

Being Zealous Doesn't Make You Right

Jack Hughes

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If you have your Bibles, turn to Luke 9:28–36. We're actually moving on from verses 23–27, believe it or not. Now we are in the section on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Six years ago, when we first moved to Burbank, we got a house that was in pretty bad shape—kind of a fixer-upper. I have a background in construction, so we started into our long, enduring remodeling process. There were several instances where I knew what I was doing—I had done [these] things before, I knew what was code, and I did it. Then the inspector came, and said, “Well, that may be *Idaho* code, but that is not *Burbank* code.” So, I had to receive a little bit of rebuke and correction from the inspector, humble myself, and then tear it out and redo it.

We often do things like this as Christians. Sometimes we're very well intentioned. We *think* we know what we're doing. We make great effort, maybe even at great expense, only to discover we have done the wrong thing. This morning, we come to a text where we are going to learn some lessons like this from the life of Peter.

Luke has been laboring to reveal to us the identity of Jesus. Luke has revealed to us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He has done this through Jesus' teachings, through Jesus' miracles, through Peter's statement, [and] Jesus' affirmation [see Luke 9:18–22]. It's perfectly clear that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, that He is also going to go to

Jerusalem, be delivered up into the hands of the leaders, where He will be crucified, and three days later, be raised from the dead.

Then Jesus makes some very hard calls to discipleship. They're really not hard calls, they're just biblical calls, but in our day and age, when being a Christian is just calling yourself one, they seem almost too hard to accept. [They are] calls to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, and [to] follow Jesus. Then, Jesus, after making these hard calls, tells the crowd a very curious little prophecy. He says, "Oh, and by the way, some of you here will not taste death until you see the kingdom of God" [see Luke 9:27]. Then we come to our text for this morning.

So, if you have your Bibles, look at Luke 9:28[-36], and follow along as I read.

Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

I just want you to know that this text is just jam-packed with preaching topics. Oh, man, it's loaded. We could talk about great doctrines and truths: prayer, glorification, the kingdom of God, the glory of God, the Messiah, heaven, Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, Moses, Elijah—just [an] incredible, incredible variety of things. I want you to know [that] I struggled trying to decide what little minutia I was going to give you this morning. Since we have already covered some of these topics in our study of Luke, and since we are covering some of them in our study of Daniel on Sunday nights, what I want to do this morning is focus your attention on Peter and his example or, [it is] probably better [to say], his lack of example.

The big idea of the text is that Jesus is fulfilling this curious little prophecy He made in verse 27 that some in the crowd, and among His disciples, would not see death until they got a glimpse of God's kingdom. This was to cement in the minds of Peter, James, and John the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was going to set up His kingdom on earth, that it would be a glorious kingdom, a kingdom where all the saints of all the ages would dwell in glory, and that they could have that hope. So that's kind of the big, overarching idea.

Let's look at verse 28. The text reads: "Some eight days after these things." Matthew and Mark tell us that it was exactly six days. Luke just says, "Some eight days," because he's approximating. The text says He took along Peter, John, and James. In our previous studies, we have learned that among the twelve disciples, there [were] actually three groups. Sometimes Andrew was included in this innermost group. Jesus selected this special group—Peter, James, [and] John—to experience things that the others were never able to experience. They were the leaders of the Twelve—leaders among equals, but they were leaders nonetheless. Jesus is taking these three, the text says, if you look at the end of verse 28, up the mountain to pray. We've already explored Jesus' prayer life in some detail. He was devoted to prayer, [and] sometimes He prayed all night.

Look at verse 29: "And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming."

Mark says, Jesus' garments—I like this—“became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them” even with Tide [Mark 9:3]. Matthew says Jesus' “face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” [Matthew 17:2]. So we're talking about some pretty incredible stuff here. It's like [Jesus has] created a porthole into this other realm, this supernatural kingdom realm, that the disciples can look into.

