

The Danger of Spiritual Self - Confidence

by Conrad Mbewe

The sermon warns against the danger of spiritual self-confidence, which can arise from spiritual ignorance of the power of our fallen nature and God's sovereignty in providence.

Duration: 46:53

Scripture: Luke 22:31-34, John 13:31-38

Topics: "Spiritual Pride", "Human Nature"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of loving one another and warns against being consumed by scandalous news. He compares the negative effects of feeding on scandalous information to the destructive nature of pornography. The preacher also highlights the struggle between our desire to follow God's law and the fallen nature within us, as described by Paul in Romans chapter seven. Additionally, he cautions against the thin line between a passionate attachment to the Lord and a self-confident pride, using the example of David's courage in facing Goliath.

Transcript

I invite you to turn with me to John chapter 13. John chapter 13. It's been a few months now since we last spent some time in the upper room discourse around the Lord's Supper.

The reason being that I think this is my first Sunday in the pulpit in terms of the last Sunday of the month since about November last year and consequently your minds might be a little rusty in terms of where we ended and where we're picking up. Mine was rusty as well. We'll read together verse 31 to the end of this chapter.

John chapter 13 verse 31. When Judas was gone, Jesus said, now is the son of man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the son in himself and will glorify him at once.

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Simon Peter asked him, Lord where are you going? Jesus replied, where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.

Peter asked, Lord why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Then Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We have just been singing that we would love your Holy Spirit to manifest Jesus to us. We pray too that your Holy Spirit will reveal us to ourselves as you see us in your word and as you see us from heaven.

That Lord we might walk in your ways, in a way that truly glorifies you. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. During our times together around the Lord's Supper, we have been centering our thoughts on this message which the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples before he proceeded on to Gethsemane and from there on to Calvary.

Basically it is a time when Jesus took his disciples away from everyone else in order to concentrate on them and to give them something of his own heart so that they would know the inner intimate relationship that they have with him, the privileges which are peculiarly theirs not to be shared with anyone else even though those people might be in your midst in terms of attending your meetings and so on and so forth. It's very clear that at the beginning of this passage while Judas was present, Jesus was holding back. He did not really open his heart fully and again and again therefore he would qualify whatever he was saying by repeating phrases like, what I've said is not true about all of you and I don't mean each one of you and so on.

But after Judas left, which is where we began our reading from, Jesus stopped those qualifications and then just opened his heart fully in terms of sharing his heart with the people. Now the passage we are in, in a sense, is a sad passage because here were the disciples, they had been with the Lord for a very long time and he's breaking the news to them that I'm about to leave, I'm going away and so on and although he is also trying to show them their responsibilities to one another, it's very clear that the news that is going away clouded over everything else and consequently they were not really hearing whatever else he was saying. And we have a typical example here, he has just said in verse 33 that I'm going away and where I'm going you cannot come, but in verse 34 to verse 35 he gives them a command and he's saying, love one another.

This way people will know that you are my disciples, love one another. But you can see from Peter's question in verse 36 that he's really not thinking about this love one another business. So he says, Lord where are you going? It's very clear that his mind has still remained at that message that was given by the Lord that I am going away.

So in many ways what we dealt with last time, which is that new commandment, is one which we are skipping in our thoughts as we get to verse 36 to the end of this chapter because when Peter comes in he's not asking questions like, you know, what do you mean new commandment? You've been telling us to love one another since we've been with you. It's there in the words of the prophets. Why call it new? That's not really what was in Peter's mind.

Peter's mind was, hang on there, hang on. We've been with you for three solid years. They've been the most blessed years of our lives.

What is this you are now saying you are going away? What I want us to think about this afternoon is primarily Peter himself. It's incredible that a man who says, I will lay down my life for you, Jesus knows

that this man within a few hours will disown him three times over. In fact, he will do so with cursings upon those that are claiming he belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can that be? How can an individual who speaks such powerful words, words which perhaps many of us have never even spoken yet, should be the one who within the next few hours do such a thing? Not only disown the Lord once, not only twice, but three times over. Now our tendency is to immediately say, well he was being hypocritical. When he was saying these words, he did not really mean them.

Peter, what a terrible hypocrite. And often that's what we think about others who fall into sin. We tend to say, well it means all that which they were saying before, they were mere hypocrites.

