

September 22nd, 2019

The Church Life of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:73-80

What is an experimental Christian?

For those of you who are just joining us in this series, we have been looking at what is called experimental Christianity. Experimental Christianity insists that experience cannot be divorced from the Word of God. It seeks to unite what we believe with our head to what we feel in our hearts and to what we do with our hands. Rabbi Duncan who was a protestant missionary to the Jews in the 19th century said it like this:

“If you preach all doctrine, then that is all understanding and that is a monster. If you preach all experience, that is all heart and that is a monster; and if you preach all practice, that is all hands and feet and that is a monster. Preach doctrine, experience and practice.”¹

That’s why we are camping out in Psalm 119, because it marries all of these together. Psalm 119 is one of the most unique chapters in Scripture. It is the longest chapter in Scripture with 176 verses. It has 22 sections each representing one letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So it’s literally the A-Z of the Christian life. Meaning, it unfolds all the contours of the Christian life. It shows us what true happiness is, that was in **v.1-8**. It explains that we are exiles waiting for the return of our King (**v.17-24**). Last time we were together, the Psalmist showed us why God allows afflictions to come into our lives (**v.65-72**). In short, it covers the entire experience of a Christian, from birth to death.

¹ Source: <http://the-holdfast.blogspot.com/2006/02/brief-defence-of-experimental.html> Accessed September 20, 2019

The relationship between the Christian and the Church

This week, we are turning to the church life of an experimental Christian. What is the relationship between an individual Christian and the body of believers called *the church*? That is what the Psalmist is emphasizing and repeating in this section. Please look with me at v.74 “Those who fear you [that is the church] shall see me [the individual Christian] and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.” And then again in v.79 “Let those who fear you [the church] turn to me [the Christian], that they may know your testimonies.”

I believe this is perhaps the most relevant question we can ask in the day we live. How does the Christian and the Church relate to one another? To answer this wrongly is to invite trouble into our lives. Lloyd-Jones goes so far to say that “...to [not] take seriously the biblical teaching concerning the nature of the Church, [is what] accounts for most of the problems that we are confronting at the present time.”² When we as individual Christians get the doctrine of the church wrong, we get our practice of the church wrong. And when we get our practice of the church wrong, we get a whole host of other things wrong. So that is where the Psalmist is taking us today. He’s going to show us the relationship between the individual Christian and the body of believers called the church.

- ☆What Is a Christian?
- ☆Why Do Christians Exist?
- ☆How Should Christians Live?

The Big Idea...

Christians exist for the joy and strength of the church, and the church exists for the joy and strength of the Christian

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Three Volumes In One: God the Father, God the Son; God the Holy Spirit; The Church and the Last Things*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003), pg. 3 in Vol. 3

I. What Is a Christian?

The Psalmist gives us three characteristics of a Christian that are necessarily true for all Christians. If you are a Christian, these things are true about you.

1. A Christian is one who fears God

The first characteristic that the Psalmist gives of the Christian, is that a Christian is one who fears God. In v.74 and v.79, the Psalmist speaks about a group of people who fear God: v.74 “Those who fear *you*...” v.79 “Let those who fear *you*...”

The chief characteristic of those *not in Jesus Christ* is that they don't fear God. Paul says in **Romans 3:18** “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Meaning, they live their lives as if they were their own master. This is the fundamental characteristic of non-Christians: they have not been humbled. They believe that they are the captain of their own ship, and the master of their own fate. This is how King Herod was in the time of the Apostles. He was an arrogant, abusive man. When the people of Tyre and Sidon celebrated his great speech saying “This is the voice of a God, and not of a man!” we read that “Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, *because he did not give God the glory*” (**Acts 12:22-23**).³ Non-Christians do not give God the glory because they do not fear Him (cf. **Deuteronomy 25:17-18**)

But a Christian recognizes that God is His Father, and therefore he desires to please Him more, to obey Him more, to live for Him more. That's what it means to fear the Lord. The Christian is the man who realizes that he is not his own. He has come to see that He exists not for Himself, but for God. **1 Corinthians 8:6** “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” This is the first characteristic of a Christian, he fears God.

