

A Call to Biblical Manhood

Faithful Men Conference

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Bible Text: Psalm 16:11

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We are very thankful that you have chosen to spend these next few hours over these next few days with us and so the theme of this conference, the title of this conference is “Faithful Men: A Call to Aggressively Fight Sin and Pursue Holiness.” I thought I would take a couple of minutes here at the beginning and just try to explain to you what this conference is designed to be. Several months ago, I sat in a hotel room with actually the three men on this front pew here and it was after we had gone to Ryan's all-you-can-eat buffet and so I don't know if it was the second helping of dessert or if it was the Holy Spirit, but that's where the idea for this conference was born.

So, I want to try to explain to you first of all, what it's not about. We will, obviously, be talking about aggressively fighting sin but I want you to know in the outset that we are not making any assumptions about any of you. We are not peering through our spiritually discerning glasses and peering deep down into your soul and assuming that you are full of vile rebellion against God and that we have brought the experts in to first, beat you up and then straighten you out.

Secondly, I want you to know that tonight is not the world premiere of some magic potion formula for overcoming sin that has been long forgotten and that we have recently discovered and that we can turn out a formula that will lead you into good basic principles for life and for godliness. We understand that sanctification is not formulaic; it's not automatic; and it is not robotic. It is hard. It is a struggle of our lives and our desire is to merely sow some good seed from the word of God to give you hope, to give you confidence and to be a blessing to you.

So, this is also not a production facility. None of us will turn out at two o'clock tomorrow and be fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Sanctification, fruit-bearing is a process and if we're very honest with ourselves, it's often a process that we cannot even see moving in ourselves. So, we will not be exhaustive. You cannot take ten 25 minute sessions and turn out somebody conformed to the image of Jesus Christ but, again, our goal is to provide hope, to provide a clear path to victory and to whet all of our appetites for the power of the gospel.

So, that's what it's not. Now let me tell you what we hope that it will be and there are really four core beliefs that we have that have pushed us to have this particular conference about aggressively fighting sin. I guess the key word to these four beliefs is the word "full" or "fullness." In Psalm 16:11, the Psalmist says that, "In thy presence is fullness of joy." Brethren, I think you join me in believing that the ultimate satisfaction, the ultimate prize, the ultimate treasure in life is the Lord Jesus Christ. I think you would also agree with me that the very real daily struggle to walk in his presence is the most worthy struggle that you and I will ever endeavor to take. In other words, it is worth it.

So ultimately, this conference is not about becoming more moral people. Jesus told the Pharisees, "Listen, if you only clean up the outside, all you've done is made them two-fold more the children of hell than they were before." Ultimately, this conference is about the Lord Jesus Christ. So, what we're really saying in this conference is this: when God said to David, "Seek my face," David said, "Thy face, O Lord, will I seek." So, the point of this conference is to strip away everything that would keep us from seeking the Lord's face in honesty, from seeking the Lord's face in humility and from enjoying the presence of the Lord in reality.

That's the first core belief: that in thy presence is fullness of joy. Number 2: let me just read John 1:14. Listen to these words. You've heard them before but these words are powerful. He says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Did you hear that? That says that Jesus Christ, God, has come near us. He's come close to us. He has entered into our world. He has entered into our experience. None other than God himself has entered our world, entered our experience, understands. "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So, the second belief is this: that in the gospel, we find the one who is near, the one who relates, the one who understands, the one who can help and one who is full of grace and truth.

Thirdly, if we were to make any assumptions about you at all, it would be this: that you, I will say "we," struggle to really believe that last point. We struggle to really believe that Jesus Christ is full of the grace that I need to overcome, full of the grace that I need. That the power to overcome sin, the power to have satisfaction, joy and peace and the reality and even in the struggle of life, is anything more than just a pious platitude or a theological concept. Perhaps sometimes we think that in a future world or in a utopic place, that if things were just better around me, if my environment were smoother, if my life was less critical, if whatever would be better, then perhaps I could find that grace to walk closely to Christ and to have victory over besetting sins but right now, it seems out of our grasp. Brothers, the reason we struggle with this is because it is easiest to believe what we see. It is easiest to believe what we have experienced: in some cases failure; in some cases dry coldness and laziness of service; and in all cases, the assaults of Satan.

So, there is one more core belief that drives this conference and that is this: that this fullness of grace and truth is not just an empty promise; that Christ really can help; that Christ really does come to the aid of those who are in need; that grace is more than just some vague puff of unmerited favor; that grace is real; grace is available to the child of God; and grace can be used practically every day to fight sin and to walk with God.