They didn't really mean it. It's all a lie, because if a person is able to speak in such a way so passionately, so fervently, this should not happen. But when we think like that, we are being extremely superficial.

In fact, we are expressing a level of ignorance, of spiritual experience that we clearly need to deal with, so that as Christians we may be better informed. May I suggest to you that Peter meant what he said. The last thing you want to do with somebody who knows your heart is to be a hypocrite.

Peter knew very well that Jesus was a hypocrite. He had already made that proclamation, remember, in the passage of Matthew 16. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

He knew that Jesus knew all things, which he goes on to say later on, you will recall in John 21, when he says, but you know all things. You know that I love you. Peter knew that.

So there's no way Peter could be looking the Lord in the face, knowing very well he doesn't mean what he is saying, and saying, Lord, I'm even willing to die for you. He meant it. So the question is, then what went wrong? And it's important that we study something of that for our own benefit.

Let me begin by putting it this way. You see, as Christians, we are passionately attached to the Lord and to his cause. We are, to the point where we may not put it in words, but we are willing to sacrifice much for our Savior and for the things that he stands for.

In fact, that's what differentiates true Christians from nominal Christians. Nominal Christians are willing to show some kind of sacrifice and commitment if it's going to bring earthly honors to them. Yes, they will do that.

But when something is secret, or two people are likely to know, and they're not likely to trumpet it on top of a molehill, an anthill, or a little hill in the backyard, non-Christians who think they are Christians are not interested in that kind of commitment. True Christians are. They've got a real attachment to the Lord.

They've got a real love for the Lord. And it is this which made Peter speak the words he spoke. In verse 36 and verse 37.

In verse 36, Peter said, Lord, where are you going? I want to suggest to you that that's a very genuine interest. Plead to them, I will be with you only. I am going.

I am going. You cannot come. Now, Peter wanted to know.

He really wanted to know. Lord, where are you going? An obvious example that I can give is the fact that you will often find that nominal Christians are not interested in following up a Bible study. They are not.

Soon as the study is finished, they close their Bibles, that's it. Even if there were pockets where they did not understand, they are not interested. They'll close their Bibles and that is that.

A true Christian is one who will say, no, no, no, this issue I need to understand. And they will ask questions afterwards, maybe from the study leader or from the church pastor, or they'll go and borrow books and spend time reading because they want to understand these things. Their hearts are not content with blank pages in their spiritual pilgrimage.

They really want to know these things. They've got a real interest in the subject at hand. That's all that Peter is manifesting here.

He is genuinely interested. And also when he says in verse 37, Lord, why can't I follow you? Again, it's genuine. He genuinely does not want to be parted from his master.

He doesn't want. So when the Lord says, look where I'm going, you cannot follow now, you follow later. He's still not satisfied.

Why later? Why not now? I want to be with you. Again, a typical example that I can give is that a genuine Christian is never satisfied with the status quo of things, spiritually speaking. He won't be there saying, well, look, you know, this is the way church ought to be, you know, maybe one soul a year getting saved or, you know, just the fact that we're able to go to church and there's a nice sermon and we go home and so on and so forth.

And yet he so longs for more. He wants more of the Lord's presence. He wants more of the Lord's power seen in individuals getting saved, individuals growing, churches growing and so on.

That's a Christian. A true Christian is not content even if you try and give him some kind of prophecy that, look, these are the last days. The Bible says that in the last days, you know, people's love will grow cold and things like that.

You'll say, yeah, fine. Elsewhere they'll grow cold, but it shouldn't be the case here. Why should it be the case here when our master has such great and glorious promises? Why can't they be realized among us now? And if prayer is the way these things are going to be realized, then I am going to pray down God's blessing.

And consequently, they give themselves to crying out to God that God may give them something of a time of refreshing now. That's a true Christian. True Christians may look at God's decree, general decree, but they hunger for a reality and consequently will still insist on why they should not experience the fullness of the things of God.

So may I suggest that if you know nothing of the kind of chemistry that was taking place in the soul of Peter, then probably you have not known true salvation at all. If an individual simply says, I can't believe a pastor said it, so why ask questions? He said it. And to you, that's it.

