

## *You Shall Be Like God*

This morning I am going to continue in a series that I have been doing on spiritual warfare. This week, what I would like to do is to talk about Satan's ultimate lie that in many ways, I believe as I have meditated on it, is really the tap root of virtually everyone of his other lies in our lives. I am going to, by the way, continue to talk about entryways to our spirits next week and the week after. But I wanted to just focus on Satan's ultimate lie, the big lie, that opens us up for everything else. The lie is found in Genesis 3:5. A lie that he first spoke to Eve and then to Adam. Genesis 3:5:

“God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened [and here is the phrase] and you will be like God.”

You shall be like God. If you wanted to discover sin at its core, sin in its essential being, you could find almost no better phrase in the Bible than “You shall be like God.” The notion that I must be in the center of the universe, that things must revolve around me, that I must be in the lime-light, that I must have other people's approval and worship and acceptance, that things should focus on us and our needs. You shall be like God.

This is the demonic in its purest form. Because ultimately that is what Satan is all about and why he was thrown out of heaven. It was because he was attempting to cultivate worship for himself. Listen to Isaiah 14:12:

“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn. You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations. You said in your

heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

That is what caused Lucifer to fall from heaven—this desire to be like God. To garner for himself worship and praise. It is not enough for him to give praise to God. “No, I want it for myself.” See, this is Satan’s character—to wish to be like the Most High, in getting what belongs only to the Most High. And, of course, that is the character of anti-Christ. That figure that appears at the end of the world. The spirit of anti-Christ, we are told in 1 John, is already at work in the world. This desire to be like God is always at work. But it will be personified in one particular world figure before Christ returns. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3:

“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.”

Paul is talking about anti-Christ there in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Then, in verse 4:

“He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”

See, the character of anti-Christ, evil personified, will be shown going into the rebuilt temple of God in Jerusalem and gathering for himself the worship that belongs to God Almighty alone. You will be like God.

And this character, to be like God, is shown in the nations of the world. One nation, in particular, is singled out in the Bible as having this anti-Christ kind of character, this satanic orientation, and that is the nation of Babylon.

Way back in Genesis 11, you see in the Plain of Shinar, in Babylon, which was the later location of the Babylonian kingdom, folks gathered there and they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves.” Babylon. Let us make a name for ourselves. And that demonic spirit continued in Babylon several thousand years, maybe three thousand years, later. And it came to us through a man named Nebuchadnezzar. And we read that in Daniel 4 that “as Nebuchadnezzar [in verse 29] was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, ‘Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’” You shall be like God. That was Nebuchadnezzar’s sin. “I did it by myself, by my own strength, and for my own glory.”

That same spirit continues and is judged in the book of Revelation in Revelation 18. You shall be like God. I think a wonderful measure of how wicked a state, or a country, or a world leader becomes is how much that state, government, world leader tries to pull toward himself or the government the loyalty and devotion that belong to God alone.

You see it, obviously, in its extreme form in Nazi Germany, where Hitler had people swearing oaths of undying allegiance to him.

You see it in Mao’s China, where millions and millions of pictures of Mao were distributed throughout the country. Everywhere there were enormous paintings of chairman Mao and the sayings of chairman Mao, who gathered for himself the worship that belongs only to God.

You see it in North Korea today.

But, I think you see it in some degree in the post-war growth of the American government. You shall be like God. As government continues its ruthless self-assertion in this country, as it grows out of control, as democracy—the ability to control government is more and more taken away, and government asserts itself as the only provider of all of the good in life—we will provide you with every service; we will educate your children; we will communicate down to the lowest levels what your children need to think and how they need to feel and what their approach ought to be to sexuality; we will approve their curriculum; we will approve of their teachers; we will provide you with health care; we will be the dispenser of good much the way that God used to be considered the dispenser of good. Provider, protector, benefactor—that demonic spirit is at work in the modern nation state and it is at work in that part of our humanity that the Bible titles “our flesh.”

I am going to break it up for you today because I want you to see how the most basic lie – “You shall be like God” works in our lives. Trying to be like God, by the way, is the motivation behind most of our sin. It is the source of the wars in this world. It is the source of our own unhappiness. It is the source of marital discord. It is the reason why people get divorced. It is the source of people’s aggressiveness and murder, violence. You shall be like God.