We know from texts like Daniel 12:3 that this is where all believers are headed. Daniel 12:3, speaking of believers in the kingdom, uses these words: “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” Jesus even quotes this text in Matthew 13:43 in relationship to the kingdom. The Bible speaks of angels radiating light. For instance, in Matthew 28:3, the angel that appeared to the Roman guards is described by Matthew with these words: “And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.” And you remember what happened after they saw him—they fainted, it was so scary. They hit the dust and woke up after seeing the angel. In Luke 24:4, the angel who appeared to the women who came to the tomb is described as wearing “dazzling clothing.” So what we're seeing here is a glimpse into glory, into kingdom glory, into heaven from earth.

Look at verse 30: “And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah.” Just stop there. This is an amazing scene to ponder. I was tempted to go here last week, but we're getting here this week. Do you remember that last week we talked about heaven, and how we'll be able to talk with Jesus? That being in heaven is not Jesus [as] this huge figure sitting up on this throne and us all groveling in the dust for eons of years? We'll be able to talk with Him. We see this right here, as two sinners—Moses and Elijah—who were saved by grace, were chatting with the Lord of Glory in His kingdom—something you and I will also be able to do if we know the Lord.

Look at verse 31: “Who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” That is, Moses

and Elijah were speaking to Jesus about His departure. What departure? His departure from this earth, His death, His burial, His resurrection, and ascension. They're saying, "Lord, so when are You going to die? I mean, You came to earth to die. When's it going to happen? When are You going to make atonement for sins?" And so they're dialoguing about His future death, the very thing that Jesus had already tried to tell His disciples was going to happen. And, as we shall see later on in Luke 9, He'll tell them again.

Now we come to Peter and his bad example, and three things you can learn from [that] example, which will help you live your Christian life in a way that will better glorify God. The first thing we want to learn is: remain awake. Look at verse 32: "Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep." Jesus had taken His three most trusted disciples up to the mountain, not for naps, but for prayer. We have learned that Jesus had great stamina in prayer. At times, He prayed all night. I don't know if you've ever even tried to pray all night or even half the night, [but] it just takes Herculean strength and incredible concentration to do this. Even three or four hours of prayer is a labor. [Also, the disciples] have most likely been ministering all day, working, and then they hiked up the mountain. Jesus says, "All right, let's break up and pray," and you know what happens. I mean, you've experienced this. As soon as you start getting into prayer, you confess all your sins, you start going through your prayer life, and all of a sudden, your body says, "Can't you just sleep for a little while?" It reminds me of *The Jungle Book* character Kaa, the snake: "Go to sleep." Satan, demons, your flesh, Kaa—they all try to get you to sleep instead of talk[ing] with God. The disciples went up to the mountain to pray, and they fell asleep. While they were sleeping, Jesus was transfigured before them. They were missing it.

Look at the middle of verse 32: "But when they were fully awake." What does that tell us? They were zonked. They were out. They were just totally out of it. They conked out big time. And you know what? Sometimes it just happens. You know, you say, "I'm just going to stay up tonight

and get some prayer in.” You start praying, and pretty soon your head’s nodded forward and you’re drooling on your Bible. Or, it falls back, and you hear this snarling noise, and you wake yourself up, and think, “What’s that noise?” [Or,] it’s time for bed, and you decide, “I’m just going to just pray tonight with my head on my pillow, but I’m not going to fall asleep. [I’m going to] talk to the Lord about all those important things I know I should be praying about.” You get into that first prayer, and the next thing you know the alarm is going off and it’s the next morning.

