

Pastor Min J. Chung

Friday, January 25 2013

Normal Christianity: Radical Foundation

Matthew 5:17-20; 7:24-29

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Matt. 7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Introduction

We want to talk about normal Christianity. Normal can be common. We are not talking about that kind of normal, but what ought to be normal; not what is readily seen. Normal Christianity that changed the world throughout history. Every generation God has been incredibly working to change the world. We want to be that kind of normal Christian. What is that norm that the bible is talking about? We also want to define radical. Radical can mean extreme, but more so the literal definition of radical is the “root of things” linguistically and mathematically. As we look at the root of normal Christianity we will look at our foundation. What ought to be the root of Christianity? We need to get to the Word and talk about what ought to be normal Christianity and what kind of foundation we ought to have. The Bible is telling us to have a radical foundation in the Word.

Edward Farley’s quote:

“Why is it that the vast majority of Christian believers remain largely unexposed to Christian learning--to historical-critical studies of the Bible, the content and structure of the great doctrines, to two thousand years of classic works on the Christian life, to basic disciplines of theology, biblical languages and ethics? Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, physicians, homemakers, scientists, salespeople, managers of all sorts, people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain in a literalist, elementary school level in their religious understanding? How is it that high school age church members move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA and calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of Scripture? How is it possible one can attend or even teach Sunday School for decades and at the end of that lack the interpretive skills of someone who has taken three or four weeks in an introductory course in the Bible at a university or seminary?”

These are piercing words, but so true.

Let me ask you this question. Can you witness to a Muslim, a Hindu, a Jew, an atheist, a pantheist? Can you answer their questions? Can you witness to them through the Bible. You may not know what they believe, but can you refute them through the Bible? You don’t have to win the argument, but tell them what the Bible says and plant the word in them so that the Holy Spirit can use it to change their hearts. We need to be able to intellectually talk about these things. “I see what you believe in, and this is what I believe in”. You don’t have to have an argument through the Bible. We only have one book and everyone’s eternity depends on this one book.

Many of you have not read the bible once in your life. New Year's resolution (it's still January) even if you stop at Leviticus, c'mon. You have to know it like a professor knows his/her subject; like a lawyer who knows their case. You have to know the rules like the referee knows the rules of the sport. You have to know the bible and have radical knowledge in it; then radically live it and build on it. I pray that you will have concrete application like, "I will read one word/verse/chapter a day!" God sent you these letters through the Word of God. We have to know it, live it, and build on it.

I. Radical Knowledge – Know it

A. We need to know the meaning of the Bible

- *Matthew 5:17* "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

1. Abolish

Jesus is saying that as he talks about the whole Old Testament as he comes into the time of the New Testament, he said he hasn't come to nullify the Old Testament but to fulfill it. When the Bible says the law and the prophets he is referring to the summary of the whole OT. The whole Old Testament is summarized in these two words, "Law" and the "Prophets" because the first five books are books of the law and all the other books in the OT is from the Prophets. Many people think that Jesus' coming nullifies the OT and they think this because they do not know the scripture. The OT is fulfilled by Christ's coming. The OT is about Jesus. If we don't understand the OT, we have to study the Bible. We have to study the intent of the Bible, just like we study ordinary books. God speaks to you as you study the Bible, as you use your mind and understand what the author meant. Some people ask, "What isn't studying the bible so simple?" I think on an intellectual level the Bible is about college/ graduate school level books. We must study it seriously just like how you study for your classes. We must know the meaning (not put our own meaning into it.) If you don't study the word, you will put your own meaning into the words. You won't understand the context. We need to exegete the Bible, get the meaning out. We must make sure not to isogete or put our meaning into the Bible. We need to understand that the Bible is mainly about God and Jesus and in relation to that, it is about you.

2. Fulfill

The OT is divided into four sections.

The first five books are called The Law/ Pentateuch [Genesis-Deuteronomy] which are written by Moses. The rest of the books are summarized by prophets.

The Historical Books [Joshua – Esther]

Wisdom Literature [Job-Song of Solomon]

The Prophetic Books [Isaiah – Malachi]

So it was the Law and the prophets. If you remember it like this, you at least have a framework to work with.

