

“From Tribulation to Apocalypse” Pt 2

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

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Jeff: Father, we thank You and we rejoice in You. We thank You that You’ve given to us faith that we might exercise it, that we might reach out to the object of our faith which is Jesus Christ, whom You sent into the world because You loved us even when we were Your enemies. Father, thank You that You have supplied us with every good thing in Him, and that You’ve given to us Your Holy Spirit to dwell in us, to prompt us to pray, to give us direction for our lives according to Your word. Father, thank You for His work in us.

Lord, thank You for the way in which You are shaping and molding us. Lord, You’ve called us in Your word to be men. And so, Lord, we strive to be just that. You’ve called those of us who are in marriage to be good husbands, and we strive to be that as well. You’ve called us to be good citizens in whatever kingdom we are in, and we strive to do that.

But all of this striving is not of us; it is of Your Spirit working in us. And though that doesn’t relieve us of the responsibility to strive it gives us a great deal of comfort to know that our lives are being directed, steered, even domineered by You. And Father, we’re thankful for that, and we praise You for it. And we ask that You will continue to persevere in us, that our lives might be pleasing in Your sight, and that they might amount to something not for our kingdom, but that they might amount to something for Your kingdom.

Father, we’re thankful for Bruce and Becky and for them getting through this COVID. We’re thankful for the way You’ve blessed Kevin and enabled him to be released from the hospital. We pray, Father, for each of them, that they would continue to be strengthened in their bodies.

We also pray for our brother Sig and are thankful for his time among us. We’re thankful, Lord, that You’ve given him to us for the years that You did. And now, Lord, we pray that You would bless him, that You’ll strengthen him. Our Father, we ask that You would bless him in his thinking, according to the theology that he knows and that he has learned from Bruce all of these years that he has known from Your word. And Father, we pray that he will not be swayed by the lips of man, but that he will always be domineered by Your word. Father, we ask that Your hand would be upon him in his every endeavor.

Lord, we pray that You’ll be with us, especially in this country of ours. And Lord, we ask that You’ll help us to walk worthy, not as citizens of the United States but first of all as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And Lord, let us do so in the knowledge that our lives are hidden in You. And so, Lord, let us not bow down before men, but let us serve You with all of our hearts and with all of our might and with all of our vigor.

So Lord, as we turn to Your word today we ask that You’ll bless us and give us that wisdom and insight and knowledge, that we might pursue You all of our lives, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: I’m stopping just a slide or two back from where we stopped the last time. And I’m stopping there because I want you at least to be able to make a little sense out of what I’m saying. And I basically said to you the last time that we have to ask ourselves what’s

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being said here. Are we being called to be worthy, to make ourselves worthy? And I said to you that the answer to that is no. We’re not being called to make ourselves worthy; God is the One who makes us worthy. And He makes us worthy through faith and by His power.

Now I’m going to take that up in just a minute. But what I’d like to do is that I would like to read the first chapter, actually a little less than the first chapter. I’d like for us to read the last part of the chapter, verse 4 to the end. So let me direct your attention to that reading. Actually Don, do you have it? Would you read it.

Don Maurer: Yes.

Jeff: Read verse 4 to the end of the chapter in 2 Thessalonians 1.

Don: Okay. Actually my version starts the sentence in verse 3. Do you still want me to start with 4?

Jeff: Well, if you have to. *(Laughter)* Yes, go ahead; that’s fine.

Don: Jeff, I don’t care what anybody says. Your closet New King James is showing.

Jeff: I’m going to go ahead and read this. *(Laughter)* Go ahead.

Don: *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: So God is the One who makes us worthy, and He does so by faith. And He is the One who gives us the faith, that we might reach toward the Object of our faith who is Jesus Christ, who Himself makes us worthy before His Father. And so God is the One who makes us worthy.

The interesting thing about it is that faith is the instrumental means by which He does that. Again He is the One who gives that means to us. But He also does that through the means of grace. And what are the means of grace. Well, “by His power” is indicative of that means of grace.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves is: what power, what expression of power is he talking about? He actually tells us what that is, if I can get this to work. I can’t. *(Laughter)* I can’t because you actually need to put the stick drive into the

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computer. There you go. You know, it's a slow morning, Matt; I'm working on it.
(Laughter)

So what's the power that we're talking about? I think the power is found in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. Don, do you have that?

Don Maurer: Yes.

Jeff: Would you read that?—1 Thessalonians 1:5.

Don: Here, Jeff, you can read it.

Transcriber's Note: Don passes his Braille Bible to Jeff.

