

## **Postmodernism & Friendship**

*Father, I know we have been discussing many things that are very challenging to us, and we pray that You will open our hearts and minds to Your truth, to Yourself, and to Your great love for us, so that that love and compassion may fill our hearts and spill out from our lives to touch the lives of others. Father, that is our great desire and it is a very big thing to ask, but we ask that You will do that and use these sessions to that end, to shape and mold us according to Your purposes. We ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

We were talking last time first about those four walls of intimidation, or fear of the culture; condemnation; cultural retreat into the haven of the church and Christian institutions; and personal separation. And I suggested that many of us have an enormous barrier between the church and the world created by these four walls. If we have this mentality, and if we are shaped by the culture war mentality of our life as Christians in the world, these barriers make evangelism extremely difficult. Now, in talking about that, I used the image that evangelism, if we have this problem, will sometimes become like raids where we go out in groups of two and three from behind that wall into the world. And you may have wondered whether I was attacking particular methods of evangelism, especially Evangelism Explosion. I was not. I was simply talking about a problem that we face. We become so separated, alienated, and fearful of the world, that we do not feel safe as individuals. And so we have to go out, if you like, in small packs to roam in the world. And our evangelism can become like that with these brief excursions into the world, safety in numbers, and hoping to return with a captive. But I was not criticizing any particular method of evangelism or approach to it in doing that. You are too subtle if you think that is what I was saying, because I most certainly was not. I will come back later to talk about issues of different kinds of evangelism, but I had no intention of attacking any particular method. I was speaking more about a problem of mentality than particular techniques of evangelism.

Now, after talking about those four walls, or four problems, we went on to look at the question of whether we love the Lord who became incarnate in the world. And we were looking first at the issue of trust and that God calls us, in fact He commands us, not to be afraid but rather to trust Him. We are not called to condemn the world at all. And we looked at several passages where Jesus says so very strongly that He did not come into the world to condemn it but to save it, and that if we are going to judge anybody or anything, it has got to be ourselves. Judgment must begin with the household of God and not with the world. What business, says the apostle Paul, is it of mine to judge those outside the Church? And we looked also at Jesus' challenge in the sermon on the plain in Luke 6 to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who are hostile or who mistreat us, and to wish them well. We are to treat people with grace, love, and gentleness.

Now that brings us to where we were at the end of our last session. And our third challenge as we think of the call of Christ is that instead of retreating from the culture in which we are, Christ calls us, rather, to be the salt of the earth. We are all familiar with His words in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, and we will turn to those right now. Jesus says in Matthew 5:13-16, "You are the salt of the earth." And the beauty of this image, of course, is that salt has to be applied. It has to be applied to the earth, to the world. That is the point of Jesus' image. It is not to be kept in the salt shaker. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness," if it is not used and it just sits there on the shelf, "how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Jesus tells us that if we just stay retreated in the church, in our own havens apart from the world, then we actually lose our savor. It actually has a harmful effect on us. It is not simply that we fail to do what Christ called us to do—which is to be out in the world seeking to have an impact on people's lives and being in contact with them, the salt applied to the world—but it actually damages us because we are

