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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**February 3, 2024**

**Communion Sunday - Loving God**

**Mark 12:28-34**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again thank you for this day, we thank you for this time that we can focus on you and the cross. We just continue to pray as we do that you would give us the privilege of your Holy Spirit, would you guide us through this, would you accompany us, come alongside us, Lord, and give us the ability to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as you know this is our communion Sunday, the first Sunday of the month, the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross and that the night before he died how he met with his disciples to celebrate for the last time a Passover supper. *Matthew 26* describes it, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new*

*with you in my Father's kingdom."*

So Jesus took bread and wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples if they would eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis, and we call it "the Lord's table." We meet once a month in this way, and we do so by meditating first on what it is the Lord Jesus did on the cross, by examining ourselves and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

So as you probably know, we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark and Jesus is now at the final stretch of his public ministry, his crucifixion is just days away and he's had a whole bunch of confrontations with the Pharisees. He's clearly, as we've said, poking the bear. He's kind of goading them into seeing him as such a threat that they decide they have to take him out.

He tells them the parable of the vineyard which is one that we looked at a few weeks back. Jesus uses the story of a vineyard

owner repeatedly seeking his share of the crops only to have his men beaten repeatedly until he sends his son thinking surely they're going to respect my son, but instead of respect, his son is murdered.

Jesus is clearly telling the religious leaders that God has sent them prophet upon prophet whom they have rejected and mistreated, and now the king of all prophets was there in their midst and they were about to kill him. This story wasn't lost on the Pharisees, they knew they had been called out and they wanted nothing more than to take Jesus out. And so we pick up at the story at *Mark 12:12*. It says: *And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.*

And what follows is next a series of confrontations between Jesus and these religious leaders. We saw last time how they questioned Jesus about whether taxes should be paid. Jesus calls for a coin, and he says, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* And they marveled at him.

And what quickly follows on the heels of that confrontation is yet another, this time about marriage and resurrection. This is verse 18. It says: *And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no*

*resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."*

Well, if you remember we covered this just a couple of weeks ago in our discussion about the new heaven in the book of Revelation and the question's asked, as we said, in a mocking way by these religious leaders who are just trying to make Jesus look foolish. Jesus is not about to have that. In verse 24, it says: *Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."*

We spoke at length about the new heaven, what that's going to be like and I just recommend if you want to check out that video if you're interested, but suffice it to say Jesus gives them a piece of his mind and a piece of information that no one had previously

ever had. He then goes on to quote the very scriptures they knew so well to prove to them how wrong they were about the resurrection. This is what he said in verse 26. He says: *And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong."*

What Jesus is pointing out is if there's no resurrection and people simply die and disappear, then God should have said, "I was the God of Abraham, I was the God of Isaac, and I was the God of Jacob." Well, the fact that he speaks of each of these patriarchs as being in the present is proof positive from the very scriptures that they're relying on that God sees them not as dead and gone but as alive and present, something that logic and just a basic understanding of the scripture would have made very clear.

You know, if you take a step back and picture what's taking place in all these different confrontations that Jesus has with these religious leaders, you realize that these men, these Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, they're trying to match wits with the creator of the universe, with the very one who created wit in the first place. They're no match whatsoever. And each time they try

to match wits with Jesus they come off looking profoundly silly and ignorant.

And Jesus' response is not treated like some simple slap on the wrist by these folks, I mean, in their view this is a country peasant with no degree, no pedigree, no education and he's making them look like fools. And for people who's entire career is built and based on the false notions of honor and respect that they demanded, this comes as an existential challenge.

And so instead of simply licking their wounds, they decide they're going to continue this intellectual war of words by bringing forth yet another religious leader for yet another confrontation. And we pick up on it at *Mark 12:28*: *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* The second is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these."