Jeff: Okay. (Laughter)

Don: All right. *“You are all sons of light and sons of the day.”* Oh, what am I doing? That's 5:5. Oh, brother!

All right; here we go: 1:5. *“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sakes.”*

Jeff: Yeah. Our gospel came to you not only in word, but in power. In other words, the Word coupled with the Spirit's activity because it's His word; He inspired it; is the power that came to bear upon us so that we might exercise faith, and reach toward Christ who is the Object of our faith.

So I guess what I'm saying to you this morning is to think about this in light of the fact that we have the power of God when the word of God is proclaimed or taught. In other words, it is this Word that is God's word. And when that Word is taught it has a way of becoming a means of grace for us.

I want you to think about that for just a minute. When you lead your family in family worship, when you gather your grandchildren around and you speak the Scriptures to them, when you talk to your wife or when you interact with your friends, one of the things that is actually most meaningful is not just the reading of the Scriptures—though that is meaningful,—but the reading and the explaining of Scripture. In other words, when you give the sense of what that Scripture means, therein lies the power of God as He uses Scripture as a means of His power in order to transform lives.

Now for what purpose? This is where we ended the last time. For what purpose does all of this take effect? And the answer to that is citizenship. I want you to see this; this is actually in Philippians.

The reason I'm taking you to Philippians is because when you look at 1 and 2 Thessalonians you find a church that is really in conflict with the local government. The reason I say that is because here you find the local government in Thessalonica saying that these men are acting contrary to the decrees and the dogma of Caesar. And so we find a church in conflict with the state.

Now what I want you to see is that God has a purpose for working in us. That purpose for working in us is multiple, and yet here is an aspect of it. In Philippians 1:27 we read: *“Only let your manner of life be worthy.”*

And then in 3:20 we read, *“But our citizenship is in heaven.”* Now when you think about the word *politic*, this is the word from which we get that word. And when we look at Philippians 1:27 we find the verb form of that word. And when we look at 3:20 we find the noun form of that word. In other words both of these words have the idea of being a citizen in mind. One is a verb form and one is a noun.

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So what he’s saying is this: Let your manner of life be worthy of your citizenship in heaven. And then, “but our citizenship is in heaven.” That’s the idea.

And so when we think about why it is that God is working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, one of the things that He’s doing is, He’s making us good citizens in His kingdom, a kingdom that is here presently. And so we think about it this way. God’s kingdom is a kingdom that’s here, and that is coming.

I want you to think about that for just a minute. When you think about His kingdom, it is in one sense displacing current kingdoms. I want to give you a way of thinking about that for just a minute. Go with me to Luke’s Gospel, chapter 11. In verse 14 you find basically two groups.

Transcriber’s Note: Luke 11:14-15, ESV. *“Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzeboul, the prince of demons.’”*

Jeff: First of all you find those who think that Jesus is driving out demons by the prince of demons. And then a little bit later you find that there are those who are asking for a sign.

Now the Scripture oftentimes does this. It oftentimes puts the structure that is going to follow in the dialogue itself. So for instance in verse 14 notice what’s going on. Now He—Jesus—*“was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke and the people marveled. But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzeboul, the prince of demons.’”* There’s our Beelzeboul group. *“While others, to test Him, kept seeking from Him a sign from heaven.”* There’s our sign group.

So we have our Beelzeboul group which is from 14 to 23, and then our sign group which is from verse 29 to verse 32. Actually our Beelzeboul group goes down to verse 26.

Now you’ll notice that the dialogue actually gives us the structure; do you see that? It gives us the structure for thinking about what is going to come next. So let me put it on the board here. Verse 14 gives us the dialogue. And it tells us that there are two groups. There are those who are thinking that He is doing this by the power of Beelzeboul. And then there are those who seek to test Him, asking for a sign, okay? And we’ll just use this generically. From 14-26 we find the Beelzeboul group. And then from 29-32 we find that he picks up with the idea of those who are asking for a sign.

Now that leaves for us verse 27-29.

Transcriber’s Note: Luke 11:27-29, NKJV. *“And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’”*

“But He said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who hear and word of God and keep it!’”

“And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, ‘This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.’”

Jeff: What’s going on there? What’s happening there? Well, it’s just this sweet old lady saying, “Wow! You’re great! So blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you suckled on!” What in the world is going on there?

Don Maurer: She was the first Roman Catholic. *(Laughter)*

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Jeff: I’m not going to spend a lot of time here. But if you look, one of the things that you realize in the Beelzeboul group is this. You realize that herein we find an answer to why this lady is here. So for instance He tells the story about the strong man. *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor.”* Now listen to what he says next. *“His armor in which he trusted.”*

Okay. So now we’re supposed to think that the man has trusted in something material, something like armor. And then He tells this story in verse 24. Let’s just stay with this theme of Beelzeboul and spirits. He says, *“An unclean spirit is driven out. And he goes through arid places.”* He goes through desert places; he can’t find a place to rest, so it returns. It returns with seven others.