being disobedient to the calling of Christ. If we stay in the haven of the church, retreated from the world, we actually lose our righteousness, because the righteousness that Christ has called us to is one that is to do justice, to love mercy, and to be faithful in all our relationships out in the world, as well as among ourselves as believers. So we start losing our savor if we are disobedient to this command. And Jesus says the effect will be that the church will be rejected, it will be trampled under foot by men. If the church is not making any difference to the world, if it is not salty salt that actually has an impact, bringing preservation and taste to the world, then the church will be trampled by men. It will be rejected as worthless and useless. As my father used to say about our local pastor, he had his head so much in heaven he was of no earthly use. Now that may seem like a very harsh word, but I am afraid it was really true of that particular man. He had no impact on the life of anybody inside the church or outside the church. He was just living a self-centered, completely retreated life. Jesus says we will be trampled underfoot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” Again He is thinking of this problem of retreat, of God’s people retreating from the world and hiding their light under a bowl. “Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Jesus has called us, as Christians, to be out in the world having an impact, taking the salt of our justice, mercy, righteousness, love, obedience to the commandments of God, and caring for people. Take a desire to love and to serve them into the world where it is going to have an impact on people. And Jesus says as we do this, as we live in the world being faithful to God there, then people will see our lives and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. In other words, this will have a direct effect on the evangelism of the church. That is Jesus’ point. If we stay retreated, the church and the Gospel will be dismissed, we ourselves will start compromising our own righteousness and saltiness, and our lights will become dim. You see it is such a sad thing. We are afraid of the culture, so we retreat from it so that we will not be polluted, but Jesus says if you retreat from it, you will actually lose your righteousness. We must go out into the world and live faithfully in the world, serving the culture. The Christian model of one’s life should be that we are called to be public servants. That is our calling, to be the servants of other people just as Christ was, not to be preserving the purity of our own lives by keeping apart from the world. True righteousness will only happen when the believer is obedient to the call of Christ to go into the world.

Another passage is from John’s Gospel, and this is from Jesus’ prayer on the night before He died, and this is, if you like, His last will and testament for the Church. This is His longing for us; this is what He is praying as He goes to the cross, for His disciples and for the Church of the future; and it is what He continues to pray for us. He is talking about how the world will hate them. That is a reality that Christians always have to face, just as the world hated Christ Himself. But His prayer is this in John 17:15-18: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.” There are problems out there, of course there are, but Jesus is praying that we will be protected. And His prayers are powerful and effective because when we go out into the world we are being obedient to Him, and He is praying for us every day of our lives, that we may be protected from the evil one. And then He goes on, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” He prays that the Father will sanctify us by the Word. We are not of the world. No, we are not, because we are called to a different kind of life and we belong to a kingdom of Christ. But Jesus says, “As you send me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” That is Jesus’ prayer for us, and that is His commission for us, that we are to be in the world. We are not of the world but in the world, always in the world, just as Christ Himself was in the world. He did not stay in heaven. None of us would have been saved if He had, not anybody. He came into the world out of love and a desire to serve and to save, and He calls us to do the same.

And finally, we are called to be friends of sinners rather than separate ourselves from people. Many Christians will quote passages like, "Come out from them and be separate." Those passages are talking about the kind of righteousness that Jesus lived. "He is holy, separate from sinners," the book of Hebrews says. He was not separate in the sense that He was not alongside them or did not befriend them, love them, care for them, eat, sit down, walk, and talk with them, and give His life for them. He was not separate from them in that sense. He was only separate from them in the sense that His life was different. It was holy, righteous, and obedient to the commandments of God. And look at the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. We already looked at another part of this passage. First Corinthians 5 is in the context where He is discussing church discipline and what we have to do if one of our brother or sister believers in our congregation, someone who has professed to be a believer in Christ, starts cheating their employees, cheating on his wife or her husband, maliciously gossiping, or whatever it happens to be. What do we do when a fellow Christian does that? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9, "I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people." And notice what he says in verse 10: "Not at all meaning the people of the world who are immoral." The people of this world who are immoral, not at all meaning them, "who are immoral or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters." In other words, you are not to separate yourself from unbelievers who do those things, whatever kind of sin you can think of that deserves church discipline. "In that case, you would have to leave this world." There are no other kinds of people apart from sinners. We are not called to leave this world. "I am writing that you must not associate with anyone who calls themselves a brother but who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard. With such a man do not even eat." Paul is talking about church discipline in our congregations, something as a pastor I had to be involved in. We disciplined people who were dishonest in their business, people who were malicious gossips, people who became involved in homosexual relationships, and people who committed adultery. But we are not called to separate ourselves from non-Christians, from unbelievers, no matter what their sins are. That is not the calling of the Christian.