Then there surely must be a problem with what you consider to be salvation in your life. If you are simply content with what's happening around you and in your own soul, despite the sense of distance from the Lord, and you're simply saying, well, I mean, if the Lord wants to be close to me, He will. If He's far away, well, it's up to Him.

There's a problem there. Thus far, we must commend Peter. He is expressing something of what we feel towards the things of God.

We want to know more and we want more of Him. Yet, this is where the problem is. We must be warned that there is a very thin line between this passionate attachment to the Lord and a passionate self-confidence.

Let me say that again. We must be warned that there is a very thin line between a passionate attachment to the Lord and a passionate self-confidence. The line between courage on the one hand and pride on the other is extremely thin.

Now, some of you will remember, but most of you I'm sure will, when David went out to join his brothers when they were at the battlefield and Goliath was coming out and really challenging them, who among you can come out and be a man and so on, day after day. Each day, the Israelites would cower into a little corner and nobody was coming out from among them. Then, David one day heard this and he asked his brothers and in the middle of all that, he says, well look, I can take on that man.

I took on a bear, I took on a lion, I can take on that man. You will recall the way his brothers replied. They were very angry with him.

I mean, he was the smallest of them all and they were basically saying, look, this is not for boys. Come on, get back home and get back to your mother's breast and enjoy her milk and so on. This is for men and they were mistaking his courage for pride.

Now, spiritually speaking, often it's the other way around. We mistake pride for courage and that's what happened with Peter here. The last statement he made is what betrayed him.

Verse 37, Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. I will lay down my life for you and there he gave himself away. As you know, he did not give, lay down his life for his master, at least not during the period of Holy Scripture.

Tradition has it that later on he was crucified upside down on a cross and that's how he died. But the point I'm trying to stress here is that Peter did not see himself crossing that thin line. That passionate attachment to the master had now matured into something else.

It had gone beyond what it ought to be. It was now a sinful self-confidence. In the parallel passages, it comes out a little more.

So quickly turn with me to Matthew 26. Matthew 26. Matthew 26.

I begin reading from verse 31. And then Jesus told them, this very night you will all fall away on account of me. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Peter replied, even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. I tell you the truth, Jesus answered this very night.

Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. You will disown me three times. Let me just mention two symptoms that show that a person has gone beyond a passionate attachment to the Lord and he is now in a season of self-confidence.

One is what we've just seen there. It is where a person thinks that others may fall, but not me. So even when you point out to this individual, but look, the way you are going, that's what happened to this individual, what happened to this individual, and they are all genuine Christians.

And he says, well, it can happen to them, they're just careless, but not me. Now when a person begins to walk that route, just know that he has gone into a sphere where he has crossed the thin line. In fact, the tendency with such people is often to laugh at the failings of other Christians, to really laugh at them, as though to say, you know, they were foolish.

Okay, they may have had God's grace, but no, they just don't think. But us, you know, we are the ones who can really do it. Them and them and them.

And that's a terrible thing. I'm sure you've experienced this where you are with fellow Christians and they are laughing at the failings of others. I think those of us who are pastors, it often happens when we are in pastor's fraternals, and so there's a bit of sort of holy gossip about other pastors.

This is, you know, imagine what he did. How could he? How could he? And as though to say, you know, us, we can't do such a thing, we can't. Now, that level of self-confidence is worrisome.

It's suggesting that an individual has crossed a certain line where he thinks that there's some kind of grace he possesses which others do not possess, and that's not true. Another symptom, which is pretty obvious, is when such a person willingly goes into situations of temptation and is telling other people not to worry, I can handle it. Yeah, other people failed, you know, that's understandable and so on, but not me.

Don't worry, I can handle such temptations. So you find perhaps young Christians, or when I say young, I mean sort of in courting periods, and they're in courtship, and they're spending a lot of hours together within closed doors. And they're saying, well, look, you know, others may fall, but not me.

I can't. Now, that clearly shows there's a problem, because that individual is obviously thinking that they are above such temptations. That's too low for them, but that's really walking into this kind of situation.