Incidentally, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of Satan is not divided. Why? Because one demon driven out now gets seven to agree with him, and he goes back to where he actually fled from. And where did he flee from? A house. But Jesus isn’t talking about a house; He’s talking about a person. And He says, “But wait. That person is better than he was before; he’s all cleaned up.” He’s talking about being externally cleaned up. He’s not internally cleaned up. If he were internally cleaned up the spirit would find no home in him. He’s only externally cleaned up.

What does that mean? Good works; he’s done some good deeds. He thinks he’s okay. So again, it’s a man who has trusted in his external works, his external deeds.

Now all of a sudden the woman comes into play. What does the woman say? “Wow, You are wonderful, Jesus! Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts that suckled You!” And He said, “no, no, no; nothing external about it.” In other words, that would be like the man trusting in his armor. That would be like the man who renovated his life with good deeds; it’s not enough. And Jesus says, “Blessed is the one who hears—the one who believes, the one who savingly understands what I’m saying.” That’s the idea. And so what we have here is that we have nothing external, this idea of belief.

And then the sign; notice the sign. People ask for a sign, and Jesus says no. Yes?

Brave Man: Jeff, in my version the verse says, *“But even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.”* Isn’t the “into practice” kind of an external thing as you’re kind of approaching it?

Jeff: Yes, but what He’s saying is, there has to be that seed that is planted in you that grows up and then produces the fruit.

Brave Man: It sounds like my translation is a little different. Even when you talked about the armor,--

Jeff: What does it say?

Brave Man: It’s a little different. *“Until someone even stronger attacks him and overpowers him, and strips him of his weapons and carries off his belongings.”* And it goes on to say, *“Anyone who isn’t working with Me actually works against Me.”*

Jeff: What version are you using?

Brave Man: I’m not sure. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Okay.

Brave Man: It’s an online version; it’s the *New Living Translation*.

Jeff: Oh, okay. Like we talked about before, that’s going to be a little more on the thought-for-thought side. And I’m getting to the kingdom, so hanging there. Let’s think

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about the sign for just a minute. Jesus says, *“No sign will be given to this evil generation except the sign of Jonah.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: The sign of Jonah is what? The sign of Jonah is preaching, right? Remember what we just said: hearing the word savingly is what matters. And like we said, hearing the word savingly is going to bear fruit; it’s going to bear externals. But it has to start with the internal.

So then He says, “Do you remember the queen of the South?” The queen of the South came and listened to who? Solomon. *“One greater than Solomon is here.”* “Do you remember Jonah? Jonah went and preached to Nineveh, and they repented at his preaching. And One greater than Jonah is here.” And who is this? This is obviously Jesus Himself.

Now let me show you the difference here. The difference is this. He is not of the kingdom of Beelzebub; He is His own kingdom. Now you have to think about this for just a minute because I think this is powerful when you grab hold of it. Here we have a queen who is converted by listening to Solomon. Here we have a kingdom that is converted by listening to Jonah. But here we have Jesus, who Himself is a kingdom. He doesn’t convert a queen; He doesn’t convert a kingdom; He brings His kingdom.

And that corresponds to the prayer *“Thy kingdom come.”* In other words, Lord, bring Your kingdom to earth. Don’t just convert queens and nations. Subvert kingdoms; subvert queens and kings, and bring Your kingdom into their lives. And that’s the idea. Matt?

Matt Kail: But isn’t the sign of Jonah that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, and Jesus was in the earth for three days and rose again from the dead? So that’s the sign of Jonah that’s given to the generation. There then is the power.

Jeff: Yes. Here’s the interesting thing, though. It’s in Matthew where He actually says this, right? He’s a preacher and he’s in the belly of the whale for three days. In Matthew you find Him doing something a little different from what I think He’s doing in Luke. He leaves off being in the belly of the whale three days. He doesn’t actually draw the typology so tightly as He does in Matthew. And I think that what He’s focusing on here is the preaching, the wisdom, the proclamation that converted. And so what is it? Well, it’s this idea of needing to hear the Word that He’s trying to press upon them here.

So I think the idea is that you get this kingdom and this kingdom. But this kingdom is not anything like the world’s kingdom. It’s that kingdom which comes and supplants the world’s kingdoms.

