

Sermon to the saints of God at Topeka – Sunday, December 17, 2017

But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. - Joshua 22:5

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerualem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. - Acts 11:22, 23

In one sense, whenever I read such passages as this, I am thrilled and encouraged to see the people of God be given such a sobering and all-encompassing exhortation, knowing that while it was a specific exhortation given at a specific time to a specific people, it is similarly meant to carry the same weight of sobriety as an exhortation to all of God's people, everywhere, in all times and places. Then in another sense, my mind always drifts to that seeming paradox of the coexistence of human responsibility vs. God's sovereignty. In elder Ben's recent sermon, he spoke of some displays of the wisdom of God to be found in the scripture that go beyond human invention and full comprehension – most notably this very notion: the coexistence of human responsibility vs. God's sovereignty. This topic has often been preached on from this pulpit under various headings – God's Sovereignty, Absolute Predestination, TULIP doctrine, free will, God's will vs. man's will, etc. It is a notion well worth returning to often – it is important that a godly man continually tamp down what he thinks his will to be in his vanity and to frequently remember the sobering reality of God's omnipotence, omniscience and Providential will. But inside of that, we see that we are constantly exhorted in the scripture to proactively engage in many behaviors and activities toward the perfecting of our faith and the keeping our feet from evil. Hyper-Calvinists sit on their hands, not looking around for what to do, within the scripture or without, claiming that God will compel them to do what He wants done, while 'free will' Christians take the foolish position that grace is theirs for the taking, thereby reducing the great salvation of Christ to a 10% off coupon that any store will honor whether you present it or not. But while every man who has a sincere, God-given love and fear of the Lord lives his life in continual recognition of the sovereignty of God – he also clearly sees the scores of exhortations to proactive behavior on his part. We have the duty to see, understand, and act upon those exhortations as a means of cleaving unto God. I imagine that this particular exhortation, to cleave unto God, can be at once thrilling and daunting to a man of faith, whether a novice, one in his youth, or one who has walked in the old paths of God for many years. How does one cleave unto God?

The English word 'cleave' appears in the Bible 30 times (and there are also a few instances of its past tense expression 'clave', e.g., Ruth 1:14: *And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.*) There are two distinct meanings of its use in the scripture (whether translated from the Hebrew in the OT or the Greek in the NT), and they have opposite connotations (similar to the opposite connotations found with the English words 'forbear' and 'provoke,' for instance). Here is one sense in which 'to cleave' is used:

Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers." - Habakkuk 3:9

This Hebrew word is *shaca* (shaw-sah) and it means to divide, part, split or tear in two – as a plowman cleaves the earth. When you read about animals with 'cloven' or 'parted' hooves, this is the same sense meant. So, in the verse above, we see that God divided the earth with rivers. That's not the sense we are looking at today. We are looking at the meaning of cleave, from our keystone verses at the beginning of this sermon, and others like:

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. – Gen. 2:24

The Hebrew here is *dabaq* (daw-bak') and it means to cling to, stay close, follow closely, join to, stay with, stick to, abide closely with. [The Greek word rendered as 'cleave' is *prosmeno* (pros-men'-o) and it means ostensibly the same thing]. The English word 'cleave' has several meanings, but I found a definition that I think gives the best sense of its meaning when used in this context in scripture: *to adhere to; to become very strongly involved with or emotionally attached to.*

*Side note: This second sense of 'cleave' (the one we are talking about today) does not always express a 'good thing' to do – one can 'cleave' unto things or people in really bad, destructive ways:

Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. - Joshua 23:11 -13

(the Hebrew word that is rendered as the English word 'marriages' there also means 'affinity' – so not just 'marriages' in the sense of matrimony, but in 'marrying' yourself to ideas, groups, habits, customs, etc.)

In all the exhortations we see to 'cleave unto the Lord,' we see that it means to cling to the Lord – to follow him closely – to become very strongly involved with and emotionally attached to.