The disciples were no different. Jesus is absorbed in prayer, He’s concentrating, and Peter, then James, then John crash[es]. So Jesus is up there praying, and they’re sleeping. While this is happening, Jesus is being transfigured before them. Look at the end of verse 32. They finally wake up, and verse 32 says: “They saw His glory,” that is, Jesus’ glory, “and the two men standing with Him.” Jesus now is appearing in radiant, kingdom glory, and they had been *sleeping*. In the garden the night Jesus was betrayed, [do] you remember what happened? [Jesus] tells His disciples, “Listen, My soul is troubled within Me to the point of death. Pray that you might not enter into temptation” [see Matthew 14:34, 38]. Matthew tells us that Jesus wasn’t even gone an hour and He came back and they were sleeping. “Get up! Get up!” (I don’t know if He kicked them.) “Wake up!” He goes away for a little while again, He comes back, and they’re *sleeping*. “Get up! Pray! Pray! Keep watch!” He goes away, comes back, they’re sleeping again. So they wake up to see Him taken away.

[In our text, it is the] same three disciples—Peter, James, and John. They may have been leaders, but man, they needed their sleep. Jesus made that classic statement when He said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” [see Matthew 14:38]. You know, I think all of us have determined that we’re going to read our Bible, we’re going to pray, we’re going to do these certain spiritual acts. Maybe we’re going to get up early in the morning and we’re going to go for it. We start going through our prayer journal, and it’s like somebody sprinkled some sort of narcotic in there. You can just barely stay awake. It’s like listening to a four year old learn[ing]

how to read. Oh, man, will that ever put you to sleep. Peter is missing the greatest experience of his life because he was asleep.

And you think, “Well, Jack, how do you know this is the greatest experience [of his life]?” Well, because he says so. In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter says [that] God has granted to us “everything pertaining to life and godliness,” and then he goes on and he mentions the knowledge of God four times in the near, following context. Then he says, “You need to get this knowledge, you need to live by this knowledge, we have this knowledge, you need to make sure that you’re abstaining from sin” [see 1:3–15]. Then he wants them to know this: that the Word of God, this treasure we have from God, is the most sure and important thing that we have. In order to emphasize that God’s Word is to be relied upon more than anything else, what [Peter] does is he goes back into his mind, and he says, “OK, where’s that file cabinet called ‘experiences’? Let me look for that file that says, ‘the greatest experience I ever had,’” and he pulls out [what is in] 2 Peter 1:16–18:

We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Then [Peter] goes on to say, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention” [see 1:19]. [He’s saying,] “Sure, experiences are incredible, and I’m telling you, we had the granddaddy of them all, but *you* pay attention to the Word.”

So here is the greatest experience Peter ever had—Jesus, Moses, Elijah in kingdom glory—and [he] slept through part of it. Mmm. Don’t you hate that? It’s like when somebody says, “Oh! A shooting star!” You look up and it’s gone.

“Where?”

“Oh, you missed it.”

The lesson to learn here is: don't be sleeping when you should be awake. Have you ever [awakened] in the morning, and you know you need to have your quiet time? You get up, but you're tired, and you're kind of complaining about it, but you do it anyway. And, truth be told, you were doing it more out of duty than out of love for the Lord and out of love for His Word, and because you think you'll get a blessing. You're just going through the motions. So you do it. You get some coffee, you [sit] in your little spot, get your little blankie or whatever, you confess your sins. You're praying. [You] make some requests of God, thank Him for some things, you start reading through some texts. Maybe you're reading through the Bible in a year and you're in the Minor Prophets, and the Minor Prophets have been pretty killer: judgment, woe, destruction. “You sinners! I'm judging you!”

You've got this kind of sour attitude because, “You know, I don't know what's in the Minor Prophets, but everything I've read so far has just been nothing but destruction.” You can't wait to get to the New Testament. You're reading along, plodding along, trying to get your two chapters in or whatever, and all of a sudden you come across a verse, [and you think,] “Whoa! I *know* this verse. I *like* this verse! I've heard this verse quoted a lot of times. This verse has given me comfort. I didn't know this is where it came from.” And you go, “I'm going to go back and I'm going to read the context a little bit more.” Now you have kind of heightened interest, and so you read up to it, and when you see the verse in its context, it's more wonderful than it ever was before. You thank God for it, and you ponder the truth, and you meditate on it. Maybe all day long, maybe all week, maybe for the rest of your life, that verse encourages you, and blesses you, and you're glad you didn't sleep in that day.