Now it's interesting, it's impossible to tell what motivated the

scribe, I mean, he's part of a long line of adversaries that the religious leaders put in front of Jesus, and yet his response to Jesus' answer, it shows he has a great deal of insight, a great deal of wisdom. Verse 32 says: *And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him."*

Now what Jesus had responded to the question with was what's known as the shema. It's the basic understanding of who God is that all Jews subscribe to. It's taken from Deuteronomy and it encapsulates their theology. This is *Deuteronomy 6:4-5*. It says: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* This is the scripture that virtually all Jewish synagogue services open with. It's the text that you find in those phylacteries that they carried with them as well as the mezuzah that is assigned to their doorposts. I mean, I'm aware of that because I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood, most of my Jewish neighbors had that text written on that little mezuzah that they had on their doorposts. It's what all Jews believe. But then Jesus adds the second part taken from *Leviticus 19:18*. It says: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Well that's something that the scribes and Pharisees had long ago forgotten.

And the scribe responds in a way that had to be shocking to the other religious leaders. This is what he says about loving God. He says: *"And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."* That's not the response the religious leaders expected. You see, their whole approach to God was centered around getting the issue of burnt offerings and sacrifices right from a mechanical standpoint. Just make sure you attend to the rituals and that you attend to the ordinances just like we tell you to and you don't have to really worry about dealing with God. The scribe clearly has an understanding of God that differs from that of all the others.

But, you know, even today the temptation to turn our relationship with God into some simple religious activity remains. It may not be a matter of getting our burnt offerings and our sacrifices in order but it's very easy to adopt the attitude that my faith consists of just showing up at church and maybe tithing. We're just as good today at turning our relationship into our religion as the Pharisees were in theirs. Again, they did it by focusing in on the mechanical aspects of obedience.

The ten commandments were given by God to demonstrate the



impossibility of living up to his standards and instead of seeing the Ten Commandments as an impossible standard that would drive them to seek God's mercy, well they instead began to work it as a way to get into heaven. And by this time the religious leaders had created so many sub laws that surrounded the Ten Commandments, they tried to cover every single aspect of life and wound up coming up with 613 new commandments that discussed every single aspect of living from a technical legal perspective. And so doing they just wound up reducing their relationship between God and man to a huge series of do's and don'ts. And that wound up separating the heart and the hand into two very separate realms where what was in the heart meant next to nothing. And again it was exactly the opposite of what God had intended.

And Jesus hated and railed against it, saying in *Matthew 15:7*:

*"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:*

*"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the*

*commandments of men.'" And at another time Jesus said in Matthew*

*23, he said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."*

Now understand, justice, mercy and faithfulness, those are all matters that involve the heart. And clearly this scribe, he gets that, he understands that part, that loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength is far more important than all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

So religious leaders had everything perfectly backwards, I mean, as long as you have the burnt offerings and sacrifices lined up correctly, your heart could be anywhere else and it wouldn't matter. That's what they taught. And Jesus hears this scribe's response and his understanding of faith, an understanding that puts him very close to grasping the gospel. Verse 34, it says: *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.*

So Jesus tells the scribe he's close to grasping the actual gospel. So what we need to ask ourselves this morning is are we any closer than he was? You see, the first part of God's command is a description of the love we are commanded to have for God. It says: *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*

And the first question that springs up has more to do with our

Western way of understanding love than it does with the Eastern way that is presented. You see, Westerners, we Westerners, we always tie the idea of love into romance. And when you look at love that way you might think, well, how in the world are you supposed to command somebody to love you? I mean, if you want somebody to love you, you do the very best you can to be as attractive as you can to him or her and you kind of hope for the best, maybe they might like you. If you're successful, maybe you're able to win their love. See, in the West it's kind of a crap shoot. I mean, you could do your very best and still not win the romantic love of the person that you're interested in. But that's not the way God views this at all. Love to God is not something you feel. It's something you do.

Jesus tells us that our greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and scripture tells us specifically how we are supposed to do that. It's in *1 John 5:3*. It says: *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

See, loving God, it's not a matter of romance or sentimentality or emotion more so than it is simply a matter of obedience. We are commanded to love God not by feeling warm fuzzies but rather by keeping his commandments. I mean you think about it, Jesus is love

personified and so we look at Jesus, say, okay, how does Jesus perfectly express his love for God? Well, he expressed his love for God through one word, that word is obedience. His life was marked by profound levels of simple obedience rather than sentimentality, and by and large love is tied by Jesus to the concept of obedience. Obedience is simply love in action.

