

## What Makes Us Different

### Upon This Rock, Part 6

#### *Selected Scripture*

In his work, *Why Church Matters*, the author began one of his chapters with the following true story.

Robert lives in Gilbert, Arizona. He loves life and people and enjoys laughing at himself. He's got a good job and faithfully attends his [evangelical] church. But if you really want to see Robert get excited, ask him about his Jeep. He had searched for over two years to find just the right yellow and black Wrangler. It was spotless . . . just gorgeous," he recounts. "Once I got the Jeep . . . well, of course, I had to join the Jeep club. Robert explains, "The local club has over 1500 active members. It offers meetings, parties, trail runs, and a website where members can exchange Jeep tips and information. It's a Jeep community."

Once he became a member of this club, Robert connected with guys who taught him the finer points of four-wheeling. As his Jeep discipleship intensified, Robert's commitment only deepened. "I was totally hooked," he says, "Every free moment was consumed. I was either working on a Jeep, planning a Jeep run, hanging out and talking Jeep, or going on-line to check our Jeep website."

It was only after a conference on the nature and subject of the church, that Robert realized, he had no real passion for the church or its assembly . . . he said, "I would do anything for the guys in my club, but I struggled to do anything to serve my church."

Then he was challenged with this question at the conference – "If the church is central to God's purpose as seen through history and the gospel, how can we take so lightly what God takes so seriously?"

He realized that for several years he had pushed the church to the outskirts of his life. He had

invested so much in the Jeep club but very little in his local church

The author then made this application – we all have our own temptation – our own version of the Jeep club – some interest or pursuit that we care deeply about. It might be a hobby or a sport, a career or an education; it might be a preoccupation with technology, health, political cause or even a relationship.

The signs of our passionate commitment are all there – and we often do not recognize them for what they mean.<sup>1</sup>

Now this illustration isn't directed at people who own a Jeep.

Your Jeep might be your children's soccer league; your garden; your cottage or your set of golf clubs.

What is it that drives the passion of your life – and is any of it, spiritually related?

Just as marriage or parenting continually realign your priorities in life; the church body continually reminds you of spiritual disciplines and realities and the priority of the gospel.

A church is a community of believers who've effectively promised one another that they will accept the reminder – and hold themselves accountable to the gospel and the priority of the Body of Christ.

That the church matters more than a Jeep.

We've begun to explore 21 promises we are making to each other as members of this Body of believers.

Promises related to our conduct, our church, and our community.

And let me say this – the promises we talked about last Lord’s Day and the promises we’re going to talk about today are for every believer – if you’re visiting from another city or another church – these are for you.

If you’re not a believer, we’re putting ourselves on notice – this is how you should see us live – this is the kind of passion you should be able to observe in our lives.

These promises are for every genuine believer to make in relation to their own personal conduct.

Thus far we covered three promises as it relates to our personal conduct:

- **First, the promise to submit to the authority of scripture as the final authority on all matters.**
- **Secondly, the promise to pursue holiness in all areas of life as a joyful act of worship to the Triune God.**
- **Thirdly, the promise to avoid sinful habits and entanglements such as illicit drug use, drunkenness, gossip, gluttony and all other sinful behavior taught in scripture.**

And if you think that’s too specific, we covered several lists that the Apostle Paul gave regarding sinful activities and behaviors.

Now today, let’s cover the final promises we’re making the Lord and each other – in regards to our personal conduct.

And again, let me encourage you, these promises aren’t something we’ll get perfect – we’re going to fail; we’re going to stumble and trip from time to time and we’ll need regular reminders of the sacrifice of Christ and the ongoing encouragement and accountability of the church body – that’s part of what it means to belong to one another.

But what we *are* saying is that these promises are going to be our pattern – our pursuit – and our passion.

We’re effectively saying that the gospel – the church – is more important than a Jeep.

Alright, here’s the fourth promise:

- 4. To pursue fellowship with Christ and growth in the Spirit of God through diligence in spiritual disciplines including prayer, Bible study, worship and service. (Luke 18:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 5:1-16; 1 Timothy 4:7-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)**

Again, this language is pointed. We refer to prayer and Bible study and worship and service, not as spiritual entertainments or spiritual recreation . . . but a spiritual discipline.

Turn to Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians in *1 Corinthians chapter 9* . . . notice how he refers to Christianity as an athletic contest in verse 26. ***Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body . . .***

In this one text alone, Paul is relating the Christian life to different sporting contests – like, running and boxing.

The Greeks had two great athletic festivals – the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games. The Isthmian Games were held at Corinth and were very familiar to the believers in this local church.

