

PLEASING GOD Galatians 1:10

Galatians chapter 1. We'll read verses 6 to 10 once again tonight, particularly paying attention to verse 10. Galatians chapter 1, verses 6 to 10, paying particular attention to verse 10:

“⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Now please, if you would, join me in just a moment of prayer. Father in heaven, all flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Speak to us from your word today, we ask. May it be our food, may it be our life. Give us ears to hear, give us eyes to see, and hearts to obey. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

We've been moving forward slowly through Galatians, and I confess and admit that it's slowly, but we've been doing it very carefully. Last week, we looked at the primary false gospel that's loose in the world today—the false gospel that's being preached more than any other gospel in the world today, I think—the false gospel under which a very great percentage of the world's population is raised. And that false gospel is the false gospel of the teachings of Rome.

Tonight we come to verse 10: “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Scripture in many places and in many ways tells us that it's not possible to serve two masters. It's not possible to serve God and man. It's not possible to please God and man. It's not possible to serve God and money. Scripture in many ways and in many different places tells us that we must serve God alone.

Just turn quickly to Matthew chapter 6, the teaching of the Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 6 and verse 24, Jesus speaking: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” You cannot serve God and money. Money—the love of money that's at the root of all evil, as Paul said. You cannot serve God and money. Money itself can be an idol, not just the stuff that buys, but money itself.

You cannot serve God and anything else. God will not accept any competition. God is God alone. “I am the Lord and there is no other.” “I am the Lord and I know no other Rock.” There is no other, from Isaiah, chapter 43: God and God alone; God, the living God.

But there is a balance to be sought, isn't there? We're not going to be much of a witness in the society in which we live if we're hypocrites, if we're false, if we're unpleasant, if we're dishonest in our dealings, if we're liars, if we're greedy, if when people look at us, they see nothing but hypocrisy.

It's strange, but it's true: Have you ever wondered just how it is that the whole world, no matter how much they hate Jesus Christ—everybody knows what's good and how a Christian ought to be? Everybody knows what Jesus is like. Everybody knows what a hypocrite is. Everybody can understand that. When they see somebody who claims to be a Christian, and yet they see a standard of life that is of the Devil, they understand what hypocrisy is.

The law has been written in the hearts of humanity, and even though sinners will not receive the law and will not receive instruction from it; even though the unsaved will not receive instruction from that law written in their hearts; even though they're blinded and turned over to their own sins and their own desires—they still know enough of the righteousness of God. They still know enough of that which is right, in their heart, to know a hypocrite when they see one.

So in some way, we must seek the approval of the people we live among. Our life must be, in a way, approvable. They must be able to look at us and see the goodness of God reigning in our lives. But, in gospel terms, in terms of serving God, we cannot allow them to dictate the terms. Whilst they must be able to look at the moral aspect of our lives and see Christ-likeness being reflected in our lives, the message we give them must be the absolute truth according to God.

Inspid niceness is not Christianity. Jesus was not a pacifist. He wasn't a pacifist peace hippie. You've heard me say it many times. That's a great problem with the church in Australia; it's a great problem with society out there. They have accepted a false Christ, a Christ who is basically effeminate and passive and nice. He wants to hug your Nana, your Nana wants to hug Him, and if you just try to be as nice as you can, well, that's all you've really got to worry about.

But that's not the way that Scripture presents Jesus to us. "Behold! All authority has been given unto me." They're the words of Jesus—"All authority." When He says that He holds all authority, He's saying that the power of life and death is in His hands, and He's saying that His word is to be revered and honored as His word. When He says that "all authority is given unto me," He's saying that everything that happens—everything, everything that happens—is under His providential care.

That's one of the hardest things to take in as a Christian—that God is not surprised by anything that happens; that God knows that this is happening; that all things that are happening are happening according to God's will and God's providence, according to God's secret will. We've spoken of this before. We've spoken of the fact that God has a revealed will and God has a secret will. His revealed will is revealed in Scripture; it's revealed in the commandments; it's revealed in the law; it's revealed in the gospel. He has certain expectations of all humanity. He expects Christ-likeness.

The law was given to all of humanity—all of humanity. The law was written in the heart of Adam and Eve, and from them the law remains in the heart of all humanity, though, as I said,

many are blinded to this. Many are under a deception. Many have been given over to their own lustful desires and sins. God has revealed His nature for all of humanity, and He expects obedience and righteousness from all of humanity. That's His revealed will.