We know that, in the core sense of a man's heart, God imparts the love that we have for Him in the sense of granting us saving faith.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. – Eze. 36:26

And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. – Jer. 24:7

But we also know that we are given exhortations to proactively 'cleave' unto the Lord:

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. - Acts 11:22, 23

So how do you do that? There is nothing new or novel I will say here today, and I am in no way suggesting any of this as a formulaic expression of religion – this isn't some sort of Methodism (which is Satanic folly). What I hope to relay this morning is merely some practical helps that foster the mind and heart in cleaving unto God while we occupy in this life, as there is much danger and wide paths that drone in our ears and hearts as a matter of course in our days - to cleave unto everything and anything else. Spurgeon offers a good thought here that our beloved sister Kathy turned us on to recently: *"Under our feet we must keep the world, and we must shun that base spirit which is content to let worldly cares and pleasures sway the empire of the immortal soul."*

LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD, HIS WORD AND WHAT IT MEANS IN TERMS OF YOU

We know that this is first and foremost a function of study. But, especially for young people or novices, I think a bit of a nuanced approach is in order.

Reading/studying in groups: This is always a good thing, and I think just about all of us get into some group setting or another for this type of learning opportunity. But it doesn't always hit the specific target of what you may be struggling with, or need help with, in your lot. So, read by and for yourself, too.

Reading/studying with understanding: by yourself, for yourself: What I mean by 'with understanding' is simply this: Slow down, don't pass over words, phrases, proper nouns, etc., that you don't understand. It will usually greatly impede your understanding of that place in scripture. When you see a word or phrase that you don't understand, stop and look it up, use a

Strong's Concordance, google it, read some commentary. Alternatively, go to or call someone and ask them. If it's too late/early to call someone and you are stuck, jot it down and ask them later – but not too much later. Do it while the place you're reading in is fresh.

What I mean by 'by yourself' is simply that. Unless you're a very young person, and I think our youngest member is sister Chloe, you should probably be reading the Bible daily – and I know that some of our houses have some sort of regular reading program. But my personal view is that if you are a young person following along with your family's reading program, that is probably not enough; and whether you live in a house that has a regular reading program or not, you should probably have one of your own as well. You went down in the water. You made a profession of faith. Your life, faith and lot are ultimately a matter between you and God.

What I mean by 'for yourself' simply means that you should be taking a regular look at scripture that pertains to your current specific roles and lots in life, to know all you can about what the Lord requires, commands and exhorts us to - given our place in this body and world. You should also take a regular, focused look at those aspects of scripture and our Christian walk that you may have trouble with or stumble in. Scripture is the most potent means to combat this vile flesh and resist evil (hence, putting on the whole armor of God). We can't really say that we are cleaving to God if we are not in earnest attempting to get His counsel on what to do when we are in tough spots or feel ourselves slipping into a bad perspective. This can be as simple as taking a topical approach by finding all the verses that contain key words (and their tenses and derivations) and reading through them. There are also certain parts of the Bible that speak in more lengthy, focused ways about certain topics. And for young people who might not really know where to start on reading the Bible *for yourselves*, you can and should ask your parents for guidance there. You can also ask older people. They know good stuff, by God's grace. The main thing you shouldn't do is not ask for help and therefore not have some sort of personal Bible study plan laid out for yourself that you tend to with some sense of regularity.

*A little context here: The average time we spend in high school, both in class and in study (if you're doing it right) is: 53 hours per week - $53 \text{ (hrs)} \times 39 \text{ (weeks)} \times 4 \text{ (years)} = 8,268 \text{ hrs ttl}$

The average time we spend getting an undergrad degree, both in class and in study (again, if you're doing it right) is: 50-60 hours per week – $60 \text{ (hrs)} \times 40 \text{ (weeks)} \times 4 \text{ (years)} = 9,600 \text{ hrs ttl}$

If we go on to get a Master's Degree, or Law School, it's another: 4,800 hrs ttl

After all of that, many of us have specialized training once we get into, and as continuing education for, our 'vocations.' That's a lot of time – it's all time spent getting us ready to start into our earthly vocations. We have a vastly more important vocation in our lives – one that takes continual time and energy – in cleaving unto God.