Jesus is a friend of sinners. That is how He is presented to us in the Gospels. Now Jesus was criticized by His contemporaries, especially the most devout ones, or at least those who thought they were devout, because of the kind of company He kept. And let us look at several examples, starting with Luke 7:39. This is on the occasion where Jesus has been invited to eat at the house of a man named Simon, a Pharisee, somebody who is devoted to zealously observing God's law, but who thought that zealously observing God's commandments meant keeping yourself personally separate from sinful people. That is what the Pharisees understood righteousness to be, just like many Christians do today. And this woman who is a prostitute comes in, and she anoints Jesus' feet with ointment, washes them with her tears, and wipes them dry with her hair. This is an extraordinarily intimate gesture. Jesus, of course, is not seated at the table, but He is reclining at the table with His feet behind Him, and she is there washing His feet, drying them with her hair, anointing them with ointment, and kissing them. Luke 7:38-39 says, "She wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.'" In other words, He obviously is not from God. I invited Him here because I thought He might be, but now I can see He is not, because He is allowing this kind of person to touch him. And Jesus of course goes on to comment on the Pharisee's misunderstanding.

Or take another example. Luke 15:1-2 talks about tax collectors, and of course tax collectors were despised for a couple of reasons. For one, they were considered to be collaborators with the Romans, who were occupying Palestine at this time and were hated. The tax collectors worked for them collecting the taxes from this subjugated people, the Jews, and so they were seen as collaborators with the enemy

and hated for that reason. The other reason they were hated was because they were not paid to be tax collectors, so they had to collect enough to pay their own wages. And of course, that left a lot of room for dishonesty and corruption to happen a good deal of the time. And so they were absolutely hated by people for both of those reasons. Luke 15:1-2 says, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" That is their fundamental criticism of Jesus. If Jesus had just gone and preached at them, they would not have minded. But Jesus did not just go and preach at them, He ate with them and welcomed them. He enjoyed their company and they enjoyed His company. That is why they are all here. They are all gathering around to listen to Jesus because He treated them in a way that other teachers of God's Word did not. He was glad to see them and to spend time with them. And then Jesus tells these wonderful parables that are all about the nature of the Gospel, like the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the two lost sons. (It is not just one lost son, but two lost sons. The other son, the eldest son, is a Pharisee.) They are wonderful stories, and they are talking about the nature of the kingdom of God, the nature of the work of Christ, and the calling of you and me, which is to delight in going out into the world to love and serve sinners.

Well, there is a third passage in Luke 15. Jesus loved to scandalize the Pharisees and teachers of the law, and not only by the way He mixed with such people, but by a lot of His teaching as well, which they found particularly scandalous. And they would have found one of those parables very scandalous, and that is the second one in particular, where Jesus has a woman representing the person of God in the parable. There is the shepherd who goes to find the sheep, and none of us has any problem seeing that as representing God. But in the second parable, Jesus speaks of a woman who searches for a lost coin, and that also represents God searching for sinners. And the Pharisees must have found that quite scandalous. They did not think women were worth teaching God's Word to, never mind using them as a kind of illustration to represent God's care for His people. If we turn to Luke 19 we find another example. This is the occasion where Jesus is entering Jericho, and there is Zacchaeus, who is a chief tax collector. So he is better at this job than others and had become very wealthy, and he was a little man, so he climbed a tree because he wanted to see Jesus. And Jesus, when He got there, said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Jesus invited Himself to dinner to be Zacchaeus' guest. And Zacchaeus came down and welcomed Him gladly. It was not the way he was accustomed to being treated by any of his fellow Jews, and certainly not by teachers of the law. Verse 7 says, "But all the people saw this, and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'" Again they criticized Jesus for this, but of course this is precisely the reason why He came into the world. He invites Himself to your table and to mine, as well. He did when we were still sinners in unbelief. That is why you are a believer today, because He invited Himself to sit down at your table, whether you wanted Him particularly or not. That is the nature of the Gospel. It is the very reason Jesus was sent into the world, to be a friend of sinners, and that is of course what those three parables are all about. God has come into the world in search of the selfish, the self-centered, the proud (like the elder brother), the wasters (like the younger brother), the lost and wandering in sin. That is the very reason He came.