Every athlete was involved in rigorous training ten months out of the year. The last month of training was always held at Corinth, with supervised daily workouts in the gymnasium and on the athletic fields.<sup>ii</sup>

The winners of these foot races received wreaths made out of pine twigs and pine needles. Paul writes in *verse 25* that this wreath doesn’t last, but your prize for your spiritual race is an imperishable wreath – or crown.

Then he refers to boxing. The boxing champions in Paul’s day just as idolized and rewarded as today – with fame, attention, money, and status.

But Paul does something unusual here. He effectively says that the Christian is running your own race – as if you’re racing against yourself – your desire to sit it out – to relax.

Paul writes here as well that we’re to effectively box – but we’re boxing our own body . . . notice *verse 27, I buffet my body*.

The word *buffet* means to *hit under the eye* – to effectively give yourself a black eye.<sup>iii</sup>

In other words, Paul is training and disciplining his own body in order to bring his lazy, undisciplined desires into and under self-control.

Paul wrote along these same lines to Timothy in his first letter and chapter 4 where he said, ***“Train yourself for the purpose of godliness.***

***Train yourself*** comes from the word *gymnos* – from which we get our word *gymnasium*.

In other words, your pursuit of godliness ought to have the smell of spiritual sweat – the sweat of a good workout!<sup>iv</sup>

If somebody says to you, “It’s hard to pray and read my Bible and live a godly life.” You can tell them – you’re obviously doing it right – because the right way is discipline and diligence and sweat.

So we make this our pursuit – to go into the gymnasium of spiritual disciplines and be willing to work up a sweat.

That we, Paul wrote the *Ephesians* – and I love his realistic language while at the same time presenting to us the goal – *we are trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:10)*.

I love what one author wrote when he defined spiritual disciplines as those exercises that free us from the gravity of this present age.<sup>v</sup>

We are trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And we are learning it together as a local body of believers.

**5. We promise to practice sexual purity before marriage and complete fidelity within heterosexual and monogamous marriage. (Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, 10:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4)**

In 1820, a lawyer by the name of Washington Irving published his first short story.

It became so immensely popular that for the next 170 years it would be read by millions of people. It was so popular that most of you in this auditorium would know the name of the leading character. Let me describe him for you and see how long it takes before you figure it out.

He was a man who walked into the woods one day with his favorite dog and his favorite rifle. He met some strange men deep in the forest, and they offered him a drink; within a matter of moments, under the influence of that magical brew, he fell into a deep sleep that would last for 20 years.

His name was Rip Van Winkle.

Twenty years later, Rip Van Winkle awakens and hurries back into town, none the wiser – only to discover that everything had changed.

He went back to the tavern inn where he used to sit and talk with his friends underneath the sign that had a painting on it of His Majesty King George III. Only now, it had a different portrait and name. Rip Van Winkle’s friend, the tavern keeper, was gone.

Let me read you Washington Irving’s words:

In the place of his friends was a lean looking fellow, with his pockets full of handbills, haranguing

vehemently about rights of citizens – elections – members of Congress – liberty and Bunker’s Hill – which bewildered Van Winkle.

The appearance of Rip, with his long grizzled beard, his rusty rifle, his uncouth dress . . . soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians.

They crowded around him, eyeing him from head to foot with great curiosity. [One man] hustled up to him, and, drawing him partly aside, inquired, “On which side did you vote?” Another short busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and rising on tiptoe, inquired in his ear, “Are you a Federal or a Democrat?”

Eventually, they all demanded who he was . . . Rip exclaimed, at wit’s end, “I’m not myself . . . I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain. . . and [now] everything’s changed.”

During one long twenty-year nap, the world of Rip Van Winkle had changed; and he had an incredible amount of catching up to do.

Washington Irving closed by writing, “It was some time before he could be made to comprehend the strange events that had taken place during his sleep. How that there had been a revolutionary war – that the country had thrown off the yoke of old England – and that, instead of being a subject of his Majesty George the Third, he was now a citizen of this United States.”

Imagine such breathtaking change in only 20 years.

We can imagine that, can’t we?

In the past 20 years, we have experienced seismic shifts away from any semblance of a Christian worldview to a man-centered, subjective, relativistic, pagan, and world view.

Perhaps unlike any other arena of life, the arena of sexual ethics, sexual relationships, marriage and gender have morphed into unrecognizable patterns.

Time magazine’s cover asked the question a month ago – Is monogamy over? And one author they asked to give his opinion wrote, “Monogamy is unnatural, but we should keep it for our kids’ sake.”<sup>vi</sup>

If you just woke up after a 20 year nap, the cultural understanding of marriage has been reduced to mean virtually nothing, simply because the moral argument for same-sex marriage is the same moral argument for polygamy, group marriage and more.