³ The words of Isaiah are spoken to every unbeliever: “You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me” or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding?” (**Isaiah 29:16**)

2. A Christian is one who hopes in God's Word

The second characteristic that the Psalmist gives of a Christian, is that a Christian is one who hopes in God's Word. Please look at v.74 again: "Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because *I have hoped in your word.*" Meaning, "I trust in it, I rely on it, my only comfort in life and death is in it."

This is a vital difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. I remember witnessing to a man a number of years ago. I was speaking about how the Word of God tells us that Jesus Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead. He scoffed at the thought that the Word could be trusted. He immediately brought up Nostradamus as a reliable guide to future events. That was very instructive to me, because it demonstrated that *everyone* places their hope in somebody's words: either the *words* of Nostradamus, or the *words* of our government, or the *words* of their own heart. Everyone places their hope for the future in some set of words.

But the Christian sets his hope in God's Word alone. When Job was at the height of his misery—his children dead, his wife and friends as his adversaries, and his health had failed, he cried out "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (**Job 13:15**). Christians live by hope. Hope in what God has promised.

What does a Christian need to hear if he is frightened? God's Word. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (**Psalm 23:4**).

What does a Christian need to hear if he fears judgment? God's Word. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (**Romans 8:1**).

What does a Christian need to hear if he feels abandoned? God's Word. "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (**Matthew 28:20**). This is the heartbeat of the Christian: hope. Not in what he sees around him.

But hope in God's Word. This is the second characteristic of a Christian: he hopes in God's Word.⁴

3. A Christian is one who is *necessarily* united to the church⁵

The third characteristic of a Christian, is that the Christian is *necessarily* united to the church. Look again at v.74 and v.79. The Psalmist speaks about the relationship between the individual Christian and the church. **v.74** "Those who fear you shall see me..." **v.79** "Let those who fear you turn to me..." Here we see the relationship between the individual Christian and the church. The

⁴ The Puritan Thomas Manton put both of these (fear of God and hope in His Word) together as the antidote against legalism and antinomianism: "And as we must not suffer our fear to degenerate into legal bondage, but hope in his mercy; so our trust must not degenerate into carnal sloth and wantonness, but so hope in his word as to fear his name." Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.,: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 281

⁵ Just as the Father is necessarily connected to the Son and vice versa, and the Holy Spirit is necessarily connected to the Father and to the Son and vice versa.

Christian is no longer *merely* an isolated individual. He is united to the whole group of those who *fear God*—which is the church.⁶

The church of both Testaments

Now that maybe new for some of you, to be applying the idea of *the church* to the OT. After all you might rightly say, the Psalmist isn't even using the word *church*. Well then why am I using it? Well simply for this reason: the church is not an invention that began in the NT. The Greek word for church is ἐκκλησία *ekklēsia* and it literally means “the called out ones.” This is a description of all of God's elect—they have been “called out” of the world to be a people for God's own possession (1 **Pet. 2:9**) whether they lived in OT or in the NT—they are all the *ekklēsia*. Our dispensational brothers and sisters miss this when they make the hard line between Israel and the church that they do. Abraham is not *merely* the father of the ethnic Jews. In a more real sense, he is the father of all the church of God. God told him in **Genesis 17:5** “No longer shall your name be

⁶ What is the church? What do we mean by the church? How do we define the church? There are three primary ways the Scripture defines the church: **1)** The invisible church **2)** The visible church and **3)** The local church. First the Scripture speaks of the **invisible church** meaning “the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Savior(1).” **Ephesians 5:25-27** speaks of the invisible church: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved *the church* and gave himself up for *her*...so that he might present *the church* to himself in splendor...that *she* might be holy and without blemish.” Christ loves and gave Himself for the whole number of God's elect. We call that the invisible church. Second the Scripture speaks of the **visible church**, meaning “the whole body throughout the world of those that outwardly profess the faith of Christ(2).” This is the outward society of all professing Christians from every nation. Now some of these are truly born again, and some are not. The Scripture speaks of the visible church in places like **1 Timothy 3:14-15** “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is *the church* of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.” The confessing church wherever she is found is the household of God and the only buttress or foundation of truth on planet earth. We call that the visible church. Third the Scripture speaks of the **local church**, meaning, “a local gathering of saints where the presence and lordship of Christ is recognized(3)” and worshipped. The Scripture speaks of the local church in several places. The book of Corinthians is addressed “to *the church* of God that is in Corinth” (**1 Cor. 1:2**). Paul wrote in **Romans 16:3-5** “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all *the churches* of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also *the church* in their house.” Likewise in the book of Acts we see Paul and Barnabas traveling through Lystra and Iconic and Antioch appointing “elders for them in every *church*” (**Acts 14:23**). These are all local churches. [(1) - James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 7; (2) - *ibid*, pg.9; (3) - Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Three Volumes In One: God the Father, God the Son; God the Holy Spirit; The Church and the Last Things*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2003), pg. 7 in Vol. 3]