3. The Law

You have to understand it in its context. It is the description of the lifestyle of Jesus. It talks about the character and person of Jesus. Loving as an Israelite would be different than loving as an American. When you understand the Law, its principles, contexts and how it talks about loving God and loving others – as we get the essence, we can see what Jesus is like. The Law is saying we fail and we cannot live according to God's law but there is going to be a person who is going to live perfectly according to the law of God: Jesus. Many people today think and talk as if Jesus came to abolish the law. Christ did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law.

4. The Prophets

The prophets give us the history of Israel and the hope of God's deliverance in their exile. There is always a hero that delivers Israel and this hero pictures Jesus who saves us from our sins. He pictures the spiritual deliverance of Jesus. Jesus is our hero that saves us from the exile of sin. He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

The ESV study bible notes on Matthew 5:17: “to fulfill them” Jesus fulfills all the OT in that it all points to him, not only in the specific predictions of the Messiah but also the sacrificial systems which look forward to the great sacrifice of himself. In many events in history of Israel foreshadow his life as God’s true Son who perfectly obeys God and sets forth a behavior pattern that his life exemplifies. Jesus doesn’t replace the OT, but fulfills it through his life and ministry. The OT meaning cannot be understood unless you study Jesus in the NT. NT describes his fulfillment. The OT is unclear without NT and the NT is shallow without the OT. Jesus is saying “I am the person that the law is describing.” I am the perfect person. I am the perfect obedient One. I am the Hero that the prophets were pointing forward to. I am here. I came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

- B. We need to know the details of the Bible
 - Matthew 5:18

Matt. 5:18 *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, **not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.***

He is talking about the importance of each word. Read each and every word.

1. The importance of each word
 1. Read – Deep and wide. You have to constantly understand the whole Scripture because there is an incredible unity. As you study the Bible, you start connecting things and seeing the correlations.
 2. Know

At least know the facts. Know what the Bible says.

3. Understand
4. Memorize

Minimally you need to know the facts of the Bible more than you know the stats of any fantasy sports leagues. Repent! Love every letter. What is something you know most about? What topic do you know most about? For Christians it has to be the Bible!!! There was a pastor that I know that knew so much about computers. I rebuked him one day as I asked him, “Do you know more about the computer or the Bible?” What do you know more about? We must know the Bible.

Psalm 1:2 *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

This is normal Christianity.

2. The importance of the Word in the world

Matt. 5:18 *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law **until everything is accomplished.***

God is running history according to the word of God. God’s bible is the manual book for the fulfillment of history. It contains the essence of everything that is happening in the universe. It is the key that unlocks the secrets of the universe. Sometimes people ask me, “Pastor Min, should I force myself to read the Bible even when I don’t feel like it? If I do that am I not being a hypocrite?” Well, we have two natures in our hearts. There’s an aspect in which when we read it with a sinful motive so that we can tell other people and can look “holy” to other people, for ourselves – sure, you’re being a hypocrite. But there is another aspects in our spirit’s nature because we love God. Our sinful nature has its own desires but we read the Scripture because you love Jesus and you want to grow and become like Jesus and impact other people. “I feel like doing something else right now but I’m going to force myself to read the Bible because I want to grow and meditate on it day and night”. When you do this, you are not being a

hypocrite, you are loving God even if you don't feel like reading it. You, in fact, are being a Christian; you are being a normal Christian. We need to love the Bible more than our feelings.

There was a man in Kansas City who was severely injured in an explosion. The victim's face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands. He was just a new Christian, and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. Then he heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in Braille. Much to his dismay, however, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion. One day, as he brought one of the Braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, 'I can read the Bible using my tongue'. At the time Robert Sumner wrote his book, the man had "read" through the entire Bible four times with his tongue. This reminds me of this verse....

Psalm. 119:103 *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

I pray that you will love to read the Bible and that God will change the desires of your heart and that you will have taste buds for the word of God. I pray that you will love the Word because you love the person who gave you these words.

II. Radical Obedience – Live it

Christian life must be a derivative of the Bible. Everything in our lives must be a derivative of the bible. We must try to obey everything.