Consider how long it will take for other laws to fall out of favor. Currently, it’s against the law to marry someone in your immediate family; it’s

against the law to marry someone who's already married; it's against the law to alienate the affections of someone's spouse through adulterous seduction; and it's against the law to marry someone who isn't an adult.

In other words, having redefined marriage as something beyond its biblical and culturally understood parameters for several thousand years, it becomes anything we want it to become which means it becomes nothing.<sup>vii</sup>

Listen, monogamy is not man's idea, it's God's. Polygamy is man's idea – that's not hard to figure out. All the way back to the days of Abraham and the patriarch's, their disobedience in multiplying wives brought heartache and division and rivalry and jealousy and disharmony.

And to this day, where fidelity and monogamy where one man and one woman covenant together in faithful union – wherever that standard is eliminated or ignored you have an incredible travesty.

For one thing, women become collectibles; like properties and houses. Just travel through world history – even Biblical history and look at what happens to women when they can be added to one man's possession – they become commodities to be used and collected and effectively misused or simply ignored.

The Bible simply records the polygamy of so many through Old Testament times; keep in mind that just because the Bible reports something, that doesn't mean it recommends it.

Just look at what happened to Esther and David and Solomon and Rebeca and Hanna – look at the heartache.

You need to go back to the created order of **Genesis 2**, affirmed by Jesus Christ in **Matthew 19** – ***A man shall leave his father and mother – and shall cleave to his wife – and they – the man and his wife – in fact Jesus emphasized it by saying – and the two shall become one flesh; not a man and not two wives – or another man.***

But the man and his wife – these two people become one flesh.

What are we promising as believers?

Let me tell you what you're promising . . . you're promising to be viewed in your village a lot like they viewed Rip Van Winkle.

You are promising to be hopelessly out of date. You are promising to belong to a community of people who aren't with the cultural norm . . . you are promising to accept the derogatory names and labels.

Still, this is our distinctive – which is why the New Testament emphasizes over and over again our sexual conduct – because it is in this conduct where we are so obviously different.

Paul wrote to the Roman believers in **Romans 13:13**, ***Let us behave properly as in the daytime, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality . . . 14, make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.***

He wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:18, ***Flee immorality . . .*** by the way, as best as I can tell, that's the only sin where you're told not to fight it or resist it or battle it or overcome it – you're to run from it. ***Flee immorality.*** He goes on to remind them and us in **verse 19**, ***Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20, For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.***

He uses slave terminology. Christ has gone to the slave market of sin, and He has bought you off the auction block – you now belong to Him. And the way you show you belong to Him has a lot to do with your body.

To the Thessalonian church, Paul was even more specific: ***For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;***

I love that clarity – for this is the will of God.

No Christian has to sit around wondering about it.

We now have a dedicated line at Wisdom for the Heart to receive questions from listeners and one Friday a month we answer them. It's become one of the most popular things we do. And the questions are all over the map. It's such a joy to respond.

Not too long ago we got a question from a man who said, "I'm living with my girlfriend, and I'm a Christian and she's not – and I'm praying to know what God wants me to do, and I wonder if you have any idea."

Did I ever.

My answer was pretty simple – and I don't think I've ever said this before, but I said, "Guess what – you don't need to pray about that all – I've got the answer for you from God. Move out!"

This is the will of God – Paul continues in **verse 4**, ***that each of you know how to possess his own [body] in honor, 5, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6)***

How serious is God about this subject?

The writer of Hebrews writes it this way: ***Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4).***

How many times will you hear people say, “You shouldn’t judge anybody . . . that’s not like God . . . you shouldn’t judge!”

Scripture actually and very clearly says that all sexual relations outside of marriage (unrepentant fornication), before marriage, after marriage with someone to whom you are not married to (unrepentant adultery) – ***God will judge.***

We’ve seen a lot of tragic tinkering with the family over the past few decades: abortion on demand; no-fault divorce; cohabitation; same-sex parenting through surrogate mothers or artificial insemination; and on and on . . . all of it whittling away and reducing and ultimately erasing the ideal of marriage and sexual purity as designed for our own good by our wonderful Creator God.

One more promise in relation to our personal conduct:

**6. To follow the ordinances of scripture by being immersed in water following conversion to Christ and remembering and celebrating His atoning sacrifice through communion. (*Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42, 8:36-39; I Corinthians 11:23-28*)**

We’re putting this in the category of personal conduct issues because – while the church administers it – these activities are decisions you make in your personal life, first and foremost between you and your Lord.