Jesus made that clear in *John 14*. He said: *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."* Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, *"Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"* Jesus answered him, *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."* He summed it all up in the next chapter. He said: *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."*

You might be thinking just like the scribes and the Pharisees, well, okay, all that's required for you to be a Christian is simple obedience, I mean, just check off the right boxes and show up with the right sacrifices and offerings and you'll be fine. Well, the Pharisees had already made a fine art of dividing the heart of God

into 613 different sets of rules governing every aspect of behavior so that you could effectively see yourself as right with God not by the heart that you had for the kingdom but by the religious activities that you engaged in.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I'd like us to take a minute to consider your walk with God. You see, we are commanded to love our God not by conjuring up warm fuzzies but by choosing simple obedience. See, the more you obey God, the more you pursue him, the more you learn who he is and what he has done for you, the more your love for him will automatically grow. You will find that obeying your way to feeling happens a lot more readily than feeling your way to obeying, and that's the difference between religion and relationship. And so as you're sitting there this morning, just ask yourself, am I trying to feel my way towards obeying God or am I obeying my way towards loving him? Consider that.

*1 Corinthians 11:28 says: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

So once again I issue the same warning I do each time, I tell you communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. And I plead with you, if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the king, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your savior and Lord, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister by bringing your sacrifice to the altar, than don't participate; just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, then err on the side of caution and get right with God and your brother or sister first.

And as I always say again on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking that you have to be spotlessly perfect and if you're not, you're not worthy to receive communion; and that, too, is a mistake. I point out that being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and it doesn't mean that you never fail; it means that you recognize that the salvation that you have received is a gift that no one anywhere is capable of earning -- quote -- "by being good."

And I quote Dane Ortlund once again, he says, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we fail, we're aware that we've

sinned. And the reason why we're aware that we've sinned is because God's Spirit is now within us. You see, it's God's Spirit that convicts us. And so we grieve as children who know we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, a Father who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin. What it means is that we understand if we do sin, we have somebody in heaven speaking on our behalf, an advocate. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

And again that's the key. We have Jesus' righteousness often described as an alien righteousness, meaning it doesn't belong to us; it belonged to him. It belonged to him, and by faith we appropriate it. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. We say it over and over, he lived the life we were supposed to live and he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be worthy of this very moment to sup at his table. And as you sit and think about it, ask God for the grace, the wisdom and the courage to do what he commands of us, and that is to love him with all of our heart, our

soul, our mind and strength.

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.*

You know, there's always going to be a tension in our Christian life between faith and works. The scribes and the Pharisees, they were way over on the side of works and what it produced was a dead faith that didn't really care about God or neighbor so long as I was checking off the right boxes when it came to religious obligations. Well today, by and large, we operate on the opposite tension. We are oftentimes tempted to think of faith as just mere belief, I mean, a simple agreement with a set of religious propositions about the nature of God and how he interacts with man.

I recently heard of someone's response to being asked if they were a Christian by saying, well, I believe that Jesus is very God, that he came to earth, lived a perfect life and died for my sins on the cross. And my question to you is: Does having that belief make you a Christian?



I mean we know that demons believe that Jesus Christ was very God, they believe that he lived perfectly, they believe that he died on the cross for sins, if not for their sins and yet we know they're obviously not Christians. And so the question is: Is simply knowing that Jesus died for your sins enough to make you a Christian? It's a pretty important question. It's one that you really do have to nail down.

And yet so you might be asking, okay, well, what makes me a Christian? I mean, is it just some proposition that we believe? I mean, *Romans 10:9* says: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Is that enough?