And I think that’s the idea, right? How then is the kingdom present in the world? Well, the kingdom is present in the world through the church. It’s not any kind of extra thing that God does in order to bring about His kingdom in the world; it’s the church. And so, for instance, it’s the church proclaiming the gospel. And when the church proclaims the gospel, and the gospel comes to settle in the hearts of presidents and Congressmen and judges and regular people, what begins to happen? They hear it savingly, and then their lives begin to reform according to God’s word. And they begin to act like Christians in the sphere that they’re in. But it’s because they’re in the church hearing the word of God proclaimed and taught. And that takes its effect in their lives. Does that make sense?

Brave Man: Yep.

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Jeff: So it's not an extra thing that God establishes like a parachurch. For instance we have a tendency to think to ourselves that well, if we just establish this Bible study for judges then we can really teach them how to judge according to Christian principles. No! It's just being in the church and living day by day.

You know, it's kind of an interesting thing. I probably shouldn't say this on tape. But anyway it's fascinating to see that kind of work itself out in life.

David Miller: You know, the Chinese Communists say that the church is subversive. And I always thought that's not true, because Christians are better citizens. But it's the kingdom of God that's subverting Communism and turning Communism on its head.

Jeff: Yeah, that's right; absolutely. Well, okay; the key point is that living by faith when the state opposes the church means just living the Christian life. And when you live the Christian life you will be found to be either supportive or in conflict with the state at any given moment.

I want to say a couple of things about church and state because again, just to remind you, in Thessalonica here you find the local authorities saying, “Hey, these guys are acting contrary to Caesar's dogma.” So they drag them before the magistrates.

Now I want you to think about this for a minute. We're going to talk about this a little bit as we go with some of the different encounters that we find. But what was it that they wanted in Thessalonica? They wanted the preservation of their civil order. They said, “These guys are turning the world upside down.” And what did they desire? They desired their world not to be turned upside down.

Now I want you to think about this. We want the same thing that the pagan wants. Really, at its core, we want the civil order. But the pagan wants civil order grounded upon the dogma of Caesar. The Christian wants civil order grounded upon the dogma of Christ. So we both want civil order. But civil order is going to look different depending on your perspective.

And so the church and the state are separate institutions. But the Christian says that the only submission that one can offer the state is due submission in the Lord. In other words, I offer the state myself as a servant, as a citizen, only as I offer myself in the Lord, which means—and you already know this—that I can only do certain things, or I can only refrain from doing certain things. If the Lord said to me, “Do not do this,” and the state said to me, “You must do this,” I need to obey the Lord. If the state says you must do this, and the Lord says you must not, I must obey the Lord. And so I can only be a good citizen insofar as I am a good citizen of God's kingdom first. You're looking at me like you're not—

Ted Wood: No; it's just a lot to take in.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I'm trying to think about all the implications of it.

Jeff: Yeah. So no sins of omission or commission for the sake of the state. In other words I am not allowed to do—just like I said—something that God forbids. Nor am I allowed to offer some behavior that God has said is off limits, right? So I am not allowed to commit sins of omission or commission for the sake of the state.

Now think about this. The state that says, “No religious or civil liberty,” a state that fails to protect life, a state that hinders private property, in all of those things the state

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cannot expect my full submission. I am going to have to say no at some point, because the state is basically impinging upon what God has commanded for me.

And so there are certain things—and this is the difficulty—there are certain things where we’re going to have to say no. So the question really becomes, how shall we live? How shall we live in this world? And the answer is that I want to give you a few things. I want to give you a few ideas just as we think about this in light of 2 Thessalonians.

First of all, *we must value truth and not live by lies*. You know, as Christian people it would be easy for us to say that since we don’t want to upset the apple cart we’ll live by the dogma of Caesar. What’s the dogma of Caesar? Well, the dogma of Caesar today is to protect trans-gender lies. We need to acknowledge trans-gender boys and girls. Biological boys are no longer boys; they’re girls. And biological girls are no longer girls; they’re boys, and so we need to do that.

And you know, that’s the direction of it. For instance, about four weeks ago I ran into a grandpa who was lamenting to me. He said, “You know, I have a grandchild that is a boy who is now telling me that he’s a girl. And I’ve told him, ‘I will support you in whatever way I can. I will even call you a different name and use different pronouns.’”

And the grandson said, “It’s not enough.”

And he said, “What more can I say?”

And the grandson said, “You must believe that I’m a girl.”

And he said, “I don’t know how I can do that.”

And I said, “You must not do that. I mean, you must not do that.” And the point is that you can already see the progression, right?—the progression from all right; I will fudge; I will use pronouns that I know aren’t true, to the point that I will actually believe the lie. And there’s a progression; there’s a downward slide. And if we’re believers who value truth, then we must not countenance a lie. Yes?