In His hidden will, in His secret will, God is working all things for His glory, including disaster, including death, including sin and wickedness. We don't get to play with God's secret will. We don't get to think much about it. All we know is that it is there, and that it is working; that all things are happening and being made to happen to reveal His glory; that in the day that we meet with Jesus, face to face, things will be revealed to us. We will be granted understanding. We will see the revealing of His glory in the wickedness and the disasters that are happening in the world. We will understand His judgments, and we will understand His mercies.

And we as Christians, as God's people in the world, come under those same disasters. We suffer those same problems. We're all still going to die. Even though the promise of Scripture is that even though we die, yet we shall live, all of us will at some point in time, at God's appointed time, depart this earth. We will depart this body. We will come to the day of our death, unless the Lord returns before that day. Christians have been saying, "Unless the Lord returns before that day" for thousands of years now. He will return one day, that we can be certain of. But we've got no promise nor guarantee that we ourselves will not be facing the last day of our lives before we meet the last day of this world's history. He will return. The same happens to all, as it says in Ecclesiastes. All come to death.

God's secret will—He is gaining glory for Himself from the unfolding of providence in history, and it's a requirement of us that we understand this and accept this in faith. We're to believe God. God says all things are in His hand. Jesus says, "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me." Revelation tells us that He's taken that scroll that symbolizes ownership, that symbolizes possession, that symbolizes His control of all providence. He opens the scroll in the book of Revelation, as the seals are broken. Things are happening. Things are happening all over the world. Why? Because Jesus, the Son of God, the Lamb who was slain, has all authority upon the earth and in the heavens. All authority is His. Everything's unfolding according to His will. He is God the Son of God.

We are to be pleasing to God in righteousness, but we must understand—those of us who are born again, those of us who are indwelt by the power of the Holy Spirit, those of us who are being conformed into the image and the likeness of Jesus Christ—that they hated Jesus. If they hated Jesus, they will hate us. That's the fact. Whilst people, the outsiders, expect to see Christ-likeness in our lives, at the very same time, they will hate Christ-likeness. That's the madness of sin, that's the wickedness of humanity given over to sin.

We are to live a life that is approved in the sight of God and that will morally be approved in the sight of all of humanity, but we are not to preach a gospel that is pleasing to all of humanity. We are not to share the word that is pleasing to all of humanity. We're not to compromise in any way. A word has been given. The gospel has been given. God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. God has revealed His Son Jesus Christ in Scripture. This is the message that we are given. This is the word that we are to cling to, though we might face hatred, though we may face persecution.

We're blessed in this nation at the moment. We are suffering no persecution. I've said to you a few times, I don't want to be persecuted, but sometimes I think it might be better for the Australian church if we were. We're not hated, I think, because we're so insignificant. We're not turning the world upon its head. We're not doing the work that the apostles were doing. I could go way off the track here and start talking about that, but I'm not going to. I'm going to try and stick with the text.

We've got to please God. Whenever we come to that moment of choice—Do I please God, or do I please men?—we've got to please God. We've got to choose the way of obedience. Sometimes we're going to have to speak the truth—to speak the truth in love.

I had a situation on Friday where I said some very tough words to someone I love, but I said those tough words because I love them. They were very hard words. I've never spoken to that person in that way before. But the point had come where I just had to speak the truth: "You must be born again. You must. And you must be begging God for the forgiveness of your sins." It took me a long time to get to that situation, but I got there eventually—God got me there. I thank God for that. I'm not sure if that person appreciated what I said. I have no idea. But we must share the truth in love, understanding that those whom we love may not want to hear it, and yet we must share the truth.

Turn to Romans in chapter 10, beginning at verse 12: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Verse 14 asks, "How then will they call on him I whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" Now God can convert a soul any which-way He pleases, and I have heard testimonies of people who are converted because they had a dream, they had a vision, they picked up a scrap of paper and on the scrap of paper was a verse of Scripture. We've all heard them. But understand something—they're the exceptions to the rule. That's not the way God tends to work. God has appointed that we, His people, share His word. That's the way people get led to the Lord. Someone has to preach; someone has to speak; someone has to open their mouth and speak the truth.

Now as I said, God could convert this nation without you or me doing a thing or lifting a finger, but that's not His usual means of working. He's revealed in Scripture that His usual means of working is to bless the obedience of His church. It's to bless the obedience of His people in sharing the word and testifying of salvation in Jesus Christ. He doesn't need us. He doesn't have to have us, but He loves us and He uses us. We are important, not because we're special, but because God Himself attaches importance to us. That's the root and the ground of our

importance. We're worms on the ground. We're dust. We're nothing. With but a thought, God could destroy us all completely. But He loves us, and in loving us, He has given us work. What did God give Adam to do in the garden? Work. "Tend the garden and expand it. Look after my garden."