Make a point of asking questions of people who know more than you do about the Bible: What I mean here, is simply to do a thing with purpose. Ask people stuff about the Bible that you struggle with – not as a fair shew, but as a way of earnest learning. It is your duty to do so, and in so doing, you will be engaged in spiritual communion with a brother or sister – and this greatly aids us in cleaving unto our God – becoming more strongly involved with and emotionally attached to Him. Even your relative ignorance of scripture can be a provocation unto love and to good works in others if you are asking someone to help you understand a part of the scripture that you currently don't. Maybe that person wasn't going to really talk or think of God's word at the time that you ask, and now they are.

Make a point of talking about the Bible to people who may know less than you do about the Bible: Again, not only a sobering duty, but a great means of helping us all to follow more closely, cling to – and therefore cleave unto – the Lord:

Young men likewise exhort (by the older men) to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, - Titus 2:6,7

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; - Titus 2:3

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, - Acts. 20:20

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. – Mal. 3:16

If we know that the Lord hears and records for a memorial the times when we speak of spiritual things to one another, and think upon his name in our communion together, that is a sure way to cleave unto God. In all these things, however, you must make room for them to happen, both in terms of some sort of planning or calendaring (I don't mean to sound so formal – but if you don't 'make a point' of doing things, they rarely happen) AND in terms of simply keeping your eyes open for opportunities to learn.

Two last, brief points here - especially as you mature: 1) don't impose the need for all scriptural explanations to be in line with what you currently understand, and 2) don't avoid parts of the Bible that you don't understand at all.

PRAY MORE OFTEN – BY YOURSELF - WITH A FOCUSED MIND

Praying in a group setting is always good thing, and can be very edifying, but it is not always as cleaving, or meaningful, a communion with God as praying by oneself. Sometimes a person

leading a prayer might say things or use phrases that you don't understand, so that keeps you from close communion in that moment. You might lose track, or start wondering what that phrase meant, or feel frustrated or be hard on yourself for not knowing what it means – and all of this has now drawn you away from focused communion with God. Sometimes you may oscillate back and forth between what someone who is leading a group in prayer is saying and what you may feel compelled to say to God in that moment. There are other possible partial challenges to intense, focused communion with God when praying in a group setting, but I won't belabor the point. I think you all understand what I am getting at. All that group prayer is very good, but all of us should pray by ourselves – often. Ask yourself, “how often do I pray to God by myself?” Outside of meditating on His word, it is your main communion with God (and in some ways, it is more personal). If you pray more often in a group setting than you pray in earnest, by yourself, then you are probably not praying enough. Not looking for a number here – but looking for the creation of a habit whereby you take everything to the Lord in prayer.

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; - Rom. 12:12

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. – Php. 4:6

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. – Acts. 6:4

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. – Matt. 21:22

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. – James 1:5

And I mean no formulaic expression by this, but for young people who sometimes might have a hard time in knowing WHAT to pray for, you should always include at least:

- a. Your thanksgiving: recognizing God as the Sovereign responsible for all that you have and giving you your very existence. Thank Him generally, thank Him for specific things, thank Him in all things
- b. Your praise: praise Him above what He has given YOU – praise His Holy name for all of His works, His attributes, His word – even if it might not seem to relate specifically to you at the time. He has many names, and these names exude His attributes. All these attributes are worthy of more praise and honor than any of us can muster. We cleave to Him when we recognize those attributes out loud and present them to our minds.
- c. Your requests for help: as we know that we have need of God in ALL things, we must therefore ask Him for help on things that we don't understand, or that we are troubled by, or that we want to become better at – knowing all along that He has a perfect understanding of what we need before we even ask – but we are SUPPOSED to ask – in

earnest. We also need to ask the Lord to help keep our feet from evil – that He would make straight paths for our feet. And remember, to ask the Lord for understanding or help with a thing that we aren't already proactively working on or seeking understanding on is, I think, to ask amiss. So, if you need help with a thing, certainly take it to the Lord in prayer, but also seek to work on that thing with all the strength, energy and focus that you can bring to bear on it.