Let us turn to another couple of examples in Matthew's Gospel, beginning with Matthew 9:10-13. This is after Jesus has called one of these sinners to be one of His 12 apostles. Matthew 9:9-13 says, "As Jesus went on from there He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Jesus and his disciples." These are Matthew's friends. Many of us can identify with this. When we first became Christians, we still had lots of friends who were tax collectors and sinners. And many of Matthew's friends came and ate with Him and His disciples at Matthew's house. "When the Pharisees saw this they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" It is the thing that most offended them about Christ. "On

hearing this Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.'" And then notice the Old Testament passage He quotes: "But go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" You can go to church 50 times a week, offer your possessions and your tithes to the Lord and to His work, sacrifice yourself to the service of the church and of the Lord, but if you are not being merciful, you have not begun to understand that to which God is calling you. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." It can be very convenient to offer all sorts of things to God and feel like we are doing our duty. But if we are not being merciful to sinners, we have not pleased God at all, because this is the very nature of how God treated us. That He has been merciful to us is the very heart of our relationship with Him. If we understand at all the mercy of God, then we are going to be merciful to sinful people. That is God's calling. And so Jesus responds just in this way: "Your sacrifices are all worthless if you do not understand mercy and commit yourself to its practice." And that is, of course, why Jesus in that parable of the two lost sons includes the elder brother, who shows no mercy to his younger brother, has a hard heart, is proud about his obedience, and is very angry with his father for being merciful to the younger brother. But in fact he has taken God's gifts for granted completely. He is just as unrighteous in his own way. And we often forget that part of the parable in Luke 15 about the second lost brother who would not come into the feast and stayed outside grumbling. And the feast, of course, represents the feast in the kingdom of God where we sit down at God's table. And in a later session, we will look at a couple of examples where Jesus talked to teachers of the law and tried to help them see that they were not actually righteous. Jesus here is not saying that they were righteous and so He was not bothered with them, but He is saying that He came to call sinners—people who know that they are sinners.

And then over in Matthew 11 Jesus is being criticized by the people again, just as they criticized John the Baptist. In Matthew 11:18-19 Jesus says, "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' And the Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" That was their fundamental criticism of Jesus. But the commandments of God are not about personal separation from sinners. They are about being merciful and loving to sinners.

Just think of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. We all know this story. It is one of the most loved and famous stories in the world. Jesus is having a discussion with an expert in the law, and what Jesus tries to do, of course, is teach this man to understand that he is a sinner and that he does not actually keep the most basic commandments of God. Luke 10:25 says, "On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the law?' Jesus replied." See, this man has come to test Christ, and just think of his question. How would you respond if somebody asked you this question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" You would be so delighted and you could not wait to start telling that person basics of the Gospel. You are a sinner; Christ died for you; repent, and believe in Him. But Jesus does not respond like that, because He knows that this man is testing Him and his question is not sincere. But it is not just that. The man is not ready to hear the Good News, and we will talk about this more later. It is pointless telling the Good News to somebody who is not yet ready to hear it. It is not just that this man is not sincere. If you read the account of the rich young ruler, he came to Jesus and he was sincere. And he asked exactly the same question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus never tells him in that encounter. Now was it because Jesus did not love him? Is it because of that on this occasion? No, that is not the point. We are actually told in one of the Gospels that Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and loved him, but He still did not tell him, because he was not ready to hear. Now this man has to hear something else first before he can be told how he might inherit eternal life.

