

Key Principles of Christian Living

2. *God Doesn't Need Us*

This is the second sermon of a teaching series in which we will be exploring the basic principles which every disciple of Jesus really needs to embrace if they are to understand God and reach their full potential in Christ. In the first sermon, we explored the first principle which teaches us an absolutely fundamental truth: *He's God and we're not*. All spiritual reality must begin at that point. Until we have settled the issue of who's God and who's not, we are still in spiritual kindergarten and if we are fighting against God's right to be God, our lives will be miserable, and we will be forever frustrated. But when we finally come to the point where we can allow God His rightful place in the universe, in His church and in our lives, then we're ready to move on.

That brings us to the second key principle of Christian living, which I spoke about in the previous sermon, but I want to elaborate more today. This truth flows from the first and it's the simple fact that, *God Doesn't Need Us*. Of course, we desperately need God, but He doesn't need us. This principle tells us something about God and something about us. To say that God doesn't need us means that He is totally and truly sovereign over the universe. He's the boss, the ruler, and the Lord of all things. That means He alone has true freedom, which we touched on in the first sermon.

Go to any Bible college or seminary and you will hear very learned (and sometimes heated) debates about 'free will.' But when we use that term, we almost always refer to human free will. Such debates have always fascinated me – especially when the term 'free will' appears nowhere in the Bible. Here's the truth of the matter. Only one person in the universe has complete free will. Find that person and you've found God. Our 'free will' is drastically limited, God's free will has no limit. He can do whatever He wants to do whenever He wants to do it.

That is the essence of true free will. It's true that we humans have important moral choices to make and it's also true that we are accountable for those choices. But any 'free will' we have is only a derivative. The 'freedom' we have to obey (or to rebel) is a freedom that God has gifted to us.

This second principle also tells us something about God's transcendence, which the Bible teaches when it tells us that, 'God is high and lifted up.' Transcendence means that God created the universe and is separate from it. The universe is not an extension of God or a necessary part of God. He existed in and of Himself long before the universe was created.

This principle also points us to God's holiness. This is a hard attribute to define because it is basic to who God is. As one writer put it, holiness is what makes God truly God. It's the 'goodness' of God that separates Him from His creation. It involves purity and separation from sin, but goes beyond that. If God were not holy, He would not be God at all.

This principle also impresses upon us the truth of God's immensity. All power and all wisdom and all majesty reside in Him alone. He inhabits all things and His presence fills every part of the universe. There is nowhere you can go where God is not already there. Not only does this principle tell us something about God, it also tells us something about who we are. To say that we desperately need God, reveals our inherent weakness. We are sinners by birth, by nature and by choice.

The true condition of the human race is revealed in these penetrating words from Paul:

Romans 3:10-12 *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

Even a casual reader is struck with the universal, repeated emphasis of these words: “no one ... not even one ... no one ... no one ... all ... no one ... not even one.” Paul leaves absolutely no room for misunderstanding here! The whole human race has rebelled against God. As a result, when God looks upon humanity He can’t find a single righteous person. Not even one. He can’t even find anyone who truly seeks Him.

Sin has so warped the human heart that no one does anything truly good in God’s sight. We are all ‘worthless’ in His sight. That last part is a pretty tough pill to swallow. How can you reconcile the word ‘worthless’ with the truth that “*God so loved the world?*” Why would anyone love that which is worthless? The answer goes to the very heart of this second principle and to the very heart of the gospel of God’s amazing grace.

God loves us in spite of our sin and not because of some supposed worth He found in us. To put it in crass terms, He found nothing worth saving in us, but He saved us anyway because that’s the kind of God He is. That thought is both humbling and thrilling. None of us deserved God’s grace. If we deserved it, it wouldn’t be grace. Any ‘worth’ we have to God is worth that He gives to us. We have value because God values us, not because of anything of value within us.

This second principle exposes our phony independence, our casual arrogance, our sinful pride, and our obsessive need to be in control. It tells us that we aren’t in control, and we weren’t ever in control, not even when we thought we were. We can find this concept in numerous places in the Bible:

John 15:5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Romans 7:24 *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*

1 Corinthians 8:2 *“The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.”*

2 Corinthians 3:4-5 *“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”*

As I grow older and wiser, I find myself increasingly glad that we worship a God Whose power is unlimited’ Who never grows weary’ Whose plans will not be defeated’ and Whose ways are far beyond my own.