GET AROUND, WITH PURPOSE, TO SEE MORE PEOPLE MORE OFTEN

Granted, this sounds like what I already said about talking to people that know more than you do, but I mean more often than, but including, times when you are asking about a specific thing. It is dangerous, deceitful and damaging to the heart and soul to visit or help people as man-pleasers or as respecters of persons. It is also damaging to the soul to tuck yourself away from others of like faith, claiming this or that circumstance or personality trait as the reason for doing so. In neither of those postures can a man say that he is cleaving unto the Lord. On the contrary, it is a great refreshment to the soul to be in communion with and minister to the saints in earnest, as a means of serving the Lord, and in so doing cleaving closer unto Him. By seeing people more often, you get to know them better, become less able to rubberstamp them with the shortsighted, apathetic and selfish fleshly judgments that we are all prone to in our weakness. When you are attuned to people with a meek, godly perspective, you develop a better sense of how it is with them. You become able to 'read' them better – anticipating their needs. You develop a tighter Christian bond with them (though only if you spend that time in Christian fellowship – encouraging each other in vain, worldly notions can only end in sorrow). Given the right lens, you will force yourself to become more forbearing regarding their idiosyncratic behavior – rather than avoiding them on its account. And without proactively provoking our very selves to more frequent, close communion with each other, we can never say, in earnest that we are striving to keep the Lord's commandment:

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. – John 15:12

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; - Eph. 4:2

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. – 1John 4:7

By earnestly emulating, in practice and not in theory only, that great love that the Lord has for His people, we are cleaving unto God – we are becoming increasingly strengthened in our involvement with and more emotionally attached to the Lord. If you don't get around to seeing people (in whatever way you can), then you run the risk of being a respector of persons. You also run the risk of deceiving yourself - staying away because you don't want to hear good words - or take counsel with others - or you don't want to give people an opportunity to get a read on

you - or to inquire how it is with you. Claiming to be socially awkward or reclusive or shy is subtle, fleshly deceit. Any of us gravitate toward those in our own houses or nearby that we have a natural closeness for. One reality of our faith, however, is that biological familial closeness should ever be trumped by the true spiritual kinship God proclaims for us, and we should therefore aspire and strive to have that close kinship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. And I suggest to you, beloved, that this is a practical help in cleaving unto the Lord.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. – John 19:26,27

And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. – 1John 4:21

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. – 1John 3:14

He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. – 1John 2:10

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. – Phm. 1:20

When you are out and about and you see children and young people acting in folly, don't just go home and get annoyed with them or with their parents for not teaching them better. Approach the child, the young person – in the moment – and help them. Teach them to cleave unto God in all things. Also, help young parents with how to do that sobering job. And children and young people – hear me on this – if ANY of you look upon good, solid, bible instruction from these people, who care for your souls as ANYTHING other than a GREAT, GREAT BLESSING, then you are blind. Part of cleaving to God is WANTING to be surrounded by mature, chastened, loving souls who will give you good Bible words - fitly framed - at just the right hour.

GET YOUR MIND PREPARED FOR WORSHIP

Getting together here, on Sundays, to worship our God, sing hymns of praise unto Him, and to be fed by the bread of life, the sincere milk of the Gospel, the heavenly manna, is perhaps the most important thing we do in any week. Prepare your minds for it. Don't come here preoccupied. Be present, open and connected. Don't spend one minute of time in this building thinking about all the things you have to do later today, or start to think through or plan your week. Be in this moment as a time specifically set aside to worship God, sing praises unto Him

and to learn about His word. If you think you already know what is being preached, give full attention anyway.

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things (all of those blessed sequentially-linked characteristics of mature Christians listed in verses 5-7, and the resulting conditions between aspiring to them and not), though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. – 2Pet. 1:12-15

The Holy Spirit of God, through Peter, speaks of things being put in remembrance 3 times in 4 verses – not toward just mentioning ‘things’ in case you forgot – but bringing them to your forefront of your mind *afresh*. There are precious few concepts in the scripture that we shouldn’t look at afresh, from time to time. Sometimes a new context, or ‘time,’ or situation in your life can cause you to see a piece of scripture afresh. That is the Lord. Oftentimes, when I am listening to preaching from this pulpit, I hear several things in a row that maybe I had considered at some point, and then – wham! – I hear one that I hadn’t. Or I hear a thing that I thought I ‘knew,’ but the Lord shines brighter light on it for us. If I wasn’t really paying full attention, I would have missed the nugget. The Lord gives us nuggets: the words are already there – the nuggets are the ever-keener understanding He gives of those blessed words.