In 1986, I was a third-year student at Boise State University. I decided to take “bonehead” astronomy. You've got to take something, you know, some sort of science, so I thought, “Well, I'll take astronomy.” I didn't know it, but that year was a special year because [it] was the year that Halley's comet was coming by. It only comes by once every 76 years, and it just happened

to be coming in the middle of that semester. It was an exciting time, because scientists had launched a spacecraft to intercept and take pictures of the comet as it passed by the earth. It was fascinating. This comet—they got pictures of it—looked like this giant, glowing potato about fifty feet long and thirty feet wide. [It] had all these violent gas eruptions spewing out from it. But there was this catch. If you wanted to see Halley's comet, you had to get up at 3:30 in the morning, drive outside of town, and set up with the hardcore astronomers. Now, the astronomy class was big. It probably had 150 or 200 people [in it]—it was in one of those huge lecture halls. And so, I got up in the morning, drove outside of town, got there, and there were about ten people who showed up.

You know, many Christians are like those astronomy students—they're unwilling to stay awake, get up early, be disciplined in Bible study, church attendance, prayer, [or] service. And you know what? They rob themselves of their own blessing. They cheat themselves. Sure, God has made us to need sleep, but He has also given us brain[s] so we can know when to be awake. We're awake for TV, we're awake for dinner, we're awake for sports, we're awake for entertainment, we're awake for work, but when it comes time to receive eternal blessings, maybe we should sleep in. That is *wrong*.

Now, you may be sitting out there, going, "OK, Jack, now come on, you're meddling now. OK, I've been robbing myself of the blessing, I haven't always been where I should be at the right times, awake, paying attention to receive the blessing, but what do I do about it? You know, I mean, what's the cure?" Here it is. I could go into a whole series of sermons on this, but here is the short and sweet of it: 1 Timothy 4:7. This may seem trite, but it is the answer: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Listen, [do] you want to play golf well? [Then] you get out there and hit balls [and] take lessons. [Do] you want to be a great artist? [Then] you paint, you draw, you do whatever. [Do] you want to be a good runner? [Then] you run a lot. [Do] you want to be godly? [Then] you discipline yourself to practice the godly disciplines. You resolve to get up, read your

Bible, and pray. You resolve to come to church when things are happening. You resolve to serve. You resolve to share the gospel.

If you stay up too late and you're really tired, and you don't want to get up to read your Bible, you get up anyway. You read your Bible anyway, and all day long, you suffer for it. You don't blame it on your quiet time—that wasn't the problem. Your quiet time didn't make you tired; *you* made you tired. You just give yourself a thorough verbal lashing in your mind. "Fool! What were you doing staying up so late watching that idiotic TV show? Now look how tired you are! [Do] you feel good? Don't ever do that again! Stop it!" You let your tiredness, you let your misery, be dumped on the thing that did make you tired, but not on the blessing you received from spending time with the Lord. Don't ever make that the fault of your lack of discipline. That is the one thing you need more than anything else.

It was Mark Twain who said, "Do something every day that you don't want to do; this is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain." That's it. I get up and spend time with the Lord every day at this time. Discipline produces habits; habits produce progress. Even if you only read one chapter of the Bible a day, that's not all that huge—[it would take] a minute, two minutes. Let's just say it took you ten minutes to read a chapter [because] you're a really slow reader, [and] the chapter's big. In one year, you would have read 360 chapters. There are only 260 chapters in the New Testament. That means that you would have read through the whole New Testament and Genesis and Jeremiah, which are some pretty large books. That's more than most people ever read in a year. That's just from a little, tiny bit of consistent effort. Think about what you could do if you put more effort in than that.