Well, He's given His people in the church work, and that work is a blessing. In that work, is God giving us a status that we do not deserve. He's treating us like His children. He's treating us as though we were special. He's making us special by giving us work to do, and the work we are to do is to be pleasing to Him. We're to please Him in all that we do, especially in the sharing of the good news about Jesus Christ. They're the works to which He has called us. They're the works which He has promised to bless. They're the works that He's promised to use in calling people into His kingdom.

Now I don't know if you've noticed, but the truth is that average Joe out there hates preaching. He hates the good news, and he hates being told that he's a sinner, and he hates being told that he can do nothing but turn to God and beg for forgiveness. But that's the word. The "foolishness of preaching," as Paul calls it in another place. The foolishness of preaching—that's what we're told to do, and in doing this we are pleasing God. We are living according to the pleasure of God. We're not pleasing men when we tell the truth, but we are pleasing God.

Let's turn back to Galatians, and we'll just have a closer look at verse 10. "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?" Now that sentence comes immediately after the pronouncement of the double curse. Starting back at verse 8: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?"

Well stop there, and I do want to explain something. There is an alternate way to translate verse 9 into verse 10. In verse 10, where it says in most of our Bibles, "For am I now," it could actually say something like, "So now, am I seeking the approval of man, or of God?" And the reference is back to what he had just said. Or, "There now..." There's another word that usually doesn't get translated in the English translations in there, and it's a word that connects what is said to what has come before. So it could well be, and I think it is, that what Paul is saying is, "You see what I've just said? I've said that anyone who preaches a contrary gospel is accursed, and I say again that anyone who preaches a contrary gospel is accursed. So how does that look to you? Does it look to you like I seek the approval men or of God?" "There now, do I seek the approval of men or of God?"

What's the importance of that? Well if you remember, as we've tried to work our way through Galatians, it appears that the false teachers who came to the churches in Galatia were attacking Paul and were running Paul down, and were saying that he was no true apostle, that he was not worthy of being called an apostle.

It may well be that one of the things that they were attacking Paul about was that he was not preaching compliance to the law, because he was not preaching compliance to Jewish ceremonial

law—he was a man-pleaser. It may well have been that their accusation was, “What Paul should be telling you, Galatians, is that not only should you believe in Jesus, but on top of that, you should be circumcised and you should be attending the feasts and the sacrifices, and you should be having the Sabbath on Saturday,” etc., etc.

It would appear that Paul was accused of being a man-pleaser himself—one who waters down the gospel. And so Paul has actually made a counter-accusation. What he’s saying is, “No, I’m not the man-pleaser. Think about what I’ve just said and what I’ve said about those people in particular. I’ve said that they’re accursed preachers of a contrary and accursed gospel. And that’s not man-pleasing!” What he’s saying is, “I’ve laid it out straight and hard right in front of you. I’m not a man-pleaser. *They* are the man-pleasers.” ¹⁰ “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?”

I think there might be something different to “the approval of man, or of God” in the New King James. It is, “Am I now seeking to persuade.” “Persuade” is a legitimate way to translate that word, but the idea behind it is “to gain the approval.” So in a way, he’s saying that he is persuading, but he’s persuading in such a way as to seek the blessing of someone’s approval. Whose approval is he seeking? Whom is he trying to please? He’s trying to please God. “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” And that’s an interesting sentence: If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

So what’s Paul saying about his former life? What’s he saying about his life as a Pharisee? What’s he saying about himself when he was a persecutor of the church? He’s saying that when he lived that life, he was a man-pleaser. When he lived that life, he was not a pleaser of God, he was a pleaser of man—that he had risen high amongst the ranks of the Pharisees, that he had risen high in the eyes of the High Priest, that he was pleasing man, that his life as a Pharisee, his life as a zealous hypocrite, his life persecuting the church—*that’s* the man-pleasing life. The man-pleasing life is the life of hypocrisy.