- A. Always ask, "What does it say?" – you have to learn how to ask these questions for the immediate needs
Matt. 5:19 *Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Not what does he or she say? So many times we think like this because we want to please other people: what does he think? What does my mom say? Instead because we want to live for God we should ask "What does it say?" Everything has to be constantly evaluated by "what to" (what should I do?), "how to" (how should I do it?), and "how much to!" (how much do I do it?). The Sermon on the Mount is telling us how much and how radically we should live for God. We have to constantly check ourselves through the word. If you have a car you need to always check it because of the second law of thermodynamics. Everything is breaking apart because of sin. We need to always check our hearts with the Bible.

- B. Constantly ask, "What does it mean?" – for the long-term system

Matt. 5:19 *Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

You're building a system of knowledge of the Scripture. This is a question looking into the Bible because although it may seem irrelevant now, we need to know it for the long term of our life. We need to know the whole counsel of God to become a wise person. When a situation arises, you will have an answer based upon the Word. The bible does not address everything in detail, but as we know the Bible we can discern what to do through the principles. Then we can make wise decisions in our lives.

- C. What if I fail? – after our failures

- Matt. 5:17 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them".*

When you fail know that he lived it. He obeyed it for you. Remember that the law and the prophets describe him. He lived it for us, so we are justified in Christ. So when you fail say “thank you Jesus for living it for me.” Christian life is about Jesus.

D. What do I do after I am forgiven? – after our forgiveness

- Matt. 5:20 *For I tell you that unless **your righteousness** surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

God will give you strength to live for Him. Christian life is about representing Christ; He will give you the strength and if you fail, He will forgive you. This passage is a high command. Pharisees and teachers of the law were incredible in their external obedience. They were the most respected people because they knew the Scripture left and right, every word and detail. What does Jesus mean that “your righteousness” has to surpass them? He does not mean that we need to surpass them externally but we need to surpass them internally. Not necessarily more but deeper. They were doing things without heart, motive and love for Jesus. We are not to surpass them quantitatively in the sense of doing more but qualitatively in our motive and heart for God. After you fail say, “God help me to love you”. If you obey with heart, it’s more than obeying a billion times without heart. This kind of righteousness surpassing is foreign and supernatural but can only happen through Jesus as he gives you spiritual birth apart from your sinful nature. You can do it only by His grace.

E. What happens when I live it?

Matt. 5:19 Anyone who **breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others** to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever **practices and teaches these commands** will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

If you live out a certain way, you’re teaching others and it will impact others. Teaching and practicing automatically come together. When Jesus Christ comes into our hearts he changes our lives, and if he changes our lives without us knowing we ARE the salt and light. We transform, change and teach others. We are influenced and we influence. We need to be influenced by Jesus so that we can be the salt and light in this world. One of the most important things I learned from a pastor who ministered for 40 years was this: be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the second thing was live it then preach it. Most of us pastors preach it then try to live it. When you live it you will automatically have insight to influence other people. All the pastors need to be ordained to be a part of a denomination. A group of pastors give out exams to pastors who are to be ordained. You don’t just become a pastor: you need knowledge, experience and testimonies. There are certain standards. I am a part of this examination committee that examines people to be ordained. I remember asking a pastor one time: “Is giving a lecture or an expository sermon easier for you?” An expository sermon is what I’m doing right now: you really explain a small passage through a sermon. A lecture is based upon a topic and you search the Scripture for verses relevant to that topic and you teach that. I asked him which was easier for him. After the examination, the other three examiners asked me what I thought and which I thought was easier. The other three were lecturers as they taught in seminary and had PhDs, so they preferred lectures. I think if we really do it right sermons are easier than lectures. Sermons are one passage that we pound into and preach it. But a lecture you really have to know more than one passage, you have to know the topic, really understand its historical context and build a biblical system so you can preach that lecture. A lecture is a lot harder than just focusing on one passage. My point is: you have to study for years and then you may be qualified to give a lecture because you have studied the whole Scripture and you have built the system. You have an understanding of all kinds of topic, so you can teach from your system. It’s like an hourly test versus a standardized test. To do well on a standardized test you need to have a system of knowledge.