Often we put ourselves through more pain and grief thinking about getting up and spending time with the Lord than just getting up and spending time with the Lord. You're laying in your bed, "I don't want to get up. This is going to be hard." You're not sleeping. You're complaining to yourself about the sleep you're not getting by complaining to yourself. It's not your quiet time that's depriving you, it's your own grumbling heart. Pious souls,

you need to ask yourself this question: Are you more apt to get an eternal blessing by spending time with the Lord, serving, sharing your faith, being involved in church, or [by] going through the mundane tasks of life? You know the answer, so make sure you aren't sleeping through the blessing. Don't be like Peter, and James, and John, who slept through prayer time and almost missed the greatest experience of their lives.

[The] second [thing we want to learn is]: run in the right direction. Look at [Luke 9:]33. Peter awakes from his nap—prayer nap—he is disoriented [and] doesn't really know what is going on. There are Jesus, Moses, [and] Elijah, glowing like the sun, radiant in kingdom splendor, and they're earnestly talking about Jesus' upcoming death, resurrection, and ascension. Verse 33 says: "And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah' —not realizing what he was saying." Mark says in Mark 9:6, "For [Peter] did not know what to answer; for they became terrified." Peter fell asleep [during] prayer, [and] woke up to see Jesus in kingdom glory. He was probably thinking to himself, "Whoa! Did I miss the overthrow of Rome? What happened? Am I in heaven?" What would you think if you woke up and saw that?

He sees Elijah, he sees Moses talking with Jesus, glowing like the sun, and then he makes this statement: "Master, it is good for us to be here." How do you even respond to a statement like that? Of course it's good to be here! Good grasp of the obvious! That is a grotesque understatement. Of course it was good for Peter to be there.

You [can imagine] Jesus looking over at Peter as He's talking to Moses and Elijah, [and saying,] "Yeah, it is good."

Have you ever been asleep and received a phone call in the middle of the night? You know, you're dreaming and you dream that the phone is ringing. All of a sudden, you wake up and the phone *is* ringing. You look at your clock and you realize, "Man, it's 2:30 in the morning!" You think, "Something must be wrong! Somebody's calling from church. Somebody died. Somebody's in the hospital." So you grope for the receiver, [clear

your throat, and say,] “Hello?” trying to deceive them that, “Oh, I’m always awake at 2:30 a.m.” Then you hear this strange voice at the other end, speaking in some language you don’t even understand. You know that you don’t have the gift of the interpretation of tongues, so you say, “Wrong number,” and you hang up.

Listen, we need to cut Peter some slack. He just woke up from a sound sleep, and there was blinding light, and the first thing out of his mouth was the great understatement, “Master, it is good for us to be here.” Mmm. But what about his next statement? This is an interesting one. “Let us make three tabernacles,” you know, let’s [make] some makeshift lean-tos.

When you read that, doesn’t that just make you wonder, “What is that?” You know, it’s like, “Let’s build forts.” Well, when you think about that, what is a tabernacle? A tabernacle is really a sacred shelter, a sacred fort. When God instituted the Feast of Booths, it was also called the Feast of Tabernacles. It was instituted in Leviticus 23:34 and following, [and] Deuteronomy 16:13 and following. The Israelites were instructed to celebrate this feast in concert with the Feast of Ingathering, or the Feast of the Harvest, and they were told, “What you need to do is, all your males need to go to Jerusalem, get branches and palm boughs, and make a little fort, a little lean-to, a little tabernacle. Then, sleep there, do a little camping, get some male bonding in, and then at the end, have a big feast.” And so, that’s what they did. That was the Feast of Tabernacles. The question is: What was Peter doing? Well, turn to Zechariah 14. If you don’t know where Zechariah is, if you go to the beginning of the New Testament and go back just a little bit, Zechariah and then Malachi, or “Mel-ah-chee” if you’re Italian—two books into the Old Testament. [In] Zechariah 14, Zechariah was sent by God to the people who came back from Babylon after the Babylonian captivity to encourage them that the Messiah was coming, that He was going to set up His kingdom on earth, and that He was going to rule and reign from Jerusalem. [Zechariah] 14 is the climactic chapter, which talks about the return of the Lord to earth, to the Mount of Olives to set up His kingdom, which will endure forever. It’s a great passage, and every Jew

knew about this passage because every Jew was waiting for it to come to pass.