Well, you know what the most important part of that statement is, it's not really the simple fact of confessing that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead; as we said, demons can do that. It's believing in your heart because that's where you become a believer in Jesus Christ. *Ezekiel 36:26* says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

I've said it many, many times, Christians are the recipients of a heart transplant; and it's that new heart of flesh that God puts in us, having removed from us that heart of stone that's now passionate about loving him not because we suddenly have found an emotion that was buried deep within us but because God gave us his Holy Spirit who now lives in us. It is the Spirit who gives us the heart that wants to love God by walking in his statutes -- and here's the key word -- by obeying his rules.

So where does that obedience, where does that come from? I mean, is it a matter of simply sucking it up and trying hard to be obedient or is it something far more profound than that? You see, when you become a Christian, God's Holy Spirit literally takes up residence within you and the Spirit of Christ begins immediately the process of sanctifying you, that is, shaping and molding you into the very image of Christ. And one of the ways that he does that is by moving you to want to obey his rules. That's critical to understand.

You know, Peter in his epistle, he starts out by describing the early church and it's scattered throughout all of Asia and he's writing to them who's been suffering persecution, and this is how he opens up his letter. This is *1 Peter 1:1*. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the*

*Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

That's a lot of words there but do you get what he is saying? See, what he's describing there, he starts off describing genuine believers as "elect exiles of the dispersion." These are just people who have been chosen by God who are now being dispersed through persecution. They are -- quote -- "*elect according to the foreknowledge of God in the sanctification of the spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ.*"

That is quite a sentence. What Peter is doing is describing what a believer in Christ is. In this case it's a group of God's chosen ones that have been scattered due to persecution. They've been chosen according to God's foreknowledge for sanctification, that is to be shaped and molded into the very image of Christ. And the way the Spirit undertakes that process is by implanting in these new believers a desire for obedience to Jesus Christ. As Ezekiel puts it, "*to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*"

You have to understand, this desire to obey is real but it didn't

come from us. It comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is that new heart that now wants to obey. It's the heart that wants to love God through obedience. And the reason why Jesus was so impressed by what the scribe said is because he indicated that loving God was far more than simply checking off some religious boxes. Remember, this is what he said. He said: *"To love him (God) with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

Well burnt offerings and sacrifices, that's all the scribes and the Pharisees knew. I mean, that was according to them that's all you needed for a relationship with God. Simply check off the boxes of your religious obligations and you're set. The fact that this scribe describes loving one's neighbor and God is far more important than the burnt offerings and sacrifices indicates that he's operating on a level much closer to the gospel than to this law observing that the Pharisees were insisting on, which is why Mark says: *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.*

But that question, that question raises a question for us here now today and it's not that different from the question that folks

faced in Jesus' day. See then as now there's always going to be a tension between works and faith. We all know there are denominations that stress a works gospel that insist you get to heaven by trying as hard as you can to live up to the ten commandments or by adhering to a set of rules, and we know that's hopeless.

I mean, if you want to enter heaven by being good, God says very clearly you have to do it flawlessly without any errors whatsoever. James made that clear when he said in *James 2:10*: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* Or Paul who said in *Galatians 3:10*: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*

Well, the other side, the side that says you're a Christian by simply agreeing to a set of religious propositions, it's equally hopeless. I mean, you could say it's literally a doctrine of demons who believe that all that matters is what's inside your head.

So how do we resolve this tension between faith and works? Well again, we go back to the scripture that tells us that faith is a

gift completely apart from works and that's *Ephesians 2:8*. It says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Well, here's Paul telling us in no uncertain terms that faith is a gift of God, it's not a product of your own doing, but then in the very next verse he describes the fact that faith will always produce good works. He says: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

And so the question that you need to ask yourself over and over again is not am I doing enough works to make the grade and it's not have I checked off enough faith propositions so that things that I believe in to make the grade. It's much more basic than either of those. It's an incredibly simple question to ask. And the question is: Is the Spirit of God living within me?