So what Paul’s actually done is he’s completely reversed the accusation. The false teachers have come and said, “Paul’s a man-pleaser because he doesn’t tell you to obey the law.” And Paul’s reversed the accusation and said, “No, my friends. Those who are telling you to obey the law, *they* are the man-pleasers. They are the ones who want to get Brownie points from the temple crew. They are the ones that want to appear acceptable in the sight of the priests and of the Pharisees and of the rabbis and of the scribes. *They’re* the man-pleasers. They’re not the ones who love God and who endure persecution for God’s sake. They’re the ones who love the law and they love the praise that comes from man. *They* are the man-pleasers. *I* am God’s servant. If I was still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

That whole idea of pleasing man—turn to John chapter 12, 36 to 43. Jesus speaking: ³⁶ ‘While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’ When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ ‘He has

blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue;⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

“For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” “For fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it.” Now looking here at verse 42, you see that it says “many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it.” We find that a little bit confusing. In our modern evangelical terminology, we see that phrase “believed in him,” and we think, Well, isn’t that the aim of the game? Don’t we want people to believe in Jesus? But John’s not meaning that they were exercising saving faith. John is meaning that the authorities at this point in time, many of them, saw the works that Jesus did, many of them heard His teaching, and they actually knew that He was the one. They knew that He was the promised one, the son of David, the Messiah, the prophet. They knew that. They believed the truth.

Remember the line in James: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” Well these people are at the same point. They believe that Jesus is doing the works of God. They believe that Jesus is the one who has been sent to them. But why don’t they do what they ought to do, and that is, obey and exercise faith? “⁴² But for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” They loved the praise that comes from man. They loved being Mr. Big-Man-About-Town. They loved being welcomed at the very best parties. They loved being welcomed in the very best shops. They loved being high-up members of the social club. They loved the praise and the glory that comes from man.

Why, then, were they remaining in the law? Turn back to Galatians, where the false teachers desire us to keep preaching and teaching the law, because they loved their status in and about Jerusalem. They loved their status before the teachers of the law. They loved their status and they weren’t about to surrender it, and they’re trying to build that middle road of compromise. They say on the one hand, “Oh, yes, I believe in Jesus,” and on the other hand try and bring some other teaching in to make it more acceptable to the world.

It never works. The world knows a compromiser when it sees one. Honestly, you get more respect from people being blunt, straight-up honest about your faith. They might tell you they think you’re wrong, and they might tell you they think you’re stupid for practicing and exercising that faith, but they’ll give you more respect than if they hear you trying to come halfway, and trying to turn out of what God has given you.

I think of those who claim to be Christians and yet they somehow or other try to reconcile Christianity with the theory of evolution. There’s nothing in Scripture that in any way or shape or form can be reconciled to evolution. There’s nothing. God created. That’s what Scripture tells us: God created. He created the heavens and the earth. He spoke and it was. And those who attempt to garner some kind of respect in the world by trying to find some roundabout

circular way to get through the first seven or eight chapters of Genesis without it actually meaning what it means—they don't end up getting any respect.

To put it in a picture, if the world is there [pointing to end of the room], and I make that compromise and walk halfway to them and say, “You see, there's a compromise way!” The world stays there—it stays down at the end of the room, and what they say is, “Well, you've come halfway. Walk right out of it and come up to us, because we're not coming to you.” They never come to the compromise. They're not interested. And they don't respect us for the compromise.

Now I would rather be bluntly told, “I disagree with you.” It's much better. At least you've got something you can work with there. If you can actually get someone in this day and age to take a position, you've actually got a basis upon which you can communicate, because the problem with so many people today is that, as far as they're concerned, nothing is true and everything is relevant, and they can say they can believe in one thing today, and they believe another thing the next day, and they'll compromise anything with anything else.

I mean, I see them on TV—people trying to tell me that Islam and Christianity are compatible—that you can be both! “Oh, yeah, Islam talks about Prophet Jesus.” Well, that's great. Yes, he was a prophet. Do they talk about Jesus Christ being God, the eternal Son of God, bearing the sins of humanity on the cross, being raised from the dead? Will they make that compromise for us? Of course not. They laugh at us.

I don't know if you realize this, but most Muslims are under the impression that all Christians believe in an effeminate, long-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, who says nice things. That's their impression of Christianity, and they laugh—they laugh their heads off. I've got Islamic friends at work, and I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and say they're well-meaning. But when they hear people talk about love as though it's just this come-as-you-are, everything's okay, nothing's bad, don't worry too much about anything, it's all about love and peace and acceptance nonsense, they laugh out of the other side of their faces. That's what they've been told. They've been told to expect Christianity to be practiced in this effeminate and pacifistic way and they think it's ridiculous. They say, How can a prophet, how could a true prophet of God, be so effeminate and ineffective?