So Jesus, instead of answering his question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" asks a question back. And Jesus is constantly doing this. Frances Schaeffer used to say, "If I just have an hour with

somebody, I spend the first 55 minutes asking them questions, so that in the last five minutes I can say something they really need to hear, because I know what they need to hear by then.” So Jesus comes back with a question of His own: “What is written in the law?” He replied. ‘How do you read it?’” Jesus knew the man was not sincere. His question was simply a test; the guy wanted to find out whether Jesus really knew His stuff. He knew that he did. He was a teacher of the law, properly accredited. He had gone to the right seminary, but he rather doubted that Jesus had gone to the right seminary, so he has come to test Him. Should you really be setting yourself up as a teacher, do you know your stuff? And when Jesus asks him the question back, he cannot resist replying because he is so proud of his own knowledge. Rather than getting his heart pricked and saying, “Well, Lord, actually I really do want to know what you think,” he does not reply that way. He displays his own knowledge. He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” It is an absolutely wonderful answer that he gives. It summarizes all the law and the prophets. It summarizes all that the Old Testament teaches; it summarizes the law, what God requires of us. Jesus Himself answers a similar question exactly like this on another occasion, with almost exactly these words. It is a great answer. Fantastic answer. “Love the Lord your God with your heart and soul and mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.” That is your calling, and it is my calling. It is exactly what we are all called to do with our lives. And so Jesus responds, “You have answered correctly.” That is a great answer, and Jesus recognizes it as such. But then He adds a little bit of sting in His words, “Do this and you will live.” You obey these commandments and you will indeed inherit eternal life. Very challenging. It is very easy to say that this is what God requires of us, but it is quite different to do it. And that is really what the parable is about. What does it mean to actually keep these commandments? That is really what the parable is about.

The teacher of God’s Word is feeling a little bit caught by this point, and he wanted to justify himself, so he asks another question. “Jesus, who is my neighbor?” And obviously his desire in asking the question is to try to restrict the scope of God’s commandment and make it a little bit more manageable. What personal separation is all about is restricting the scope of God’s commandments to make them more manageable, so that I just have Christian friends who are easy to love, nice people to invite to my home, family and fellow believers who will invite me back, and we will all be comfortable together. Jesus described that kind of hospitality in Luke 14. He basically told them not to do that, but to go out there and invite the sinners, the people really in need who will not invite you back. We all like to restrict the scope of God’s commandments because they are easier to keep that way, and it is easy to feel good about oneself. And that is behind his asking, “Who is my neighbor?” And in reply Jesus tells this wonderful story.

Now a story like this has all sorts of layers of meaning. The parables can operate on four levels. They can be simply stories, just wonderful stories that grab the imagination and engage the heart and the mind, and this is a wonderful story like that, which is why it is so well known. Jesus was a great storyteller. He gave the best sermon illustration anybody ever gave, and that is of course what this is. That is the first level; it is simply a wonderful story that captures the imagination. The parable of the two lost sons is like that, too; it is unforgettable. Second, many of the parables teach us about what God requires of us, the meaning of God’s law, and what God’s commandments are. They tell what the moral life is about, and of course this parable does that. And third, parables often teach us about the kingdom of God. What is God’s kingdom like? What is the nature of the kingdom of God? The parable of the two lost sons and the parable of the shepherd and the lost coin are like that. They teach us about the kingdom of God and what it is like. It is a place where sinners have been searched for and are welcomed, and then people have a great feast together. That is what the kingdom of God is like. And sometimes the parables operate on a fourth level as they teach us about Jesus Himself. The parable of the shepherd and the lost sheep is like that. And the parable of the two lost sons is like that, because Jesus is the father who gives

the inheritance to his sons, actually to both of them, which you do not usually notice when you read that parable. He gives the inheritance to both of his sons, the elder one as well, when the younger one asks for it. The eldest complains later to his brother that he never has anything of his own, but he has already received his own inheritance like the younger son. But Jesus is the father who is so generous, and Jesus is the father who runs to meet his son and who is so merciful. So the parables often teach us about Jesus as well. So they can operate on four of those levels. All of them do not, but many of them do.