What a comfort to serve such a God. I need a God like that, and I need Him more than I will ever know. I desperately need God. Sometimes I feel that need, often I don’t. But feelings don’t matter in any case. The fact is: I desperately need God. And so do you. So do we all. So let me just recap:

- > God is free to do whatever He wants to do whenever He wants to do it.
- > God was not obligated to create us, and He is not obligated to save us.
- > Everything God does for us is an act of sheer, sovereign, amazing grace.
- > Therefore, everything we are and ever hope to be is because of Him!
- > That thought should lead us to praise and worship every day we draw breath!

This second principle is not simply a statement of theology. It's meant to be a crucial steppingstone in our spiritual life. First, you admit that God is God, and you are not. Then you confess your utter and complete need of God. Until you can say that from your heart, you are not even on first base in your spiritual journey. There are many places in the Bible that teach this truth. As I prepared this sermon, my mind was drawn powerfully to Psalm 100.

Psalm 100 *“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”*

Many years ago, this psalm was sung to a tune called ‘the Old Hundredth.’ Today we know the tune better as the ‘Doxology.’ The Hebrew text calls it, “A psalm for giving thanks.” Even though there are many thanksgiving psalms, this is the only one specifically titled that way. It is sometimes called the “*Jubilate*,” which means “*O be joyful*.” In Old Testament times, the Jews used it as part of the Temple worship. These simple words have blessed the hearts of God’s people for nearly 3,000 years.

Psalm 100 has two stanzas and each is centered around God. We are to give thanks and praise the Lord because: He is God (verses 1-3), and He is good (verses 4-5).

Verse 3 says, “*Know that the Lord is God*.” Older versions say, “*Know that the Lord, He is God*,” which makes it even more pointed. This acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty leads to three corporate responses: We shout for joy (verse 1), we serve the Lord with gladness (verse 2a), we sing with joy (verse 2b).

Then there is a statement of ownership and assurance in verse 3b: “*It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture*.” Some versions say, “*It is He who made us, and not we ourselves*.” I actually prefer that translation because it emphasizes that there are no self-made men or women. All that we have was given to us by God.

This leads us on to visible, public thanksgiving and praise: “*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name*” (Psalm 100:4).

The design of the tabernacle and the temple allowed for large courtyards where great crowds of people would gather. The psalmist here exhorts the people to come into that courtyard singing and openly praising God’s name. It’s almost as if God is saying, “*You want to meet me? You can. Start singing a song and I’ll meet you on the second verse*.” Part of the emphasis is surely meant to be that Israel would publicly praise the Lord. As the pagan nations watched from a distance, the public, loud, joyful worship of the Israelites would send a clear message to the watching world: “*These people know and love their God*.”

I don’t think it’s out-of-place to suggest that we should be bolder and more public in our praise. Last weekend there were millions of Australians celebrating the winners of some football games in our nation. Over tens of thousands of people packed into various grandstands and shouted themselves hoarse as thousands more watched on television. At the end of the season, people will decorate their homes, cars and workplaces with the colours of their team. There will be dancing in the streets and thousands will not make it to bed the night if their team wins! If people can celebrate to that extent over a bunch of guys running around on the grass passing, kicking and scoring points with a piece of leather, how much more should we openly celebrate our great and wonderful God? We should praise the Lord on the streets, in the parks, in the classrooms, in the jobs, in our offices, in our neighborhood, and with our friends and loved ones.

And while we don't need to be pushy or offensive, we shouldn't be silent either. A silent Christian is a contradiction in terms! Now we are certainly not the most reserved and inhibited congregation, by any means, but I think it is fair to say that we could all manifest the joy of the Lord a little more in our lives and our communities. This great psalm then ends with these reassuring words: *"For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations"* (Psalm 100:5).

Because God's love endures forever, it has no beginning and no end. Before time began, God was the eternal Father of love. And since God is eternal, His mercy extends as far into the future as the mind can conceive ... and then infinitely further. God's love and faithfulness will still endure for ever and ever and ever! It never runs out, is never exhausted, and when you feel you have used up your allotment, you discover that there is an infinite river flowing from God's throne.

God's love is not like the weather. It does not change with the seasons. And it does not depend on you or on anything you may do. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you less. His mercy is so great and His love so free that it is truly infinite and everlasting. We see God's love and mercy most clearly at the cross. I am sure you've seen that plaque that reads, *"I asked Jesus, 'How much do you love me?' 'This much,' He answered, as He stretched out His arms and died."*

Fix your eyes upon the blood-stained cross of Calvary. Gaze upon the dying form of the Son of God. There you will find grace unmeasured, mercy undeserved, and love beyond measure. No changes in us or this universe, however great, can produce any changes in God. All things are moving according to His divine plan. There are no mistakes with the Lord. You may think otherwise, but it's not true. You may say, *"All things are against me,"* but it's not so. All things are *for* you - but you may not yet see it. God is ordering everything for the best.