Don Maurer: There was a teacher recently in one of the public schools in Beaver County who would not cave in. And he was temporarily fired, but they got him reinstated again. That’s what it’s coming to in our society.

Jeff: It is, yeah. Yes?

John Gratner: And we do well not to concede any ground on something like this. Nonsense is nonsense even if it’s fashionable and suggested at some time. If we don’t have a debate about the trans-gender, we reject the fact that there even is one, right?

Jeff: Yes.

John: It’s a totally different discussion than do boys know that they’re boys who like other boys and date other boys? That’s a different discussion. The whole agenda has pushed into the world that you don’t even have to be one thing or the other, or know what they are or be able to define them.

Jeff: Yep.

John: And it’s pushed us all into the world of nonsense. In accepting the idea that nonsense is something to talk about, it’s arguing them into the ground.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: You know, your phone doesn’t work if the ones and zeros aren’t ones and zeros. The idea of non-binary is nonsense, and the debate has to start there. They have to prove that that nonsense is debatable in order to even continue the discussion, or else we’re arguing their lie and giving it some credence.

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Jeff: Yeah.

John: As someone has described it—maybe Jordan Peterson—this isn’t a lie; this is an anti-truth.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: It’s diametrically opposed to what reality even is. So if we’re going to talk about the Creator of reality, and His reality being prescriptive for everything because He created man in His image—“*male and female He created them*”,--that’s not in dispute. They have to prove that’s not true.

Jeff: Yeah.

John: We don’t concede any ground on that.

Jeff: And we can’t. But this is the thing: it has to be in everything; I mean in everything. Every one of us has to be committed to the truth, to the value of truth and to speaking the truth and calling out the lie, and saying, “That’s nonsense.” I mean, we have to be able to say that to the people we love most. “That’s a nonsensical conversation. And if you don’t want to enter into a great deal of difficulty about that, we’re going to have to stop talking because that is nonsense.”

And the problem is, we won’t do that because we’re relationally oriented. And I can’t tell you how many times I talk to people who will do stuff because they’re related, or they’re in some sort of friendship, or because of their job, or because of this or because of that. And if that’s the way we’re going to live, we’re always going to be walking toward the edge of the cliff; eventually we’re all going to fall off of it. At some point we have to be willing to lose the relationship, to lose the job—you name it. Because if we’re not, we’re all going off the cliff because that’s where we’re headed. Yes?

Brave Man: So back in the Thessalonica days, I mean, he’s kind of affirming us then. It almost sounds like they were having some of the things that we’re having today.

Jeff: Well, they were. When you think about the Artemas cult, the cult of Diana in Ephesus, I can’t say this to you men because we’re all men here, right? The Artemas cult was the cult of fertility. Artemas was a loose woman, right? The image that they found archaeologically for Diana is a pornographic image, okay? A big-breasted woman, right?

Ted: A many-breasted woman.

Jeff: Yeah, a many-breasted woman; I was going to leave that out—an alien-breasted woman! But the point is that this Artemas cult—this Diana cult—was all about promiscuity.

And so, for instance, there’s a guy by the name of Clinton Arnold, who has done a lot of work on magic in the early first-century church. And one of the things that he’s discovered—and you can see this in the New Testament—is that those who were connected with the Diana cult were oftentimes connected with this magic background, this witchcraft background. And so he has discovered that there were spells like Love Potion #9 that you cast on somebody in order to get him to do your bidding and all of that sort of thing, right?

So one of the ways that I’ve thought about this is that here’s a center for pornography right in the midst of the city. It has temple prostitutes. It has women as temple prostitutes, there are male temple prostitutes; there are children in there, right? So a lot of debauchery that goes on there is going on today.

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But I want to say one thing about that. If you read Augustine’s *City of God*, one of the things that Augustine says is this, because we actually think of ourselves as not as bad as the Roman culture. The Greek and Roman cultures were really bad. But if you read Augustine, Augustine actually says that they won’t even put effeminate men on stage and do things that are shameful to do, even though they’re being done behind the scenes.

So in other words he knows that there are these kinds of relationships taking place in the culture, in the temples, and so on. But they won’t put them on stage; at least they won’t put them on stage. We put them on TV and in the movies. We are way beyond where the Romans were in terms of our permissibility toward these things. So does that give you some—

Brave Man: I just want to understand a little bit of what their day-to-day struggles were that you’re referring to.