That's why we're having this conference. Now, in that light, I'm going to give the first few minutes and make a presentation to you and I have been assigned to speak to you on "A Call to Biblical Manliness." A call to biblical manliness. Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2. I'm going to read one verse here in this passage. Paul is writing to his son in the faith, his son Timothy, and he says in 2 Timothy 2:1,

"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Now, I have about 15 minutes and I knew I had about 15 minutes and in 15 minutes there is no way to give you an exhaustive or full look at what it means to be a man, a godly man. So, if there is one trait that defines man, if there is one trait that distinguishes men, if there is one trait that is essential of men, I would suggest to you that it is strength. Strength. Ephesians 6 says, "Be strong in the Lord and the power of his might." In 1 Corinthians 16, he tells the men, he says, "Quit you like men. Act like a man. Be strong."

We see this essential ingredient of men from our very nature, our created nature. We were created in the image of God. We were made like God. God is a God of strength, right? He's mighty in word. He's mighty to save. He's unlimited in his power. He's unlimited in his knowledge. Everything about God screams strong, strength. So, in the creation mandate of the creation command, for men to go and subdue the earth and have dominion over the earth, the most essential ingredient to subduing that dominion is to be strong, right?

We see this even more clearly in the distinguishing mark in physiology. God was not insulting women when he said, "The wife," in 1 Peter, "is the weaker vessel." Man was created physically stronger, therefore, man is given the command to protect, to provide, to lead the home.

Then we see this most clearly, the great need for strength in the spiritual realm. Brothers, spiritual life under the sun, that's all we know so far, the spiritual life under the sun is couched in Scripture in warfare language. "Withstand the fiery darts of the wicked." Here in this passage, "In your hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life. Take the whole armour of God." And even the devil is as "a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." All of this language describing our spiritual life is language that demands strength.

Let me just list for you a few things that God calls godly men to do. I have seven: leadership over the home; the care and maintenance of God's own bride, the church. Do you want me to stop yet? It's already overwhelming, isn't it? God gives you his own creation children and says you're to be the stewards over these children. In a polluted and corrupt world, he gives you as the head of your home, as the father of your children, as the protector of your wife and as the guardian of the church, he gives you the responsibility to see and to thwart danger in all of its forms and we are surrounded by danger in this corrupt world. He commands us to provide and protect materially and while we're providing and protecting materially, he tells us that while we're at work that

we must be ethical, we must be honest and we must be hard-working, working as unto the Lord and not to men. That we are to be responsible citizens.

I think that was seven. I could have stopped at one, couldn't I? And every one of those screams the need for strength. So brothers, let me just say this: strength is necessary and if you are in Jesus Christ, God expects – no, God demands – that you be strong. So, if strength is essential and it is, then it is also essential that we have a clear understanding of the definition and what strength looks like. As many different men as we have in this room, we probably have as many different ideas about strength: some are jocks and they like to pump iron; some are artistic. We have different ideas about strength: some are smart; some are intellectuals; some are like me.

So, let me give you one definition of strength. I want you to listen as I give this definition of strength and I want you to listen for all the words that we normally in our society associate with strength. There is a man you are probably familiar with and his name is Terry Bradshaw. Let me give you his stats: Terry Bradshaw was 6'3" tall, I'm already jealous, he's more of a man than I am. He is or was 215 pounds and now we're a little bit closer. Rock solid muscle and a barrel chest; strong. He was raised in a loving, strong, right? Two parents, strong right? Christian home. He was raised on a foundation of work ethic. Notice these words that we think of as being strong and think capable. His parents mantra was: "Nothing given. Everything earned." When he was a young boy, he set a goal to play professional football and he made it. During his career, he was known for toughness; strong. He got every ounce out of his physical skill and especially known for his onfield leadership. There was something about him that galvanized, that motivated, that inspired the men around him to do better as a team than they could do as individuals.

So, during his 14 year professional career, he won 4 Super Bowls in six years. He was elected to the Football Hall of Fame in the very first year of eligibility. He was active in the fellowship of Christian athletes and now he's a much-loved commentator known for his homespun charm and his sense of humor and his ability to make people around him comfortable. All those things just scream "strong," right? Well, Terry Bradshaw today is 65 years old. He's single and he's been divorced three times. In a recent Sports Illustrated interview, here's his quote: "I am a three time loser and I feel so dirty. Getting divorced was never, ever something I contemplated. I feel like a complete failure. I make fun of it because it is the best way to protect myself. I don't want to take my last breath without having someone who loves me."