called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, *for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*” Paul repeated this in **Galatians 3:29** “And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” Which is why the church is in both testaments. And this is what the NT authors claimed. Stephen in **Acts 7:38** says that Moses was with “the congregation [the *ekklēsia*—the church] in the wilderness.”

The church = *those who fear you*

So even though the Psalmist doesn't use the word “church” here in v.74 and v.79, that's what he means by saying “those who fear you.” This is one of the main ways that the NT constantly refers to Christians, as those who fear God. This is important to see. Because if you divide up your Bible into two parts, namely Israel and the Church, you are making a division where God makes none. And you will have difficulty understanding the OT. For example, the Psalms are not primarily a book for Jewish worship only, they are a book for the worship of the whole church. When we read Psalm 23 “The LORD is my shepherd” we don't say “Oh that was true of Israel, but the LORD is not our shepherd.” No. The Lord is the Shepherd of all the people of God. Jesus said in “I am the good shepherd...there will be one flock, one shepherd.”⁷ The whole Bible is for the whole people of God—both Jew and Gentile—everyone who calls on the name of the LORD.

No such thing as a solitary Christian

Alright then, back to our main point of this first section: *the individual Christian is necessarily united to the church.* There is no such thing as a Christian who is not a member of the body of Christ. Listen to how our faithful brother James Bannerman a Scottish theologian from 200 years ago said it:

The Christian “...is not left at liberty to hide that faith within his own heart, and himself to remain alone and separated from his fellow-

⁷ John 10:11; 16

believers...It is not a matter of choice, but of express obligation, with a Christian man to join with others in that public profession. The command is 'to confess Christ before men; and upon the ground of the command, then, is laid the foundation of a society, each member of which is called upon, whether he will or will not, to lift up a public testimony for his Savior jointly with other believers; and that public profession is one to be made not merely with the lips, uniting with others in a common declaration of the faith believed.'⁸

What Bannerman is saying is that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. It is a contradiction in terms.⁹ When speaking about Christians, the language of the Bible is *always* referring to the whole society of believers, not *mere* individuals.

If you are a Christian:

- You belong to the family of God (**1 Jn. 3:1**)
- You belong to body of Christ (**Rom. 12:5**)
- You are part of the one bride of Christ (**Rev. 21:22**)
- You are a living stone being built w/ others into a spiritual house (**1 Pet. 2:5**)
- You are part of the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (**1 Pet. 2:9**)
- You are part of the sheepfold (**Jn. 10:1-10**)
- You are one of the fellow citizens of the God's Empire (**Eph. 2:19**)

The most important society you belong to

Why am I emphasizing this? Because the crisis of the church today is the crisis of individualism. Christians have bowed the knee to Christ, but they don't feel like they have much obligation to the church. But the Bible is simply unintelligible to be read individualistically. You cannot understand it rightly if

⁸ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 21

⁹ *ibid*

exclude your life in the life of the church. But many evangelicals treat the church like they can take her or leave her. As if the church is optional in the Christian life. Dear saint, how do you understand your relationship to the church?¹⁰ Do you understand that your relationship to her is the most important of your existence, simply by sheer fact that it is everlasting? That's our **first point**. What is a Christian? A Christian is one who fears God, hopes in His Word, and who is necessarily united to the church.

II. Why Do Christians Exist?

In the Reformed circles that we are in, we are very quick to answer this question aren't we? Why do Christians exist? We exist for the glory of God. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. That's true. But that is not the *only* reason why we exist. The Psalmist gives us two more glorious reasons.