So Jesus tells this wonderful story in Luke 10:30-37: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor of the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” It is a wonderful story, and it is a very provocative story. It is a subversive story in all sorts of ways. The priest and the Levite, who have dedicated their lives to the service of God, obedience to His commandments, and teaching His Word, completely ignore the requirements of God’s law and go by on the other side. They do not show mercy, which is what God desires. They are too busy rushing off to offer their sacrifices at the temple, and they pass by on the other side. And what is particularly scandalous about this parable is it is the Samaritan who takes care of the guy. Jews hated Samaritans; they absolutely despised them as heretics who had a false religion, who could never possibly please God with anything they did. It is said of the Jews that if they met a Samaritan on the road, they would walk into the ditch so that not even their shadows would touch each other because they would be so polluted just by a shadow touching, never mind having any actual human contact with the person. But here is this Samaritan who is the hero of the story. It is the most shocking possible answer. It would be like for you, just think of who you love to hate in our culture today, what group of people you particularly despise, and then put that person, one of those people, as the hero of the story. I am very serious; that is what Jesus is doing. He is making it as difficult as possible so that it is really provocative to this man who is listening to it. It is like saying a gay rights activist went over and took care of this man, or whatever other person you want to put in this situation. Jesus is putting in as the hero of his story somebody who this teacher of the law had spent his whole life despising and considering absolutely contemptible.

Now of course the fundamental purpose of this story is to teach this man that he is not obeying God’s law at all. He has all this head knowledge, which has puffed him up. He knows what God requires, and up to this minute in his life he thought that he was doing it. He will never think that again. Jesus is teaching him what it really means to love your neighbor and who your neighbor is. And your neighbor is not a fellow priest, a teacher of the law, or your nice Christian friend. Your neighbor is anybody who is in need of your help, your love, your service, or your self-sacrifice. That is who your neighbor is. Your neighbor is everybody out there who is lost, who is in need, no matter what his or her life is like or what sin characterizes him or her. That is who your neighbor is. And what does it mean to love them? Because that is what the parable is about. It is easy to say, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” but just think about the amount of time and energy and devotion you spend on loving yourself every day of your life. Think of how much time you spend sleeping, washing, preening yourself in front of the mirror, getting dressed, feeding yourself, and preparing your meals. You spend a huge amount of energy loving yourself every day. But the commandment requires us to love our neighbor in the same way. Now who

does that? Who even loves his wife, or her husband, or his children as he loves himself, never mind the sinners out there in need. To love your neighbor as yourself, and that is what Jesus is teaching us, is to expend time, money, and energy, and to risk my security. Maybe robbers were still hiding back there ready to pounce on you if you stopped to help the poor man. It is a dangerous thing to stop to care for somebody in a place where robbers are. It is to risk oneself, one's own security and safety, and to give oneself. This guy had to walk. The injured man was on his donkey. And then he pays for him. That is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus is really challenging this man. You notice how at the end when Jesus says, "Who is the neighbor," he cannot bring himself to say, "The Samaritan." He cannot quite get those words out, so he says, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus says, "You go do the same." "That is what God's commandment is about, and when you realize you cannot do it, then you come back to Me and I will tell you how to inherit eternal life." But Jesus sends him away with no Good News, with no Gospel, only with the law because people have to understand the law before they can hear the Gospel. And until this man comes back and says, "Lord, I have a cold heart. I do not love God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength; I know that is what I am supposed to do. I do not love my neighbor as myself. I do not even begin to, never mind loving people out there really in need around me. Lord, how do I inherit eternal life when I do not do these things?" And then Jesus would answer him. We will find out when we get to heaven whether he ever came back.

Now in the case of the rich young ruler, Jesus sent him away in the same kind of way, and we do not have time to talk about that right now, but we know in that case that he did come back and was converted later. But Jesus tells people what they need to hear, not what one might like to tell them to think that one has done one's duty evangelizing somebody. Jesus tells people what they need to hear. He discerns where they are on the road toward the kingdom, and then He challenges them at that point. That is why Schaeffer said, and those are wonderful words, "If I have just an hour with somebody, I spend 55 minutes asking him questions so when I do say something at the end, I say something that really is going to touch his heart and mind where he is at this moment in his life."