Consider the final phrase: *"through all generations."* It literally means *"from generation to generation."* Exodus 20:6 tells us that God shows His love to *"a thousand generations"* of those who love Him. Since a biblical generation is 40 years, this means God's love lasts at least 40,000 years. And since this promise was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai approximately 3,500 years ago, we may safely conclude that God's faithful love will continue at least another 36,500 years. That is to say, in 3,500 years we are not yet even 10% of the way through a thousand generations!

Of course, I doubt God was using this figure literally - but it's not purely figurative either. It's a way of showing us that God's love and faithfulness go far beyond any human understanding. Suppose we line up a grandfather, a father, a son, a grandson, and a great-grandson here now. This text tells us that what God is to the grandfather, He will be to the father. What God is to the father, He will be to the son. What God is to the son, He will be to the grandson. What God is to the grandson, He will be to the great-grandson. And so, it goes across the centuries. Generations come and go, one after the other. Only God remains forever.

This is our hope at the edge of death. This is why we rejoice as we bury our dead. Nothing of God dies when a man or woman of God dies. We need not fear death because a Christian is immortal. I do not know how far we have to go until we reach the end of our earthly road. But this I know - that road is paved with God's love and faithfulness. And we need never be afraid.

Many years ago, a wise old man encouraged me to pray the last sentence of the Lord's Prayer every day: *"Yours is the kingdom, yours is the power, yours is the glory, forever. Amen"* (Matthew 6:13). That's a part of the Lord's Prayer that most of us don't even think about, but it is absolutely crucial. We pray *"yours is the kingdom"* because we know that the kingdoms of the earth will give way to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray *"yours is the power"* because we do not give up in the face of difficult trials but instead live in faith that the Lord has a purpose and He will give us whatever we need to face the challenges of each day.

We pray *"yours is the glory"* because we have chosen to live for God instead of for the praise of men. And we need to pray that way because we are all kingdom builders who love to operate in our own power and for our own glory. I therefore encourage you to say to the Lord every day: *"Not my kingdom but yours, Lord. Not my power but yours, Lord. Not my glory but yours, Lord. And not just today or tomorrow but forever. Amen."* If we pray like that, and if we live like that, we'll stay out of the kind of trouble that could destroy us. As we wrap up this message, let me draw all this together into three simple statements:

1) *God owns everything; we own nothing.*

Our problem is that too often we don't feel our need until things aren't going well. But we need God just as much when we have a million dollars as when we are flat broke. And we need God just as much when our health is good as when we have cancer. We need the Lord. We need Him desperately. We need Him more than we will ever truly know.

2) *Our lives are broken because of sin.*

Sin has messed everything up. The whole world groans and travails because of sin. Nothing works right; things break; little children are shot in their classrooms; marriages disintegrate; promises are broken; laws are violated; and terrorists fly airplanes into buildings. The world is broken, and we are broken. Like Humpty Dumpty, nothing we do can put us back together again.

3) *If God doesn't help us, we're sunk.*

That should be obvious by now. I love how David puts it in Psalm 34:6, *"This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles."* Take that verse backwards and you come to a wonderful truth. If you want to be saved, the Lord must hear you. But to be heard, you must call on the Lord. But only a 'poor' man or woman calls on the Lord. Those who think of themselves as self-sufficient have no need for God, so they never call on Him. Only the 'poor' call on God and are heard and saved and delivered. That's what Jesus meant when He said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, and those who mourn, and the meek who confess their weakness. They will embrace the power and reality and confidence of the kingdom of heaven, they will be comforted, and they will one day inherit the earth. Blessed are the needy ... Blessed are the desperate ... Blessed are the broken ... Blessed are the weak ... they will find the Lord!

If the first principle of Christian living drives us to our knees - the second principle keeps us there until we cry out for mercy. It is a great advance in the spiritual life to bow before the Lord and say, *"Oh God, I need you. I can't do this myself. Please help me."* No one who has cried out to the Lord like that has ever been turned away. And when we finally get off our high horse and cry out to God, then (and only then) are our prayers answered and God is glorified. But you'll never know until you see this for yourself. I can preach all day long, but it will have no effect until you admit how much you need God.

**You will never know if Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have.
When Jesus is all you have, then you will know Jesus is all you need.**

If you are weary; if you are tired; if you are discouraged; if you need a fresh start; if you know your life is going nowhere; if you want your sins forgiven; if you want to know God - then drop whatever you are doing and run to the cross! Run to the cross! Don't delay; don't put it off; and don't make any excuses. Drop everything and run to the cross of Christ and may God give you faith to believe as you lay hold of Jesus and hold on tight.

God doesn't need us - but we desperately need Him!