Now, remember [that] previously Jesus said, “Some of you will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” [see Luke 9:27]. So, most likely, Peter’s thinking to himself, “Hey! The kingdom of God is coming,” and maybe he and the other disciples, or maybe just himself, is thinking about these messianic texts about the kingdom or whatever. So in Zechariah, it talks in the beginning of the chapter [about] God coming forth to fight as when He fights in the day of battle [see 14:3], He beats up Israel’s enemies, He rescues the righteous. Then it talks about Him making geographical changes in the land, and then when we get to verse[s] 16[-19] of Zechariah 14, we read this:

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Now, get that. Peter knows about this text—all Jews know about all the key messianic texts. A week earlier, Jesus says, “Some of you are not going to taste death until you see the kingdom of God.” Peter, thinking about this, wakes up, [says], “It’s good for us to be here. This is the kingdom! We need to celebrate the Feast of [Booths]” because that’s exactly what God said they would do as soon as the kingdom was set up: celebrate the Feast of Booths. So, he says, “Hey, hey, hey! Moses, Elijah, don’t run off. I’ll get your building materials. Talk with Jesus.”

Now, there's a lesson here. The lesson is this: Was Peter zealous to serve and obey God? Yes. Did Peter have good intentions? Yes. Were Peter's actions based on the Scriptures? Yes. Was Peter right? No. Maybe if he was a bit more awake, if he had asked a few more questions, gathered a bit more information, just was patient for a minute, he wouldn't have acted the way he did. But he did act that way. One thing is certain: Peter was very zealous to do the right thing, but did the wrong thing.

Every Christian experiences times like this. You know, you decide you're going to do a ministry. You're so excited, "I've got this idea! I've got a ministry idea!" So you start thinking about it, you start planning it, you talk to people, and you start spending time, and energy, and resources to get this ministry going.

You mention it to one person, and they say, "Have you talked to the elders about this?"

"Well, no. Should I?"

"Yeah, they've been talking about this for a long time. I think they have something different planned."

"Oh," and you realize you have just run ahead with great zeal, with good intentions, with scriptural intent, and done the wrong thing.

You're reading a book because you want to grow in the Lord. You're a baby believer. You're trying to figure out Christianity, you want to know about doctrine, you want to know about the Christian life, you want to know about the Bible. So you go down to the Christian bookstore, you buy some books, and you start reading them. You're standing out here in the foyer, and you're saying, "Yeah, man, I'm reading so-and-so's book."

And the person says, "You're *what*? Man, that guy is off! His books are *full* of false doctrine!"

You're like, "Really? Well, I bought these other three [books], too."

"Get rid of them! Those things are like poison!"

And you [think], "I wonder if they can take them back." You're kind of bummed out because, "I tried to do the right thing. I didn't know they were bad books. I mean, they were Christian books. They were at the Christian

bookstore, they should be good.” Zealous? Yes, but running in the wrong direction.

Ananias and Sapphira, they had some good intentions. They were going to give this huge gift to the church, and just lie a little bit about giving the whole amount. And God just killed them [see Acts 5:1–10]. Simon Magus, he wanted the gift of the Holy Spirit so he could go around and heal people, do some good like the apostles. He just wanted pay for it. Peter pronounced a curse upon him [see Acts 8:9–24]. The seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19 thought, “Hey, the apostles are casting out demons in the name of Jesus, let’s do it, too. I mean, we don’t know Jesus, but let’s use the name.” So the demon beat them up, tore off their clothes, and they ran away naked [see Acts 19:13–17]. Zealous? Yes. Good intentions? It seems. Wrong? Most definitely.