This is what God says in *Romans 8:9*. He says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

That heart transplant that Ezekiel spoke of, it's always accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Again, *Ezekiel*

*36:26: And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And that new spirit that God puts within us, it's the Holy Spirit of Christ, the third person of the Trinity now living inside us as God once lived in the temple in the Old Testament. We are now the official temple that God's Holy Spirit resides in.*

*Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 6:19. He says: Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

*So as the elders begin distributing the cup, I want us to go back to consider the scribe. I want us to think about this scribe who questioned Jesus. Jesus told him he was near to the kingdom of God because he understood that it was far more of a heart thing than a head thing. He understood that God wanted a heart of obedience and a determination to follow hard after him rather than simply checking off the boxes of burnt offerings and sacrifices, and that's what God wants of us today. That's a heart that desires to follow hard after God through obedience. Paul makes it clear, he says, that's the heart of the matter.*

We don't question our salvation based on our good works or based on agreeing with our faith affirming propositions. We base our salvation on the presence of God's spirit within us. That's why Paul says in *2 Corinthians 13:5*, he says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

There's not a more important question you could ever ask than the one that Paul suggests: Is Jesus Christ within me? Is the Spirit of God living inside me? Do I have within me a drive to obey to follow hard after God by seeking his will as opposed to mine? Well, if you can't answer that question positively, if you don't really know if Christ is within you, well maybe you're a little bit more like that scribe than you realize. Maybe Jesus is telling you you're not far from the kingdom of God. And if you find yourself on the suburbs of Jerusalem just not yet connecting with the kingdom, well now is the time. To do so means laying down your arms. It means laying down your rights to yourself and inviting Christ to be the King and Lord of your life.

As the cup comes around, ask yourself, am I demonstrating my love for Christ as Christ describes it? And this is what he says:



*"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." So consider the cost of being a member of the kingdom of light, of trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior.*

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

Well folks, this is the head, hands and feet part, the part where we try to come up with a practical understanding of what it means to remember Christ. And so practically speaking, how do I determine, how do I determine if Christ is within me? I mean, we know every single person who's a believer in Christ has first been justified, and that means God has declared that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross the just demands of the law have been fully met and our penalty has been paid in full. But immediately after being justified, we begin the process of sanctification. And that is, as God puts it, being shaped and molded into the image of Jesus Christ. *Romans 8:29: For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*

So how do I know if that Spirit working within me is an ongoing reality in my life? I like to go back to a certain phrase I've

used many times which has very poor grammar but spot-on theology, and it was a statement made by an old country preacher many, many years ago in answer to the question: How do I know if I am a believer?" And the preacher simply said, "If you is what you was, you isn't." You got to think about that.

I don't know if you could better sum up exactly what he's looking for than we examine to see if Christ is in me than "If you is what you was, you isn't," because it's basically saying if nothing has changed in your life, "if you is what you was," how can you say that God is shaping and molding you into the image of his son?

I mean, the easiest way to tell whether or not God is at work sanctifying you is to look backwards to where you've been and then forward to where I am right now today in my walk with God. Where was I five years ago or a five weeks ago compared to where am I today, particularly with regard to the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness and self-control, is it growing in my life? These are questions that this very event is designed to ask. Is my desire to make Christ my Lord a thing of my past or is it a present reality? So I would ask, ask God to show you, if you is what you was, then confess to him that you isn't. Let's pray.

*Father, I just again, I thank you for this time, I thank you for the ability to look inward and to see and to ask is the Holy Spirit alive and well within me? Am I a temple of God's Holy Spirit? Can I look back five years or five weeks or five days and say, yes, I'm growing, it doesn't matter how fast but it does matter if you are. And so I pray that each and every one of us, that we would ask that very question, and if we don't see any difference or if we see things going south on an ongoing basis, then this the time to say, Lord, maybe I'm just close to the kingdom, maybe I'm on the suburbs of Jerusalem and I'm not actually in the kingdom. I pray if anyone is feeling that and sensing that from the Holy Spirit that you right now, right here today would get it cleared up and declare, "I belong to you lock, stock and barrel, heart, soul, mind and strength." And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*