Let me give you a recent example from my own experience. I was planning on using a piece of scripture for today, when encouraging us all in the following point:

“If you think that what is being preached is complex, confusing or intimidating, don’t give up. Take some notes and ask some clarifying questions later. Some topics are dense and complex, but also rich and specifically designed by God for our good and edification.”

And I was going to use the following scripture to make this point:

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: - Isa. 28:10

I have always been taught and understood this verse to mean a certain thing – an instruction – as to what manner, and process, scriptural learning is carried out in earnest. But, as I looked at it afresh, I can see now that it means no such thing. The whole chapter of Isaiah 28 is a severe chastening of the mature adults of Israel, including the priests and prophets, for having mistreated, maligned, and minimized both their offices and in having a dulled contempt for the word of God – for what Calvin calls their ‘voluntary stupidity’ (or willing ignorance).

Anyway, I don't have the time to spend with it here (if you want to talk about it with me later, I'd be glad to) – I only bring it up here to make a point. I do, however, encourage you to spend a little time, on your own, with Isaiah 28 – you might be surprised at what you see, if you look at it afresh. In any event, my earlier point is still to be made, which is:

If you think that what is being preached is complex, confusing or intimidating, don't give up. Take some notes and ask some clarifying questions later. Some topics are dense and complex, but also rich and specifically designed by God for our good and edification.

But also, the above-mentioned verse (Isa. 28:10) and chapter (all of 28) underscore the point that, sometimes you (in this case, I) might think you already know a thing (that is being preached, or read, or discussed), and it turns out a little different than you had previously thought – when you look at a thing afresh. Giving to the worshipping of the Lord all our mind-share, time and sobriety – whether it be in prayer, in singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, or in learning - is a way of cleaving unto Him. Here's another little nugget that sister Kathy hipped us to lately - Spurgeon: *As the evil spirit in Saul yielded in olden time to the influence of the harp of the son of Jesse, so would the spirit of melancholy often take flight from us, if only we would (earnestly) take up the song of praise.*

FASTING

Fasting helps subject our bodies to our spirit – it helps to subordinate our fleshly desires to the more important and enduring desires of our spirits.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Gal. 5:17

Fasting takes that one aspect of our fleshly maintenance (and pleasure, to a degree) completely off the table and out of the equation (for a time); thus, giving us more mind-share to devote unto meditation, prayer and communion with God. If fasting is done with the right perspective – not for the physical benefits, or out of some rote, vague obedience, but rather to foster closer, more focused communion with the Lord – the benefits can be tremendous. God calls us to fast in a manner that only He sees – not other men:

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. – Matt. 6:16-18

And the contrary case:

Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? – Zech. 7:4,5

Some of the best, focused prayer and communion with God is done while fasting and in private:
(in the context of husbands and wives) Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. – 1Cor. 7:5

Fasting can help reset the priorities in our lives:

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. – Matt. 6:31-33

Fasting and prayer can energize the heart and spirit for spiritual work:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. – Acts. 13:2,3

Finally, the Lord gave us the example of fasting (He wasn't fasting 'as God' – what would that be? God has no need of anything at any time – there is no 'lack' with God):

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. – Matt. 4:1,2

Christ gave us the example of resisting Satan, while in a weakened physical state, through the strength of a spiritual state – straightway answering each temptation with a strictly scriptural response.

*Two notes on fasting – 1) if you are a minor, talk it through with your parents before hauling off and doing a thing. 2) Some of you may have had less than fulfilling experiences with fasting, and there may be some different perspectives that linger because of those experiences. I would just suggest that you look into the matter afresh, perhaps as simply as looking closely at the verses we've just briefly considered. Remember, the act alone is nothing – it must be accompanied by a proper motive and spirit – which is to please and forge close communion with God. This is cleaving unto the Lord.

KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR EYE

If what you are focusing on, spending time with or gravitating toward pulls you away from regular, focused attention on the things of the Lord, put it down for a while (just walk away from it). I'm not talking about things that would be considered outright sin – we must run from and abhor sin. I'm talking about things that, while you may be able to justify as 'light entertainment' or 'mindless mental relief,' can become huge time-sucks, impediments to godly sobriety, and even private idols. Except for maybe the most mature-hearted Christians among us, there are so many things that we do – situations we find ourselves in - that pull us away from having the proper mind-share to always have right thoughts of God. Purposefully overloading our minds and hearts with such things only creates self-inflicted stumbling blocks. And I don't think this is a problem that is limited to really young people – any of us can and do get in a spot here. Just walk away from it. Put it down. Turn it off. Listen to a hymn. Go help someone. Go to someone's house and read. Read for yourself. Pray. Repeat.

LISTEN TO YOURSELF WITH A VERY KEEN EAR

It might sound like I've directed a lot of this sermon at younger people – but I don't believe I have. I think we can all use practical helps when it comes to cleaving unto the Lord. Becoming more strongly involved with and emotionally attached to the Lord should be our greatest aim. Putting down the self – completely subordinating the self to God – that is what we should be about. This particular 'help,' however, is primarily aimed at helping our young people. Those of us who are older should all know better, and should each help one another when we don't. What I'm talking about here is listening to your own words. Listen to your pride as it oozes out of your blow hole. Listen to your superiority as it dribbles off your lips. Listen to your highly-developed intelligence and superior reasoning as it dances off your tongue. Listen to your self-righteousness as it fills the air with a sparkling, pink cloud of ego. If you would just stop your busy minds and just listen, for one moment, with humility, clarity and humility (and did I mention humility), you would hear it.

“What did you get on that test?”

“I know.”

“That (movie, song, or book that the other person just said they like) sucks. (That movie, song or book that you like) is waaaaay better.”

“Don't you know anything?”

Take it from a man who has struggled with pride. Ask God to break your pride. Plead with Him, entreat Him, time and time again. We must all ask God to break our pride. It is always Satanic, it is never helpful, and it is nearly ever-present.

SEEK MINISTERING SERVICE (AND TIE IT, IN YOUR MIND, TO SERVING GOD – NOT JUST AS CHORES)

You can learn a lot about the word of God from gutters. We all have gutters. You can get an 8 foot ladder, an extension ladder and a work companion and go to these houses and clean out all the gutters. And when you go to someone's house, ask them if they will stand out in their front yard for a few minutes, while you clean out their gutters, and tell you about a bible verse or cluster of verses or bible topic that they've been thinking about recently. This not only helps you cleave unto God by knowing more about His word, but it helps you cleave unto Him by having even brief spiritual communion with your brothers and sisters. Finally, it helps you cleave unto Him by having a right perspective in the doing of the work:

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; - Col. 3:23

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. – Ec. 9:10

If, on the other hand, you do any of this as a rote chore, or just something to 'get through' or even doing a thing begrudgingly, you are moving your heart further and further away from God rather than cleaving unto Him. All these practical helps must to be accompanied by framing your perspective correctly or else it's just busywork or checking things off a 'to-do' list.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. – Col. 3:1-2

The Greek here for 'set your affection' means: to direct one's mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for, to cherish the same views, be harmonious in thought with.

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. – 1Tim. 4:15

The Greek here for 'give thyself over to them' is, roughly, 'be, or become them.'

Please consider these practical helps for what they are – by setting your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth, and giving yourself wholly to them (reading, exhortation, doctrine, etc.), you will find yourself cleaving closer and closer unto the Lord, which we are not only commanded to do, but should be our greatest thrill and desire to effort toward.

I love you all.

ENEMIES OF LEARNING

1. Knowing
2. The unwillingness to be a beginner, or novice
3. Being blind to our blindness
4. The desire to be comfortable
5. The insistence on being clear about everything - all the time
6. Confusing opinions or information with knowledge and confusing awareness with competence
7. Searching for fast-food or the magic pill
8. Living in permanent judgment or assessment
9. Being driven by novelty
10. Asking only technical or nit-picky questions