You've crossed the line, a line which you ought not to cross. Now, the question is obvious, and I think it's important we get to it. What causes this? What is it that makes an individual so full of self-confidence that he can go beyond the natural affections and attachment that we have for the Lord, which is legitimate, which makes us say statements of real, true spiritual ambition and rightly so, but go beyond that into a sphere of self-confidence that now begins to make him feel that there is something special about him.

Others may fall, but not me. What is it? Well, it seems to me there are two answers to it. The first is spiritual ignorance of the power of our fallen nature.

Brethren, we are saved, yes, but we are not angels. We are not yet in our glorified state. We still carry with us a fallen nature, and therefore, to play near sin is the most unfortunate proof that you are terribly ignorant about this.

I use the picture or imagery of a Christian, rather of an individual whose clothes are wet with petrol. You don't play around matches when your clothes have just been made wet with petrol, and it's not that you want to light yourself into a fire. No, but you just don't play near that because you know that I can easily go up in flames.

Now, it's the same with us. And that's one of the reasons why I have serious problems with people who make these soap operas favorite watching, Christians for that matter. I'm not talking about non-Christians.

You are sitting there, you know, drinking in scandals, you know, and these are scandals. This one is chasing that other one's wife, and the other one's wife is also chasing that other one's husband, and the other one is chasing this other one, and you're taking it in, and taking it in, and don't you know you are feeding a nature that is likely to arise one day and make you do the same thing? It's basically what happens to people who feed on pornography, basically the same thing. They soon get attached to these things, and it destroys their lives.

They may say, well, look, it's just my eyes feeding on these pictures, but it's what it is doing in terms of strengthening that fallen nature within you. Now, you may have your own opinion over this, but as I said, that's why I have serious problems because we carry a fallen nature with us. In Romans chapter 7, we don't need to turn to it, Paul cries concerning this that he carries with him.

He says, you know, I have the desire to carry out God's law, but I keep finding this other thing in me that's dragging me down. It makes me cry to God. When shall I be delivered from this? Now, that's a reality we should not run away from.

We all possess it. In each one of us, and I'm talking about us Christians, real Christians, in each one of us lies the potential to commit any sin, any, and I mean any, in case you've sort of put out a few sins and said, no, those five, forget it, I can never fall into this, maybe these five, include those other five as well. That potential is in each one of us.

Here's the second reason why this happens. It is because of spiritual ignorance of God's sovereignty in providence. God's sovereignty in providence.

And for this one, let's quickly turn to Luke 22. Luke 22. Again, it's a parallel passage, so the Lord must have been saying all these things at about the same time.

Verse 81. Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. And of course, you know, Peter, Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death, he says in verse 33.

Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times. You will deny three times that you know me. You see, Peter was ignorant that, you know, God's decree is inscrutable.

You cannot predict God's. Sometimes God will withdraw from you His restraining grace in order to teach you a lesson, and hopefully that lesson will make you a better servant of God in years to come, because you would have learned the lesson bitterly. Sometimes He will, and none of us can say, no, no, no, no, no, no.

He will do it to others, but me, you know, He has promised He's going to uphold me every day of my life, and I'll go, you know, from strength to strength to strength until I reach Zion. God has made no such promise. He can easily give you the kind of trials in your life, like it was with Job, one after the other, after the other, after the other, and yes, your own strength may last you until the seventh trial, but an eighth one comes, and you reach a point where you say, no, no, no, no, Lord, no, this is too much, this is too much, and you walk out on Him, all because He wanted to show you that, in fact, you were relying on your own

strength all along, and by removing the rug from under your feet, He shows you, and you come back to Him now utterly broken.

That's what He did to Peter. He was telling Peter, look, there's a conversation in heaven. I'm just giving you a bit of sort of showing shortly.

There's a conversation in heaven. Satan has asked for permission to take you through a period of trial. Now, Peter, I've been praying for you, and you will backslide, but it will be brief, and when you do come back, you must use your experience to encourage the brethren.

Peter, as I was saying, Lord, I don't need your prayers. Don't worry. Pray for others, not for me.

Me, even, you know, imprisonment, death, everything, I know that, Lord, and the Lord clearly saw that Peter needed to learn a lesson, and so He told him, you will very shortly disown me three times. So, brethren, when a man says, for me, it's impossible to own the Lord, me, me, out of question, or to commit adultery, or to steal money, or whatever, me, I forget. You ought to ask the question, what is he basing that confidence in? Is it the Lord's grace, or is it his own history, his own present affections, his own present sense of attachment to the Lord? What is making him say that? If it is the Lord's grace, there are at least two things you will notice.