We've got to teach the truth to them that Jesus Christ as a man—as a man—bore the sins of others, as a man. That it wasn't this passive, weak-willed, hopeless resignation to fate; it was actively obeying God the Father, and obeying the will of God—purchasing His bride with His own blood—sacrificial love, not passive love; not weak-wristed love; not rainbow love, but God's love. God's powerful love, God's almighty love, the love of God that says, “I've set my heart on that person, and whatever it takes, I will be saving them. I claim them as my own. Whatever it takes to cleanse them and separate them from their sins, I will do it.” To cleanse and to separate from sin requires the sacrifice of the perfect sinless sacrifice, Jesus Christ, God the Son of God, to become incarnate, to live that perfect sinless life, and to be that sacrifice. “I will pay that price. I will claim those upon whom I have set my heart, no matter what it takes.”

There's nothing effeminate, there's nothing sort of soft and cuddly there. It's not fluffy and furry. It's jagged; it's razor-sharp. It's separating, because there are some upon whom that love just simply does not fall. There are some whom He has never claimed as His own. There are some for whom the blood was not shed. That's the love God—it's powerful, it's effective, it's the love of the Almighty. There's nothing soft and cuddly to be found in it. And that's the love that we're commanded to take out and into the world.

In Exodus 32, we earlier read the whole chapter. Aaron's fear of man: "Make us gods to go before us." And how willingly did he concede the ground! What was in it for him, I wonder? What was in it for him? I thought about that question once many years ago. Why did Aaron so gladly make the calf? Well, if Moses doesn't come down, and if Aaron's the High Priest of the brand new idol, who's the head of the nation? Aaron. What's in it for Aaron? He's the new Prime Minister or the President or the High Priest, or whatever you want to call him. If Moses doesn't come back down the mountain, Aaron's on top.

That's another reason why we get that compromised gospel, the "what's in it for me," the gospel being preached for popularity. We looked at it a few weeks back now—the gospel that attracts thousands of listeners, the gospel that says, "Jesus died upon the cross; therefore, your life is going to be a life of ease and pleasure. Jesus bore the penalty for sin; therefore, God wants you to be wealthy—healthy, wealthy, and wise. Everything's going to go your way. Just say you believe in Jesus and you'll never have a problem again." And that's not the gospel. That's a contrary gospel. It's a twisted, distorted gospel—an occasional bit of Scripture in it, but it's basically just wishful thinking. It's the positive thinking cult expressed in pseudo-Christian terms. It's not the gospel. It's a contrary gospel.

So back to Aaron. He builds that golden calf, and when he gets confronted by Moses—remember those words—Moses says to him, "Why did you do it?" We better turn back there. Just turn back to Exodus 32. "Why did you do these things?" We got the classic claim of the hypocrite religionist. The classic claim of hypocrite religion. Verse 24, Aaron speaking: "So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

What's the classic claim of hypocrite religion? Miraculous power. "I just got a handful of gold, Moses, and tossed it into the fire, and we all closed our eyes, thought happy thoughts, and counted from five back to zero—Five, four, three, two, one—opened our eyes and—Hey, presto! The calf! There it is! I've got miraculous power! Hey, presto! There it is!"—the hypocrite claim to certain special miraculous powers and revelation. And the calf was supposedly a revelation. It's a revelation of the power of God. So you've got both a supposed miracle and a supposed extra-biblical revelation in that one claim that the calf came from the fire, just as it was—Hey, presto! Wonderful! The hypocrite religion makes supernatural claims, and they're ridiculous and they're lying and they're dishonest.

I spoke a few weeks back, and as we were closing, I mentioned a friend of ours for whom I pray. I pray that he would bring himself into submission to the word of God. But where does he go? He goes to a congregation that preaches hypocrite religion. And what's his attraction? "Oh," they tell him, "you are so gifted. You are so empowered. You are so special and important.

You're a warrior in the spiritual war. Pray, brother, pray! Call down the powers of heaven." It would be much better if they actually told him the truth.

But that's the attraction to hypocrite religion, or at least one of the attractions, I should say—this idea that by doing something, that by going there, that by being amongst those people, you're special. You're special! You won't hear anyone tell you in those churches that you're lower than a worm and that you're dust on the ground, and that God with but a thought could destroy you. I'm telling you now, it's all uppy, uppy, uppy. "You're special. You're wonderful. You're great. You don't have to change a thing. Think positive thoughts. You can do it! You can do it!"