The point is you need to know the Bible. You need to have a biblical system. You don’t know what kind of person passing through your life will ask you questions. Life is like a standardized test. You need to ready, study, live, teach others. Use your knowledge of the Word to nourish yourself, to save others and to defeat Satan’s kingdom in this world.

III. Radical Foundation – Build on it

We all have a foundation but do we have a good or bad foundation? Good foundation is on a rock and a bad foundation is on the sand.

- A. How do I build on a good foundation? On the Rock or on the sand
 - Matthew 7:24, 26
 - Matt. 7:24 ¶ “Therefore everyone who **hears these words of mine** and **puts them into practice** is like a **wise man** who built his **house on the rock**.
 - Matt. 7:26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
- 1. Hearing
 - Hear – internalize, listen and understand. Get it into your heart and mind.
- 2. Practicing: you live it.

Both are necessary for a good foundation. We need a balance of hearing and practicing. If you don't have the whole picture, there will be an imbalance. Your foundation must be changed through the Word of Jesus Christ. Is this boring to you? Is this sermon too long? What is normal Christianity? What is the normal length of a sermon? Again, common does not mean normal Christianity or right. I remember one time I met with a person who said that they have ADD and they said that they wouldn't be able to pay attention to my one-hour sermons. As we met, we talked about him for 3 hours. He had no problem paying attention because I was talking about him. So I said to him, “I don't think you have ADD. I think you're just selfish”. I didn't say it like that, but you just don't want to listen to what you are interested in. You don't have a problem watching hours of movies and sports. You don't have a short attention span but a short self-denial span.

I love this passage from Nehemiah; Ezra was reading the Word.

Neh. 8:3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Neh. 8:8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

Neh. 8:9 ¶ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Neh. 8:10 ¶ Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

They were listening and reading the Bible for hours.

If sermons are short so people can come and they are not good, I have a problem with that. How can we transform this generation if we don't give people what is solid from scripture. People can spend hours watching movies, playing video games.

The first sermon which Jonathan Edwards preached at Princeton: “It was upwards of two hours in the delivery; but is said to have been listened to with such profound attention, and deep interest, by the audience, that they were unconscious of the lapse of time, and surprised that it closed so soon.”

Let's raise the norm of Christianity.

According to verse 24 it is wise to hear and practice the bible. It is wise to do this but we also become wise as we do this.

B. How do I know if I have a good foundation? Do you stand or fall/ crash

Matt. 7:25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it **did not fall**, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Matt. 7:27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it **fell with a great crash.**”

Do you stand or fall when the storm comes?

1. Storm

Some people think storm is just difficult circumstances. But here it is talking symbolically about things that will make it difficult for people to stand. For some it is prosperity, hard circumstances, temptations, when you are by yourself, when you are tempted to lower the mourn, when your heart is wandering. The point is there consistency because you have been built on the rock of Jesus Christ.

2. Proof

Do you stand or do you fall? We have many CFC grads and many people do well and many people fall. We need to always check our foundation. Are you on the rock or are you on the sand?

C. What do I do if I have a bad foundation? [Weak]

This passage is not merely talking about one time or a one big time fall or standing.

There will be constant storms in life. We have both the spirit's and sinful nature in our hearts, therefore we all have potential to fall. It is never too late to start or strengthen your foundation. Start and strengthen your foundation.

A simple encouragement to you, always look to Jesus. He is our example and our encouragement.

- Matt. 7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching,
- Matt. 7:29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

What's the difference between Jesus and the teachers of the law. He lived it then taught it. Through his lips and through his life.

He is our foundation for our glorification and justification.

Luke 24:32 They asked each other, “**Were not our hearts burning within us** while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Search the scripture and let it search you.

Read and obey the scripture. Let the word be in you, and eventually you will be in the word. As you are in the word, you will be included in God's plan.

Chuck Colson who did incredible prison ministry and was an advisor ministry talked about the bible like this.

"The Bible- banned, burned, beloved. More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book in history. Generations of intellectuals have attempted to discredit it; dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it. Yet soldiers carry it into battle believing it is more powerful than their weapons. Fragments of it smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints. Pieced together scraps of Scripture have converted whole villages of pagan Indians."