1. The Christian exists for the joy of the Church

First, the Christian exists for *the joy* of the Church. Please look with me again at v.74 "Those who fear you shall see me *and rejoice*, because I have hoped in your word." The Psalmist is telling us something about the deepest part of our hearts that we forget. Ask yourself: what brings you *true joy*?

I know that God has given you lots of things to *enjoy*. He's given you delicious food, and bright summer days, and rain so fresh that you can smell the air, and He's given us the gift of sex, the gift of children, the gift of families. All of these are gifts to *enjoy*. But what gives you *true joy*? Certainly we could say

¹⁰ John Calvin says this: "I will begin with the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children, not only that by her aid and ministry they may be nourished so long as they are babes and children, but may also be guided by her maternal care until they grow up to manhood, and, finally, attain to the perfection of faith. What God has thus joined, let not man put asunder (Mark 10:9): to those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother. This was true not merely under the Law, but even now after the advent of Christ; since Paul declares that we are the children of a new, even a heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26)." *ibid*, pg. xiii

that *true joy* comes when we find ourselves all alone in intimate communion with God in His Word. But even that is not the deepest joy of a Christian

The deepest joy of a Christian is when He sees others hoping in God.

That's what **v.74** is getting at. This is why the Apostle John wrote his first letter. He said in **1 John 1:4** "We are writing these things *so that our joy may be complete.*"¹¹ Meaning, 'we have joy right now because we have trusted in Christ and his Word, but our joy will only be complete when you do the same.' He said something similar in **3 John 1:4** "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."¹² **Proverbs 23:16** says it like this "My inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right."

This weekend at the men's retreat was a perfect illustration of this. On Thursday night all of us brothers listened to each other tell our testimonies of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. And there was power and joy and freedom in the room when we collectively heard how others hoped in His Word.

Dear believer isn't that where you find your greatest joy? This is perhaps the greatest argument for doing devotions together as a family. We ought to read God's Word and sing God's Word and exhort each other to believe God's Word so that our joy will be one in Him. This is the greatest argument for evangelism. We urge others to flee from the wrath to come and to put their faith in Jesus Christ, so that their joy and our joy would be one.

So dear believer, are you hungry and thirsty for joy? This is why God gave us the local church. So that we could go to others to assist us in joy. Put God's Word to the test on this. Purposely seek out someone today, this week,

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards: "In some sense the most benevolent, generous person in the world seeks his own happiness in doing good to others, because he places his happiness in their good. His mind is so enlarged as to take them, as it were, into himself. Thus when they are happy, he feels it; he partakes with them, and is happy in their happiness." quoted in John Piper's *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 110

¹² The Apostle Paul said it like this in **Phil. 2:2** "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Conversely, Paul felt his greatest anxiety over the saints (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28; Galatians 4:20 et.al.)

and ask: “How are you hoping in God’s Word? What promise are you clinging to?” Tell them you need joy. Conversely, you, dear Christian, exist to help others find their joy. **v.74** “Those who fear you shall see me *and rejoice*, because I have hoped in your word.” There are Christians who are suffering and lonely and depressed and anxious who need to hear how you are hoping in God’s Word. What promises from God’s Word are you trusting in? You don’t need to have the answers to their problems to give them joy. Just share with them the promises that God is using to encourage your spirit. Monica and I have a texting group called “the grace channel” with a couple of precious believers, and we weekly sometimes daily pass verses and passages and book quotes back and forth that God is using to build up our hope in his Word. What happens when my phone vibrates? Joy. When others are hoping in God’s word, I rejoice. Christian that first reason from this passage for why you exist. You exist for the joy of the church. And you bring others joy when you hope in His Word.¹³

2. The Christian exists in order to disciple others in the Church

The second reason the Christian exists is so that he can disciple others in the church. Please look with me at **v.79** “Let those who fear you turn to me, *that they may know your testimonies.*” Notice the subtle difference between this verse and **v.74**. In **v.74** he desired the joy of God’s people. Now he’s praying for something more: that he could be of help to God’s people. That he could “teach them how to find the same strength...that he has found in the Word.”¹⁴ Essentially he’s asking God to make him a discipler of others. ‘God I have great hope in your Word, help me to help others have that same hope.’ Dear believer, this is how God has designed the body of Christ.