Jeff: Yes. When you think about this guy’s day-to-day struggle, he’s been involved in the Artemas cult, right? He believed in magic, right? He’s now a believer, and he’s walking to work, and he’s passing the Artemas cult. And he has this pull to go back into the Artemas cult.

Think about what he’s thinking. I mean, couldn’t he be thinking that the reason why he’s being pulled back into the Artemas cult is because somebody has cast a spell on him and he’s being pulled back? Is there a counter-magic working?

I think this is why in Ephesians that Paul is talking about the power of God exercised in Christ over and over and over again. There is no power in that darkness; there is power in the light. And so I think he’s trying to drive home some basic truths. No, it’s your lusts. That’s what he says in chapter 4 or 5. It’s your lust that’s carrying you away; there’s no magic about it, right? Yes?

Don Bishop: We shouldn’t compare ourselves with those cultures; there’s a big difference.

Jeff: What?

Don: There’s a big difference; they didn’t have the truth. The big difference with us is that we’ve had the truth here in America, and all of Europe, and now we’re turning our backs on it. So who’s going to have freer thinking?

Jeff: Yeah; that’s right. Yeah, that’s it. Yes?

Ted: This is a very excellent conversation. And I’m just thinking about being gentle as doves and wise as serpents when we deal with those in our own congregations who are dealing with all of this kind of stuff. My concern is that Christians are adopting the agenda of the world. So the agenda says that the big issue is sexual identity or gender identity. And we’re very quick to go and fight that battle. But I don’t want to get on the world’s agenda.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: (*Unclear*) I mean, we’re saturated with this diversity.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: Diversity, equity, inclusion. It ought to be spelled d-i-e. (*Laughter*) But I thought about how to handle that, because I’m going to be in a situation where that is pushed. And I think I will even deal with it. What I will have to do is to say that I’m a Christian, and this is what I believe. And God sets the agenda and the standards for everything, rather than trying to get into it.

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Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: The enemy has thought this through in detail.

Jeff: Yeah. And this is my frustration for a long time. Let's put it this way: the church has been feminized, okay? We've said that it is.

But now guess what has happened. What happens is that the culture has said, “Hey, there is no gender; it's non-binary.” And all of a sudden men are waking up to the fact that hey, I'm a man, and the church has been feminized.

And we hear about this going on in the culture. And so we hear a boy saying, “I'm a girl.” And what do we say? “Oh yeah? Well I'm a man!”

Wait a minute! We have waged war with the world, and the world has said, “I'll choose the weapons. The weapon is gender.” And all of a sudden we're right into the agenda. And it's like wait a minute; that's not where we ought to be.

Where we ought to be is, that's not even the conversation point. I'm a man; I'm going to act like a man; I will do things because I'm a man. I don't need to look—and neither do you,—you don't need to look at yourself in the mirror and say, “I am a man.” You don't need to do that; you're a man, okay? And so act like one in the world.

And what does that mean? It means being bold for truth, not mean. It means being resolute for truth.

I'll tell you what else it means. It means cultivating faith and family in some winsome, bold, powerful ways. It means being a good dad. It means being a wonderful husband. It means not being the guy on TV, right? (*Unclear*) I hate the caricature; don't live up to it or down to it. Instead, cultivate faith and family.

Be united. Look, I want to tell you something right now. The fact of the matter is, the church is fragmented because there are some people that are bent out of shape with others because of masks or vaccinations. Forget about that stuff! The fact of the matter is, we've got to be united as Christians to face what's coming at us. And it can't be around the non-issues, the nonsensical issues. It can't be around the non-issues. It's got to be around the gospel. If we don't have the gospel as our center core we are in big trouble, because we are going to get slaughtered.

Frankly I want you to know. Read history; the church gets slaughtered anyway. But I'd rather get slaughtered happily with you than against you.

Ted: This is the point I keep bringing up: the unity of the church. It's absolutely fractured, and we all share it. The unity of the church is fractured.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: Believe me. And we all share it. We really don't care about other Christians, other groups.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I was talking to a fellow who started coming to our church, a Presbyterian church. And he's from a big nondenominational church.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And we agree that the big nondenominational church didn't care about any other church but what was going on in their church. I mean they're selective; they have selective fellowship and selective communion. But it's not unbridled communion. I mean, that's our problem. At least the roman Catholics can say, “What does the Pope say?” I

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mean, at least they can point to that. Nancy Pelosi is supporting abortion; she ought to be denied Communion. At least that’s a conversation. We could not agree with that.

Jeff: You know, let me say this to you.

Ted: It’s horrific.

Jeff: Let me push back, because I agree with you. But I want to push back to you on the practicality of it.

Ted: Yeah.