Brothers, if strength is essential, we must not be confused about what strength is. So, let me say this: strength is not intrinsic. Do you have a pad? Write that down. Strength is not intrinsic. You are not strong and neither am I. I do not say that to insult you or insult myself but brothers, it may be the most important thing we hear tonight: you are not strong. Strength is not found in knowledge. There have been theological whizzes who are miserable failures, miserably weak. Strength is not having natural capability. Many gifted men whose gifts were squandered and wasted. It will not be found in will-power. Nothing intrinsic is the point. If you are caught in a trap of sin, the "I will do better. I will be more sorry. I will change tomorrow. I will turn a new leaf," I want you to know that those are

wasted words. They are meaningless words. Can I encourage you tonight to take off the mask. None of us are strong and whatever mask we wear to present ourselves as strong is not helpful. Strength is not intrinsic but let me tell you this also: strength is always robbed by sin.

During this time, we will talk about sins, more important we'll talk about grace. But one sin that will be mentioned is the sin of unrestrained sexual lust. Why? Because it's the common theme among men and we are being bombarded constantly with the assaults of Satan. So, you need to understand this, brothers, this is serious: strength which is essential, is always robbed by sin. Unrestrained lust or pride or whatever it is but unrestrained lust will kill you. It will destroy your wife if you're married today. It will kill, young men, your realistic expectations for intimacy in marriage. It will destroy your fellowship with Christ. It feeds love for self which is always in opposition to love for Christ. And one thing we don't think about very often is this: it spews hatred for the one that is being lusted after: somebody's daughter, somebody's son. It spews hatred.

So, Paul says in Romans 6 to us to just drive this point home, he says, "You are either a slave to sin or you are a slave to Jesus Christ." The problem is that those enslaved in sin do not recognize this. Satan and your own flesh will argue to no end. It will say, "You can have both." I want you to know that I know this by experience. Not with the sin we just mentioned of unrestrained lust although my eyes are prone to that as well, but I know how that something that is seemingly little, something that many might not even consider to be a sin, has yet put a grip and a tangle and a hold in my heart, in my life, that at times I've wondered, "Who do I really love? Do I love this, or do I love Christ? Do I love this, or do I love my wife? Do I love this, or do I love my family?" I know what it is to sit there on the bed at night and think, "God, help me. What in the world is wrong with me?" And have no hope to do better the next day.

Sin always, always saps strength. So, maybe you're sitting here tonight and saying this, "You know what? I already know this. I already know I'm not strong, why are you beating me up?" Because there's one more point: grace provides what God requires. Grace provides. Let me say it this way: only grace provides what God requires. You're not strong. We get sapped by sin. I want you to see that Paul writing here to Timothy, he's writing to a preacher but he's not writing to one who is some powerful figure above sin. In fact, if you really read this closely, Timothy seems to be curled up in a corner somewhere afraid to step his foot out of the house. He's overcome with fear. In fact, Paul says, "Timothy listen, I am persuaded, I know that your mother is a child of God. I know your grandmother loves the Lord. Timothy, I am persuaded that you also are a true believer." Timothy was so cowed and shamed, cowering in fear that Paul said, "I know you are. I am persuaded that you are."

So, Paul here is speaking to a failure, speaking to the fearful and I want you to know, brothers, that Paul says to the fearful, "You be strong." That's good news. Grace provides what we cannot do. Grace provides what God requires. You see, brothers, there is something here that is a strength found in Christ that is stronger than sin. There is a beautiful passage in Mark 3, I think it is, that says that Christ is stronger than the strong

man. There are strong men that entangle themselves but I want you to know that Christ is stronger than the strong man.

So, the message of the weekend, the theme of the weekend is to explore this theme right here: what do we have in Christ? Because what we have in Christ is that which provides the strength that we don't have. That what we have in Christ provides the help that we cannot summon up on our own. So, if you look at these sessions like this it will be helpful: in Christ we are given a tool-box that is filled with tools of grace. The goal of these sessions is to take out a tool and this is important for me. If you were to go to my house, you would laugh. I had to do something last night and I didn't have the right tool and I said, "Luke, go down there and get," and I had no idea how to tell him what to get, didn't know the name of it. I think that's kind of how we are a lot of times about grace: we like the idea of it and we like the thought that grace can make me free and that's amazing but what does it really mean today? How do I use it?

So, we want to take some tools out and just describe the tools that God has given us in Jesus Christ and I pray that if there is anybody here who is not in Jesus Christ, that he will bring you to your full emptiness that you may see in him one who is full for your emptiness.