Presumption [and] assumptions can cause great harm to you and to other people. Paul speaks of one very dangerous kind of presumption in 1 Timothy 1:6–7, when he says, “For some men, straying from these things,” speaking of sound doctrine, “have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.” Discussion is good, but not fruitless discussion. Teaching is good, but not false teaching. Being confident in teaching is good, but not being confident in false doctrine. Being zealous doesn’t make you a sound teacher.

But the most dangerous form of presumption and assumption is to assume that you’re actually a true believer when you’re not. This is a damning presumption.

You say, “Well, I’m a Christian.”

“How do you know?”

“Well, I am. I go to church, don’t I? I mean, I’ve got a little fish on the back of my car. My mom said I was.” We have looked at that sobering text in Matthew 7:21 and following, where all those people who know Jesus, know He is Lord, are involved in church, who are doing good works, come

to Jesus in the last day, Jesus describes them as the “many” [see Matthew 7:22]. He says [that] they say, “Lord, Lord, have we not. . . ?” And He says to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS” [7:23], and into hell they go. Oh! That would be terrible: to think you’re going to heaven, to be zealously doing “the Lord’s work,” and then to get to heaven only to discover you’ve been doing Satan’s work from church—at least the church building.

Listen, Jesus died on the cross, and shed His blood, and rose from the dead to save sinners and sinners only. If you think you’re pretty good, He didn’t die for you. He only died for sinners—wretched sinners who know in their hearts, and feel in their hearts, that they are corrupt, that they are wicked, that they cannot save themselves. There’s nothing they can do. They’re like Martin Luther, tormented from within. Then they realize that God paved the way through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and they see that the only way they could ever have access into heaven, the only way they could be justified before God, is to receive the free gift of eternal life. Have you done that? If you have, it changes your life. [The question is] not: Do you know the facts? but, Have you been born again? Have you been regenerated? Have you been transformed into a new creature [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], to use some of the scriptural terms? I cringe to think of how many zealous, religious, Christ-professing people will end up in hell, thinking they’re on the way to heaven. Jesus says that it’s the few [who] get there and the many who perish, from the church building [see Matthew 7:14].

This brings us to our third point: receive rebuke. Peter is excited, he’s fearful, he’s half-dazed from sleep, he want[s] desperately to do what is right, [and] he’s making stupid comments. He even wants to build some shelters—holy shelters, sacred tabernacles—let’s celebrate the Feast of Booths. Look at [Luke 9:]35: “Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!’” Peter was frantic, trying to do all these things, and God the Father wanted Peter to look at the kingdom of God and to listen to Jesus talk with Moses and Elijah about His

impending death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. And yet, Peter was running around like a chicken with its head cut off. "Let me get you some branches."

Peter was impulsive. He often acted before he thought, and I'm telling you, in his life, he received some whopper rebukes. Mmm. You remember this one? "Get behind me, Satan!" [see Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33]. Ow! He was just being concerned, "Lord, you aren't going to die!"

"Get behind me, Satan! You aren't setting your mind on the things of God." Oh, could you imagine how that would have just run [Peter] through?

Or how about this one? "Lord, I will never deny You. I will lay down my life, I will die, before denying You." [Then he] denies [Christ] three times with cursing and swearing [see Matthew 26:33–35, 69–75; Mark 14:30–31, 66–73, etc.].

Jesus [rises] from the dead, catches up with Peter later, and says, "Peter, Simon," [He] uses the old name, "So, do you love Me unconditionally?"

"Well, Lord, You know I *like* You."

"Peter, do you love Me unconditionally?"

I mean, what could [Peter] say? "Well, I did deny You. I *like* You a lot."

"Peter, do you even like Me a lot?" Would that have been a wound? Mmm.