Scripture doesn't tell us that we can do it. And every time someone is under this impression that they can do it, I'll tell you what they're worshiping, they're worshiping a golden calf that they claim has come from the fire. Rubbish and nonsense. They're worshiping a man-made image that they claim has come from the fire, miraculously. It's just been poured out upon us. A gospel that is designed to please man. A man-pleaser's gospel. A gospel of compromise, a gospel where God's word is not held out as the truth, a gospel of idolatry with its claim of supernatural power and supernatural, extra-biblical revelation.

Remember, when Aaron was making that calf, Moses was on the mountain receiving the true word of God. God was actually writing His law on the tablets of stone. Moses came down from the mountain with a good part of the word of God under each arm. Aaron is claiming a different revelation—that God can be worshiped as a calf; that the power of God is revealed in the shape of a bull or a bullock. Nonsense and rubbish.

This is an alternate gospel, a gospel designed to please man; designed by its very nature to gather a crowd of people who want not to serve God, who want not to take up a cross, who want not to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. It's designed to gather people who want to get from religion for themselves what they want: I want a wife. I want a job. I want money. I want a car. I want a farm. I want, I want, I want. I want notoriety. I want fame. I want popularity. I want gifts. I want people to be convinced that I'm so wonderful.

I want, I want, I want. As though God is Santa Claus with a big lolly bag up in the sky who just gives you whatever you ask for because He wants you to be so convinced that you're special and good. That's not what He wants. What does He want? Humility; people who fear God; people who abase themselves before God; people who love God; people who know His glory; people who desire to do nothing other than serve Jesus Christ.

The greatest of all commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Do you realize that if we do that how radical we would be? We never get there. None of us ever gets there in this body of flesh, in this world of sin. We're never going to get there. We're on the way to being perfected, but perfection has not yet been granted. But that's the way that we are to be moving.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you realize how radical we would be if we did that, just for an hour? How incredibly different to what we now

are we would be? And yet that is what God requires. Love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, treat your neighbor better than you treat yourself. That “love your neighbor” is not the love of sappy, soft, huggy, fluffy happiness. It’s the love of putting someone over and above yourself. It’s the love of saying, “You are more important to me than I myself” It’s a love that’s willing to forgive. I’ve heard that line, “Well, if you want to love your neighbor, you must love yourself, because it says, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ If you don’t love yourself, you can’t love your neighbor.” What a terrible twisting and misapplication of a text that is.

It’s been a long time, I don’t remember ever actually doing it, but it’s been a long time since I looked in the mirror in the morning and said, “You know, Scott? I just love you. You’re just a great guy. And I’m just so happy that I could know you.” It’s been a long time since I thought that way, if ever I did. And people try to make out that you have to have that attitude towards yourself before you can love your neighbor. What a load of nonsense. What a load of nonsense!

We’re supposed to see ourselves as nothing. And then seeing ourselves as nothing, we see the image of God being carried in our neighbor and we honor and reverence God through loving our neighbor. The way that we love ourselves is, we’re very forgiving of ourselves. Have you ever thought of that? We always understand our own sins. We’re always willing to forgive ourselves and excuse our own wickedness. Well, how are we to love our neighbor? We always give ourselves the essentials of life, and sometimes more than we need. How are we to love our neighbor? We clothe ourselves. How are we to love our neighbor? We care for ourselves. How are we to love our neighbor? As we love ourselves.

Therefore, though we preach a gospel that is confrontational, though we preach a gospel that is hard, though we preach a gospel that they do not want to hear, it’s the same gospel that saved us. It’s the gospel that we had to hear. It’s the gospel that we had to submit to. Somebody loved us enough to tell us the truth, and we’ve been commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That’s the way it works. That’s the true gospel.

We’re to be pleasers of God, not pleasers of man. Yes, they are to look at our lives and see transformed lives, lives that are lived in obedience to Jesus Christ; lives that are ever increasingly being conformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Yes. But the message itself cannot be played with. The message itself cannot be changed and it cannot be compromised, because it’s God’s message. It’s God’s gospel. It’s God’s revelation of Himself in and through Jesus Christ. We cannot be man-pleasers. We must be God-pleasers, and God must take pleasure in our lives. We’ll close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we give you thanks and we give you praise for your word, the Bible. We give you thanks and we give you praise that you have made us worshipers in and through the work of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord our God, as we go from this place this day, I pray, O Lord, that you would make us obedient to your will in all things, that you would help us to show people the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we do, and that we would speak the truth without fear, without favor; but yet, even so, that we would speak the truth in love, for we must love our neighbor. Lord, may we love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. May we grow ever more in our obedience to that greatest of all commandments. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.