the focus and the center of our message. I believe that if we ever get away from the cross as central we are in danger. I notice that Paul expected the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power. I find today in our contemporary church that if you preach about power, everybody gets excited. If you appeal to people who want to receive power, many people will come forward. Personally, I believe this emphasis on power is extremely dangerous. Observing, as I've observed over a good many years, what happens to people who focus on power, they end in trouble. They usually end in error.

Power is something that appeals to the natural man. Some psychologists have said that the desire for power is the number one desire in the human personality. Paul said, "I want power, but I want it on a different basis from that which the world understands. I want to forget all my wisdom, all my knowledge, all my theological qualifications. I want to focus on only one thing; Jesus Christ crucified." Then he said in effect, "When I do that, I can be sure that the Holy Spirit will come in power."

So, I'm just going to close with one of my favorite Scriptures, Galatians 6:14:

But God forbid that I should glory or boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Let me just recapitulate my four suggested safeguards.

No. 1 HUMBLE OURSELVES – and in that passage Peter says, "Our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." So the devil is very powerful and very active. Any theology that tells you different is a deception. I was meditating on the list

yesterday evening and I was thinking, suppose that an announcement was made that a lion was loose on the ground floor of this hotel, and you needed to get out. I don't think you would walk through the lobby humming a cheerful little chorus. You'd be very circumspect how you made your exit and you'd be very interested in closing the door behind you. That I believe is a picture of how we need to conduct ourselves, because our adversary the devil is walking about like a roaring lion. We can't change that. Incidentally, you know why lions roar? It's to terrify their prey. To paralyze them. So don't be paralyzed by the lion's roar. Be very cautious. Be very circumspect. But you don't have to give way to fear. So that was number one safeguard—HUMBLE OURSELVES.

No. 2 RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

NO. 3 CULTIVATE THE FEAR OF THE LORD

NO. 4 MAKE AND KEEP THE CROSS CENTRAL.

Now, I want to suggest that we quote Galatians 6:14 together. I don't expect you all to know it by heart, so I'll say it phrase by phrase and you say it after me.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

Amen.

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