As painful as those rebukes were in Peter's life, this [rebuke on the Mount of Transfiguration] is the granddaddy. When God has to rebuke you from heaven, that puts you into a category of one. Look at [Luke 9:]36. After [God] says, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him," [in verse 35], verse 36 says, "And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone." Lesson over, prophecy fulfilled. Peter saw the kingdom, chattered and was busy through most of the important part. He didn't stop, he didn't listen, he didn't learn. He missed it. Look at the end of verse 36: "And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen." I wonder why?

What would Peter say? "Yep, we went up to the mountain to pray, and I fell asleep. I did wake up, though, halfway through the vision, and then

I said—*why* did I say this?—‘It’s good for us to be here.’ I did get to see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, but I was collecting branches to build tabernacles so we could celebrate the Feast of Booths. And then, God the Father rebuked me from heaven and told me to listen to Jesus. And then [the vision] went away.” [It] is going to be interesting to talk to Peter about that one [when we get to heaven].

Rebuke is painful, but we need it. We need it. You know somebody loves you if they come to you and confront you about some sin, or some behavior, or something you’re doing that’s not right. You know they love you more than anyone else. Proverbs 27:5 says, “Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.” Do you know what that means? That means this: that to not rebuke somebody is to conceal love. When they need rebuke and you don’t do it, you are concealing love for them. You’re holding back love from them. [Proverbs 27:]6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” Oh, the enemy doesn’t want to be uncomfortable, the enemy doesn’t want to rebuke you. The enemy doesn’t want to lose your friendship. The enemy wants to feel comfortable. So, instead of doing what is best for you, and saying, “Pal, you’ve got an area here in your life you’re blind to. This is wrong,” they just say, “You’re a good guy. I love you, brother.” They are your enemy. But the friend wounds you. Friends faithfully wound each other out of love; enemies tell you what you want to hear and flatter you.

So, as a group, Calvary Bible Church, we need to learn to give rebuke with grace, and learn to receive it with grace. When somebody comes up to [me] and says, “You know, Jack, I’ve been seeing something in your life, and I’m concerned about it,” my response shouldn’t be, “Hey! Who are you to talk to me? I’m sinless!”

[When someone confronts you,] you need to say, “Let me drop my guard [so you can] hit me there [on the chin]—hard. Wound me. Wound me.” You need to receive it. You need to receive the blows. And yes, it hurts, but you know what? These rebukes that Peter received changed his life for the better. Don’t think you’re being a friend when you see somebody going

off in a bad direction, and you're just watching from a distance, and you're thinking to yourself, "Oh, that's OK."

You need to leave here this morning committed to remain[ing] awake to receive the blessing. You need to leave here committed to zealously run[ning] in the right direction. Pray, ask questions, get counsel, [and] exercise self-control until you know what the right direction is. Third and finally, be willing both to give and receive rebuke. Don't be defensive about it. Just say, "Hit me!" and take it and learn the lesson. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for what we were able to learn from this passage. Father, there is so much more here, but, Father, I just pray that we would learn from Peter's mistakes. Father, we thank You for Peter, we thank You for including bits of his life in the pages of Your Word so that we could relate and learn the same lessons he needed to learn. Father, if our lives were scrutinized, and if our lives were written down in your Book, oh, how many things others could learn not to do from us. So, Father, may we learn these lessons. May we discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness, to be where eternal blessings are being handed out. May we run in the right direction with zeal. And, Father, may we receive rebuke. If there is somebody here who doesn't know You, who has never repented of his or her sins, has never cried out in his or her heart, I pray that he or she would do so right now, that he or she would just cry out and say, "Lord Jesus, save me. I am a sinner. I am lost. I am in need of Your grace. Save me and wash me clean. I trust You and only You and what You accomplished on the cross and [by] Your resurrection to save me. Make me a new creature, clean me white as snow by Your blood." And, Father, make that happen by Your grace so that we can rejoice and the angels can sing. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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