But how do you know when somebody is ready to hear the Good News? That is a great question, and we will talk about that question in some depth later on as we go along. Before that, I want to do a study on how people are actually saved, what Scripture teaches us, because we often have a very superficial view of evangelism. We often think of it as just saying these three things or these five things, or whatever. And evangelism is much more than that. But I would say simply two things. First, we pray for the discernment of the Holy Spirit. He is the great witness; He is the one who saves people. I do not save anybody. God saves them and draws them to faith in Christ. So that is the first thing. I pray for discernment whenever I have a conversation with an unbeliever. Let us say we have a friend, for example, with whom we regularly have Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter dinner, who is not a believer. I pray that God will give me the words to say and that He will give me discernment to know what to say to him. I cannot plan ahead of time precisely what he needs to hear. So that is the first thing. I pray for the discernment of God and for the words. Jesus actually says to His disciples on one occasion, "When you are dragged before kings and governors and put on trial, do not think beforehand about what you are going to say. The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say." Now in one sense, as Christians, we are always on trial for our faith. That is the situation in which we always are. That is why the word "apology" or "apologetics" is used. To make an apology is to make a defense of the faith. The word "apology" is a legal term; it is a term from the courtroom. If you read the trial scenes in the book of Acts, Paul makes his defense in chapters 22, 24, and 26 of the book of Acts. He is making his apology; he is doing his apologetics, giving a defense of his faith. Now in one sense, we are always on trial, and that is why Peter uses that word in 1 Peter 3:15 when he says, "Whenever anybody asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," or "to give a defense for the hope that you have." I am always on trial before the world. That is how I should think about myself. I am on trial, and Christ, the

Church, and the Gospel are on trial whenever I am with a non-Christian, because he or she is going to draw conclusions about the truth of the Christian faith from my life and my words. So I pray for the Spirit to give me the words to say. That is the first thing.

The second thing I do is really seek to understand. That is what Jesus is doing in these conversations. He asks questions to uncover what is going on in the person's heart and mind. And that is why Schaeffer would say what he did. If I have an hour, I spend 55 minutes trying to understand by asking questions, seeking to uncover what is going on in this person's heart and mind and where they are. You know, every person we are ever going to meet is on a path going either toward God or away from Him, and it is a biblical image so I am happy to use it. And it is our calling to discern where on that road someone is, so that we say what is appropriate to them where they are on that road. Evangelism is not just saying these five, or ten, or three, or however many things, to share with somebody, and then I will have gotten them off of my chest, saying, "Well that is done, and now it is over." Well, no it is not. No human relationship is like that. No I cannot say to my wife when I come home from work, "I love you dear," and then that is my duty as a husband, over and done with. Nobody would think that was marriage just because I said it. I should say it over and over again. The words need to be said, but that does not constitute the relationship. It is the same with evangelism. Just saying a handful of words is not biblical evangelism just by itself. It is seeking to discern where somebody is so that then when I do speak to them I say something that is really appropriate. See, as you read through the Gospels, you see Jesus having all these different encounters with people. But every encounter is different, because what Jesus says is fitted to that person. Any of you that has children know perfectly well that your children need to hear different things. Actually, they all need to hear the same thing in the end, but you have to say it differently to each child, because they each have a different personality. You treat them fairly of course, but for one, a sharp look or a raised finger will reduce him to tears, and with another one, you can spank him hard and it does not make the slightest difference. Anybody who has children knows it is like this. You treat them differently. Jesus has all these wonderful conversations with people, and every one is different from the others because He is talking to real people where they actually are. So evangelism is really about discernment. It is about understanding, praying for, and seeking understanding as I get to know somebody and care for him.