I'll come to a third one later. One, he will not laugh at others. He won't.

When he hears that others who went that way fell, he will say, there go I, but for the grace of God, that's me, that's me, but it's grace that has sustained me. The second is that he will not readily take himself in the path of trial and temptation. He won't.

He won't. You know, the strongest Christians are the ones who are most sensitive of their own weaknesses. Those are the strongest Christians.

Yes, outwardly strong, but inwardly very sensitive of their own weaknesses. And consequently, they are a people who are utterly dependent upon the means of grace, because they know that grace does not come like oxygen in the air where you are just breathing it. Grace comes through means, reading the Word of God, praying, coming around the Lord's table that you may once again reflect upon the brokenness of God's Son for you, his sacrifice on your behalf, meeting with saints that they might encourage you, that you might be strengthened by one another's faith.

Strong Christians are individuals who know that I really need this, and therefore will give themselves sacrificially to the means of grace. And there was a third thing I wanted to say, that if a person is depending on himself, I've mentioned two things. One, he will laugh at others.

Two, he will take himself in the way of temptation. But the third thing I needed to say is that if he's depending on God's grace, yes, he will not stop being ambitious, not at all, but he is ambitious with trembling, with trembling. His soul longs to do more for the Lord, to achieve more for the Saviour, but he's always with this sensitivity to his own weakness.

Very well then, back to Peter. What do we learn from this man in the midst of this conversation with the Lord? I think a few things. First of all, when speaking about the future, we should always speak with caution, especially when it involves us achieving anything in the Lord's name.

We should always speak with caution. Let us be ambitious for our master. I must emphasize that.

You know, some people are ambitious in their careers, they're ambitious with schoolwork, they're ambitious in the areas where they are gifted, maybe it's sport or whatever, they're very ambitious. But when it comes to the things of the Lord, you cannot differentiate them from the pew they are sitting on. It's just, you know, like a pew, they just sit there.

That's the most they achieve, just sit there. Now, that's not Christianity. Let us be ambitious for the master, let's give vent to our heart's desires, but let us do so with trembling, with real sensitivity to our own weaknesses.

That is the spiritual balance, and that's the balance that Peter failed to maintain here, and consequently, he went the extra mile. As I've already said, if we maintain that balance, we will find ourselves very dependent on the means of grace. We will not readily abscond from the gathering of the saints.

Yes, there will be situations, especially work demands upon us that will take us away from the meeting with the saints, but it's not something that we're going to just throw out of our schedule that easily, because we know it is our lifeline. But even the private means of grace, dusty Bibles that get closed on Sunday and never open again until the following Sunday, closed closets where you never really spend time to pray, that speaks of a serious, very serious level of self-confidence, and the Lord may be waiting to show it to you in a most painful way. So let us be a people that are ambitious, and at the same time a people that want to make the most of all the means of grace.

And before us is one of them, a meal that the Lord himself inaugurated in order for us to again and again remind ourselves of the dear price paid for us, so that we can ask ourselves the simple question, if this is what the Lord has done for me, what am I doing for him? Let's pray together. Eternal and gracious God in heaven, we thank you for your word and the warnings it brings to our hearts. Lord, in a congregation like this, we have chemistries in our hearts that are wide and varied.

We can only pray that where some of us have begun to exhibit that kind of self-confidence that Peter had, that today, oh God, you will break us, you will melt us, you will mold us anew, and fill us afresh with your Spirit. Where any of us are beginning to stray into levels of spiritual self-confidence, leading ourselves into areas of temptations in the name of being strong enough to handle anything, Father, may today be that turning point where we might begin to see afresh our levels of vulnerability towards sin. Our Father, above all, we pray that as we reflect on the death of your Son on our behalf, grant that it might be an opportunity for us to look at our own lives and renew our vows to you, that we might do so with a sense of our own weakness, our own tendency to compromise and fail you.

May we do so with a real cry in our hearts for grace and grace and grace, that we might respond to your love with a similar love. Oh God, our Father, bless the bread and the cup to that end, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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