¹³ “Converts to Christ should go among their afflicted and dying brethren, should read the lives of martyrs and confessors, and if possible form the acquaintance of such as have suffered great losses and trials for Christ’s sake. The apostles do not wish to afflict their brethren; yet they often reminded them of what they endured for Jesus’ sake, 2 Cor. 1:4-11; 6:8-12. A martyrdom is an awful sight, yet it has often vastly strengthened and cheered the feeble and the timid. Tillotson thought that catechizing and the Lives of the martyrs had been two main stays of the Protestant cause.” W.S. Plumer, *Geneva Series of Commentaries: Psalms*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 1054

¹⁴ Gene Cunningham, *Psalm 119: The Diary of a Captive*, (USA.,: Basic Training Bible Ministries, 2009), pg. 68

God has given every Christian a peculiar gift to help and disciple others.¹⁵

God made you specifically to help grow and disciple and nurture the faith of other believers. That's Paul's whole argument in 1 Corinthians 12. Read it for yourself and you will see. He's essentially saying that one Christian maybe full of zeal but not knowledge; another one full of knowledge but is timid; another has mountain moving faith but is suffering horribly; another can show mercy and hospitality but is always doubting and anxious. God has made us all dependent upon each other. Meaning we all need the discipleship of one another. **1 Corinthians 12:21** "The eye (the knowing man) cannot say to the hand (the zealous man) I have not need of you."¹⁶ No. Paul says it like this in **Romans 1:11-12** "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."

All of us need to be discipled or helped by others, and all of us need to help and disciple others. What does this look like? Messy. Awkward. Uncomfortable. That's why the Psalmist prayed! Consider maybe a couple of examples. Say you are a very new Christian and you don't even know how to read your Bible. Find a more mature Christian and just ask: will you teach me how to read my Bible? Can I spend some time with you when you do your devotions so I can learn how to do my devotions. Or perhaps you are a more mature Christian and you can handle several plates spinning in the air at one time. Invite a less mature Christian to your home, do life with them. Teach them how to mow the lawn or wash dishes to the glory of God. Show them what it's like to raise children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Show them how to repent when you sin in their presence and trust in God's promises. Discipleship doesn't have to be a complicated program. It's simply walking with others as you walk with Jesus. That's what it means to be a disciple. It not

¹⁵ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 336

¹⁶ *ibid*

only means to be a follower of Jesus, it means that you would help others follow Jesus. If you say you are a follower of Jesus but you are not helping others follow Jesus, then I don't know what you mean by being a follower of Jesus. That's our **second point**. Why do Christians exist? We exist for the joy of the church and in order to help others follow Christ.

III. How Should Christians Live?

How should we then live?

How should we live in light of what we've seen so far? That's how the rest of these verses come into play. Every other verse in this section supports v. 74 and v.79. Please look with me at **v.73** "Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments." He recognizes that since God knit him together, that He has the power to give him the understanding he needs to learn God's Word. But ask yourself: to what end? Why does he want understanding? So that—**v.74**—the church will see him hoping in God's word and rejoice. That's the connection.

And everything flows from that motive. He prays three verses in a row for help from the Lord.

In **v.76** he prays for **comfort** from affliction: "Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant.

In **v.77** he prays for **mercy** for his sins: "Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight."

In **v.78** he prays for **judgment** on those who persecute him: Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts."

Now why does he pray for these things? Why do you pray for these things? Why do you ask God for comfort from affliction, and mercy for your sins, and relief from those who persecute you? I know why I do. Because these things hurt. I don't like them. And that is right to pray for relief from our personal suffering and distress.

But the Psalmist has another motive. He's praying for these things *so that* —v.79—he can help and encourage and disciple others in the church. The Psalmist is challenging us at the deepest level of what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means that even our personal comfort, and mercy and relief from persecution is not merely for our own sake, but it is for the sake of the church. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 1:6** “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”

Do you see how radical it is to be a Christian? God afflicts you dear saint so that others can be comforted. God comforts you so that you can comfort others.

God has appointed every part of your life to meet its end in the good of the church.