Jeff: Because I struggle even to know what’s going on in different churches in my own presbytery, and they’re in my denomination.

Ted: Yeah.

Jeff: So it’s not that I don’t want to know. It’s just that I’m busy. Somebody sends me an email and I’m like, oh, that’s great; that’s a wonderful thing; I didn’t even know that.

“Yeah? Well, it’s been going on for a year now.” Oh, that’s great!

So here’s the way I liken it. The way I liken it is to a family reunion. The church is a family reunion. Even in a local body is a family reunion.

For instance there are going to be people who gather together and visit with one another. And it’s going to look like groups. And it can be cliques and we need to stop that, but most of the time it’s groups of people gathering together.

And you know, when you go to a family reunion, what happens? The cousins are all around with one another. All of the older folks take their chairs out and they all sit. The ladies gather somewhere, right? That’s a family reunion.

But if Grandpa is walking across the yard, and he tumbles and falls, everybody is trying to help him up, right? They make sure he’s okay, they get him his chair. The kids are getting him water, and so on. Maybe he needs a cup of water—whatever, right? But the idea is that they’re helping him out. And then once they find out that he’s okay and being ministered to, they go back to their groups. And they have fun; the kids are playing again, and so on.

And what I liken the church to is a family; that’s the way a family interacts. And so the idea is that all of these churches can’t act like they’re all in great, close-knit fellowship with one another, because the local church can’t even act like that. So what I’m saying is, we need to minimize the temperature between us within our own local congregations, and then within churches—local bodies. And what I’m thinking is, if we can minimize the division, then the unity kind of has an opportunity to grow up a bit. If we can’t minimize the divisions—

Ted: Churches break away from churches. It’s unbelievable, all the names of all the different churches. I mean, they split and they split and they split and they split. And one group splits into parts and leaves the church. And it decides that the group doesn’t care to be with them, so they split and form a new church.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And so what do they say to the old church? They say, “You’re significantly problematic enough that I can’t come to church with you.”

Jeff: Well, what we have is that we actually have guys out there who are trying to divide the church even further, because they believe that they’re trying to purify the church by dividing it. I’m thinking of a particular individual who constantly talks about manhood. And what he’s doing is, he’ll go on these conference tours. He’ll wreak havoc

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in local churches. And then he'll go back to his own church and he'll say some different things. But what he's doing is, he's trying to divide the church on the basis of his belief that manhood ought to be the main weapon that we're fighting the culture with. And so we're in a really difficult situation as a culture because of all that's going on, and we need to be united. Yes, Bob?

Bob Busted: I'd just like to simplify this as I see it.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: We're talking about us as Christians vis-à-vis the world. It seems to me that the best we can do is to live by example, because it's very, very difficult to get involved with people in a confrontational sense. And whether it's an issue about gender, or whether it's an issue about politics, whether it's an issue about a hundred things we can talk about, it's just very difficult because I have situations on three or four of these fronts, where if I want to be confrontational, if I want to try and speak the truth when lies seem to be predominant all around me, all I'm going to do is lose friends from a long time ago; I'm going to lose friends. And I can give you example after example of situations where we're so polarized. I have friends who are so polarized that I just don't want to do it; I don't want to split that up. Yet I have strong feelings and I can't express them. All I have to do is live by example.

Jeff: Bob, I understand what you're saying. But my problem is that the person on the other side is happy to express his strong feelings that are contrary to ours. For instance I have the same kinds of situations. And those people are happy to tell me what they think about current events and how I ought to think. And so I have a choice. I could say to myself, "I'm not going to say anything," and let them rattle on, and preserve the friendship. Or I'm going to say, "Hey, you know what? You might want to stop right there. If you value the friendship you might want to stop, because I'm about ready to answer you, and you may not want to hear what I have to say."

Now I want to tell you something, Bob. I have found that I value a lot of friendships more than those people value them, because I have had many relationships where the person kept on. And I've said to myself, "They don't value this friendship as much as they value the ideas they hold." And that really tells me something. And my point is that I think we value the relationship to the point that we're willing to let them continue it.

And then I would say this to you. What happens is, that begins to affect the church. The latest Ligonier theological report shows that gender identity issues are making headway in the church. And it's making headway in the church because we are constantly inundated with that message, and it just has a way of taking root in our thinking.

Bob: But Jeff, I don't think they're happy. I think they're more stubborn or rigid; they're more absolutely in the world. And that's the way the world is going, and I'm happy with the flow. But as I say I think the better words are stubborn and rigid, strong and confrontational. Bla-bla-bla-bla-bla. They're in your face on any issue.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: And pretty soon, once you've gone that route, you've just lost a friend. I don't enjoy losing a friend because the numbers are already small, you know?