And when you fulfill these promises, you can be inducted into the full and rich relationship with those who’ve also been marked as disciples of Jesus Christ.

And by the way, we’re not making too much of baptism, we’re simply correcting the faulty thinking of the church at large that makes too little of it.

***The Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 – Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . 20***

Baptizing them – that is, baptizing disciples. Not infants, not unbelievers, but disciples.

This passage isn’t a suggestion – these are commands to identify publically with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ through

immersion in water baptism and then follow all that Jesus Christ taught us to obey.

According to the New Testament pattern, baptism isn’t something your parents do for you or your parents decide for you – it is something you do – it is something you decide to do for Christ.

Baptism is a living testimony – a demonstration that you have believed the gospel – that Christ died for you; that Christ was buried for you; that Christ rose again from the dead for you.

Which is why baptism by immersion is the Biblical mode of this ordinance – it symbolizes death, burial (in water) and resurrection. We actually pull you up – some people we count a few seconds.

The word ***baptize*** means to dip or immerse. The Greeks were intelligent people, and they had a word for sprinkling and a word for pouring and neither one of them are ever used – even once – in passages related to Spirit or water baptism.

Unfortunately, the verb is transliterated, not translated in your English New Testament. It’s never been translated because it would have created a scandal in the middle ages when the first English translations appeared – the Catholic church was at that time sprinkling infants as a sacrament.

So the ***verb*** was left alone, and baptismai was simply transliterated to create an English word, baptism, which still left people without knowing what it meant since it hadn’t been translated – which bothers me more and more by the way.

What it means is, to immerse – and it’s the only verb ever used in any passage related to Christian baptism.

And so what happened when the church was created: ***Acts 2:41-42 – So those who had received his word (that is, they believed the gospel message delivered by the Apostle Peter) they were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.***

The church sprang into existence in first century Jerusalem by people who effectively believed the gospel and made this public promise – they were baptized and then added to the church.

And we follow that practice to this day.

The ordinance of baptism is a one-time event following your conversion to the gospel of Christ, but there is another ordinance that takes place as often as the leadership of the church plan the event.

**We call it communion.**

While baptism is a one-time act of identification; communion is a repeated act of examination and rededication.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church – *But let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup . . .*

In other words, this ordinance that remembers the fact that Christ gave His life to us, calls us to examine ourselves to make sure that we are giving our lives to Christ.

So this promise is one we make repeatedly and then even collectively as a body of believers together remembering the death and resurrection of our Lord.

You know what these personal promises do for us? They cause us to revalue those things that have real value.

The world marks down the value of purity and fidelity and marriage – the gospel changes the price tags and raises the price far higher.

I was sent this true story a few weeks ago from a member of our fellowship.

A man in disheveled clothes sat at a metro station in Washington, DC and played his violin. It was a cold January morning. He played several pieces by Bach and his playing through that morning rush hour lasted just under an hour.

It was calculated that several thousand people walked by. A middle aged man noticed the musician and slowed his pace before hurrying off. Another leaned against the wall to listen, but then looked at their watch and walked away.

The only person to pay him attention was a little boy who stopped to listen, even though his mother took his hand and urged him along. He kept his

head turned toward the violinist the entire time he walked away.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only six people stopped for a moment or two; only 20 people tossed money into his violin case, and none of them even slowed their pace.

When he finished playing, and silence took over, no one noticed; no one applauded; no one recognized that this was Joshua Bell, one of the best violinists in the world; and he had been playing on a violin worth nearly 4 million dollars.

Two days before he played in that subway station, he had sold out in Boston, and the seats cost \$100.

It was part of a Washington Post experiment about perception and priorities among people.

An experiment that had telling results.

Just because the world ignores you, beloved; just because they hardly stop to listen to a message you have that is worth its weight in gold – in fact, it brings glorious immortality.

Just remember, you take your cues – not from what the world can perceive and what the world prioritizes – what the world around you stops and listens to – but to what God has already said – and what He says, is priceless.

And these are our promises back to Him – and to each other – this is our priority – this is our passion – this is our pattern . . . for the benefit of our own lives; for the benefit of the church, and ultimately for the praise and glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/25/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Joshua Harris, *Why Church Matters* (Multnomah, 2004), p. 53

ii John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Moody, 1984), p. 214

iii Ibid, p. 215

iv R. Kent Hughes, *The Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Crossway, 1991), p. 16

v Hughes, p. 19

vi Time Magazine, September 21, 2015, p. 64

vii CitizenLink – Q & A: Why Not Same-Sex Marriage?