This is what it means to be a Christian. Paul said like this to the Corinthian church “I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you...I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (**2 Corinthians 12:14-15**)

The One who lived for us

Why should we live like this for the sake of the church? Because there was One who lived like this for all us. Every part of His life was lived for the good of you and I. When He obeyed His Father, He obeyed Him with us in mind. When He suffered the cursed death on the cross, He suffered so that we would be spared. When He rose again from the dead, He laid the foundation for our future resurrection. Indeed every part of His life was a life lived for the sake

of the church—for the sake of you and me. The Scripture says this about this Man:

“He made himself nothing, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”

Philippians 2:7-11

The sinner is enslaved to self

If you are here this morning and you’ve never lived for anyone but yourself, that means that you are not a Christian. That’s what sin is: to have your mind enslaved to nothing else but your own interests your own concerns, to refuse to love and honor God and to refuse to love others as you do yourself. But God has made a way dear friend for you to be delivered from the punishment that is awaiting you. By sending Jesus into the world in the likeness of man, He was punished for all who would trust in Him. If you believe upon His name, He will take you and wash all your sins away. Paul said it like this: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Trust in Jesus dear friend and you will find a friend who will be your advocate on the great day of judgment.

Now you are free to spend your soul

For the rest of us, dear believer, this is why you can now spend and be spent for the good of the church. Yes it’s true that you will often fail at being an example for the church as one who hopes in God’s Word. Yes it’s true that you

will often fail at helping and encouraging and discipling others. But don't you see? At every point of your failure, Jesus Christ—the Son of God—has already succeeded for you. Therefore spend your soul for the sake of the church. That's why you exist. Be a source of joy for your brothers and sisters as you hope in His Word. Be a source of strength for the church as you help and encourage and disciple those for whom you exist.

Application

1. What kind of a Word has God given us?

God has given us a Word so that we can be a source of joy and strength for our fellow believers. Have you thought about the Bible like that? There was a point in Jesus ministry when He rebukes the Pharisees because they were withholding the good that they owed to their own parents by saying it's Corban, meaning it is given to God (**Mark 7:11**). Jesus said that they were using the traditions of men to make void the word of God. How fascinating! By refusing to be a blessing to others, Jesus said that they were abusing the Word of God.

God's Word is not for our own private pleasure. Ultimately there is no such thing as *merely* private devotions. He has given us the Word in order to be a source of joy and strength for the rest of the church.

2. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in a world that is starving to death for true meaningful community. The non-Christian is the most lonely and isolated man in the world because not only is He alienated from God, He is alienated from everyone else.¹⁷ What he needs to see is what the Psalmist is describing here. He needs to see Christians who exist for the joy and strength of others. A healthy church is one of the greatest witnesses of the gospel. Jesus said "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, *if you have love for one another*" (**John 13:35**). Our joy

¹⁷ "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

and strength in one another is one of the chief ways the world learns about Jesus Christ. That brings us to our third question.

3. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want the kind of church that the NT envisions. Carl Trueman puts it like this: “The New Testament places the church at the center of its practical vision of the Christian life and at the heart of the Great Commission.”¹⁸ Meaning we should understand that something is wrong when the local church isn’t the focal point of much of our energy and ambition. We should see it as unusual when a member’s life seems to constantly keep church on the periphery. “The church is God’s [creation] and not the invention of human beings.”¹⁹ Therefore we should want the kind of church that reflects His desires not our own.

4. What kind of Savior do we need?²⁰

The kind of church life that the Psalmist is envisioning here is a messy, awkward, oftentimes uncomfortable life, because it requires that we stop living isolated lives. Therefore we need a Savior who is with us in the messiest parts of Church life. And that is what Jesus has promised. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (**Matt. 18:20**). Jesus is the One who walks among the seven lamp stands of the church (**Rev. 2:1**). Dear saint, the kind of Savior that you need is the Savior you will find most when you become the source of joy and strength for other Christians. The Spirit of Jesus is always closest to the people of God. Psalm 87:2-3 “...the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God.”

¹⁸ quoted in James Bannerman’s *The Church of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. xii

¹⁹ *ibid*, pg. xiii

²⁰ With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23