Jeff: Bob, I'm your friend. *(Laughter)*

Bob: Thank you.

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Jeff: You know what I tell my kids? I tell my kids that if you have two or three good friends, that’s all you need.

John: It begins to reveal where allegiances are. Does everyone here attend the same physical church?

Brave Men: No.

John: Right. And so we use this word “church” a lot; we don’t always give it the same definition. And in all these discussions we all use the same vocabulary, but we don’t use the same dictionary. And that’s very important when we’re talking to people about these current event issues. You know, they can’t even define a woman, but they say that something means something else, and we don’t think that means what it means. Diversity, equity and inclusion do not mean the same things to a lot of people that they do. It should actually be spelled I-e-d; that’s what they’re trying to use it for—an explosive device in the culture.

But the church that we are a part of, and why we are all gathered here this morning, is because we are a part of the only church there is, which isn’t divided. And if someone is working against that church, maybe their allegiance is in question and they should be confronted with the truth. As Paul says in Ephesians 4, *“There is one body and one Spirit.”* That’s what we share; that’s why we’re all here this morning. It’s the only reason we’re here this morning, right? Exactly; it’s why I get out of bed and come here and I have to listen to Don. *(Laughter)* But we share the same Spirit with that guy, and Don with us, right? *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”* That’s a pretty good creed; how does that work itself out? In all the places that we go it works itself out, but there’s really only one. So that’s what the unity is. We work for that unity. But when we see that Spirit in somebody else, that’s our brother.

Jeff: You have the last word and then we’ve got to go.

Jim Hamilton: I was going to say that in my lifetime I’ve come across homosexual people that I’m friendly with.

Jeff: Sure.

Jim: And I’ll continue to be friendly with them even though I don’t agree with their lifestyle. But I don’t get into conversations where I’m trying to change their lifestyle. They are what they are. And I can have a relationship with them when they are that way. And I think the Lord wants us to be kind to these people and to be friendly with these people, even if we don’t—

Mike Davis: Lead them to Christ.

Jeff: There’s a difference though, between a person whose sin you are not being forced to have your nose rubbed into their sin, right? There’s a difference between that person who comes to the executive table and says, “You know, I want to tell you about my relationship that I’m in,” as if that’s the most important thing, and so on.

Jim: Well, in this case this person lives with a same-gender person, so she has her relationship set, and you are involved with both of them. And you can be helpful or you can be obnoxious.

Jeff: Yes. And I think you should be helpful with the gospel in mind. You don’t have to be mean about it.

Jim: Right.

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Jeff: But what you don’t have to do is turn a blind eye to the gospel every time they come around. If you turn a blind eye to the gospel every time they come around, then it goes back to allegiance again. You’ve got to ask yourself, where is my allegiance?

Jim: Well, I’ll never agree that that’s the proper way to live. But that’s the way they do it, so I can live with that.

Ted: I mean, for the person who is living in sin, consistently and committed to it, there’s only one solution, and that is conversion. They needed to be born again.

Jeff: But if you determine never to talk about what is necessary—the gospel—around them,--

Ted: Well, that’s why I say gentle as doves and wise as serpents. The timing is everything; it’s everything in life.

Jeff: It is. But I’m not talking about let me draw the Roman Road for you. I’m not talking about putting a track in front of them every time. I’m talking about letting it be a part of your natural life, right?

Ted: Let me just say this. I have a family member who is gay and in a relationship. They are poster children for gay marriages. And they’re family; we spend a lot of time with them. And they know where I stand. And if they talk about wanting to go to a drag ballet, then I start talking about what’s going on at my church. And they don’t want to hear that. So they know that they don’t bring up the subject.

Jeff: Yeah. Or even something like having them over to eat, and you know they’re gay or lesbian, or whatever. And it’s time now to get out the Bible and have a little bit of family worship. You don’t say, “We’re going to pass on this because so-and-so is here.”

Ted: This is our family practice.

Jeff: That’s right.

Ted: Feel free to join; you can stay if you want to.

Jeff: Yeah. Well, let’s pray. I think this is a fruitful discussion; I’m glad for it and I appreciate you men. Father, thank You. We pray that You’ll bless us. We pray that You’ll strengthen us by Your grace. Place Your hand upon us, Lord, for good. We ask that as You send us forth into this world that You would do so with Your Spirit. And we know that we have Him and are delighted to have Him. But Lord, we pray that You will lead us and guide us into all truth, that we’ll value that truth, that we’ll live our lives consistent with Your gospel. We pray, Lord, asking these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)