There are Christians who are sometimes criticized for being friendly and merciful toward unbelievers and perhaps sometimes more dismissive or unfriendly toward Christians who are, let us say, more reserved. I hope that is not true of anybody who studies with us. If you think of the parable of the two lost sons, it is so beautiful because, among other things, Jesus presents Himself in the parable as loving both the son who is a flagrant sinner, who goes off and wastes his inheritance in wild living, and also the son who stayed at home, who thought that he was being obedient. He loves both of them, he invites them both to the banquet, and he gives both of them their inheritance. Of course it is not appropriate if we see that we are called to love unbelievers and then fail to love our fellow Christians. I would have hoped it was not possible to understand what I am saying in that way. We are called by the Gospels to do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. And if you remember what I said in the last session, it is by the way we love one another as believers that people will know that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ. We have to demonstrate to the world, first of all, a depth of relationships and love within the church between believers, and then that same love to the world. It can never be an either/or; it has got to be a both/and. We must have not simply one, but both together. It is certainly my hope and prayer that nobody who hears what I am saying in these sessions will ever draw the conclusion that it is appropriate to be dismissive of one's fellow believers. That would be a terrible response. And at another level I would say, if it is just a matter of personalities—some people are reserved and shy and other people are not, and so the extroverts despise the introverts—that would be ridiculous.

So it should have nothing to do with matters of personality, nor should it have anything to do with a sense of comfort or discomfort at being in the world, and I suppose that is a part of what lies there with the question. But what I would say is this: for those Christians who do feel uncomfortable in the world, we need to deal with it, because Jesus challenges us to. Deal with it not by despising one another, but by really wrestling with the Word of God within ourselves. You remember that I said the Pharisee is not somebody else's problem, but that every one of us has a Pharisee in our heart and that Phariseism takes its fundamental form first in pride, whether we are proud because we are keeping ourselves separate from the world or proud because we are involved in the world. First pride, then a critical spirit develops, whether it is a critical spirit of sinners or a critical spirit of fellow believers who are not doing what Scripture calls us to do. The devil delights in tricking us into being proud and critical for whatever reason, and if what I teach has the effect of making people proud and critical, well then, that is the very last thing that I desire.

Another very good question is this: how do we compare ourselves, and our desire to communicate the truth with people, and Jesus, who was such an awesome teacher and had such deep understanding of people? That is a great question. We do not have to compare ourselves to Christ. That does not help us, but we certainly, I would say, take an example from Him, which is Jesus seeking understanding. There are really two things going on in terms of the questions Jesus asks and the exchanges He has with people. First, He is seeking to understand them Himself. He does not have an automatic understanding of everybody simply because He is the Son of God. He has to grow in wisdom, the Scripture teaches us. His humanity is genuine. He has all sorts of advantages over of us, enormous ones: He has a pure heart, which makes a great difference, and a real desire to love people and to serve them, which none of us has. Jesus seeks understanding for Himself, but second He seeks to move others toward self-understanding. And that is the other thing that you see going on in this conversation with the expert of the law, or with the rich young ruler, or any other conversation Jesus has with somebody. None of us understands ourselves very well, because our hearts are deceitful. "The heart is deceitful above all things. Who can know it?" We do not know ourselves, and that is one of the basic problems that any unbeliever that you ever encounter has, or any believer for that matter. We do not know ourselves well at all. And Jesus seeks to move people to self-understanding so that they will see what is going on. I mean, Jesus' purpose here with this man is for him to go away and start questioning himself. "Why did I have to show off my knowledge? Why could I not say the Samaritan? How glibly I said, 'You have got to love God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself'. I never understood what love really means." And that is what Jesus is seeking to do. Now that is the challenge for us, and you might say, "Well, that is an impossible task." It is. And that is why I said earlier that we start with prayer. I cannot save anybody; I cannot move anyone to self-understanding; I cannot convict anyone of sin; but the Holy Spirit can, and He calls me to be a witness alongside Him, to do what I can, and then pray that God will multiply my efforts. And that is what He delights to do. You do not have to do this perfectly. So please do not understand me as if I was saying that somehow, if we get this right, now we will know exactly how to talk to people. That is not my point. We will not. God calls us to be faithful and His commitment is to multiply our efforts 30 fold, 60 fold, and 100 fold. And that is what He is doing all the time, and that is why anybody becomes a Christian, because nobody ever does perfect evangelism. Only God.