Let’s ask God’s presence as I speak this message. Let’s pray.

Again, the lie “You shall be like God” comes to us through a thousand and one smaller lies like, “You must be in control.” “You must be sovereign.” “You must be able to

maintain control over all things all of the time or else something is desperately wrong.” Look at the number of anxiety disorders that folks suffer today; the number of phobias.

Or at a less intense level, the difficulty that we, as folks living in the 90’s, have simply coping with life. I mean, on a physical level, on a medical level, when you compare life in the 1990’s with life back in the 1890’s or the 1870’s, it is so much easier. Read the accounts of people moving out west after the Civil War. Read the “Little House on the Prairie” books to your children sometime. Or just read them for your own enjoyment. The sheer hardship of life just comes through every page. It was common place for parents to lose two, three, four children. To have only half or less than half of their children survive to the age of five. And now it is, by grace, an increasingly rare thing in the United States for us to lose our kids.

The life expectancy of people back then was so short. You were considered a very old person if you made it to fifty. Despite the adversity of life, emotionally, folks seemed to be so much freer 100 years ago than they are today. We simply don’t see the kinds of anxiety disorders and phobias, at the level that we do now, recorded in their journals. Why?

I think because the notion that there are forces at work beyond our control is simply unacceptable to people in the 90’s. No. I must be able to control my career, my destiny, my finances, my kids, my body! The idea that your body can do things that you can’t control; cancer can grow in it. No. Something is desperately wrong here. I must be able to control all that happens inside my body. With my marriage and my ministry.

You know, the enormous number of lawsuits in this country is a symptom of this lie of control. Why are folks suing everyone about everything? Why are we seeing this geometric growth of lawsuits?

I believe that it comes down to this notion that life ought to be subject to our control. That there ought to be no circumstance or situation that human beings shouldn't have been able to predict and control. And when men and women don't predict it and don't control it, then we want compensation.

See, we ought to totally be able to control the birth process. And when my doctor cannot guarantee and deliver to me a perfect baby, then I will sue my doctor. All surgery ought to turn out perfectly. The road should never form ice over it so that my car would slip. If I slip on the ice, someone is going to be sued.

The lie "You shall be like God" of course is brought right into our churches. Where churches insist on controlling even the presence of God's Spirit in the church. No. We cannot have the gifts of the spirit distributed as God wills because that would get outside of elder control. The church won't be able to dominate the thing. The church, the leaders won't be able to manipulate everybody. It may not go according to the church's or the leaders' plans. And nothing like that manifestation of the Spirit is going to happen to me because that would mean that I would lose control. And that thought is too frightening for many of us.

See, we insist on having the reins of life in everything. James speaks about that in James 4. We put together our business plans. We are going to market our new environmental system. We are going to market our consulting service. We are going to

market our financial planning company. We projected five year cash flow figures. We have it all down. This is the way it is going to happen. And James 4:13 says:

“Now, listen you who say today or tomorrow, ‘We will go to this or to that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”

The control that individuals demand in business, the controlling behaviors that each one of us has regarding our marriages and our children. The control that modern men and women are asserting now over decisions regarding the ending of life and the beginning of life—this pregnancy is inconvenient, so we must get rid of it. This life is not worth living in our determination, we will terminate it. “You will be like God,” Satan says.

You know, the more that we, in the 90’s, assert control, the more confused and impossible life becomes for us to simply maintain. See, what men and women are doing today reminds me of the old astronomical maps that astronomers worked out before the Copernicus Revolution. You know, five or six hundred years ago it was popularly believed that the earth was the center of the universe and all the planets and all the stars revolved around the earth. But as astronomers began to chart the movements of the stars and the planets, it became increasingly difficult to manage a map with the earth at the center. It became so complicated. And they needed to come up with all these weird orbits for all of the stuff in the heavens because the assumption was that we were in the center.

Well, you know, life is so complicated when you have to be the ruler—when you must be God. Life is so messy, so unmanageable. If you just didn't have to be in control all of the time. Wouldn't that be liberating!

The greatest answer to all of the bad stuff in life and all of the things that we cannot manage and control—the great answer of Christianity is the ultimate sovereignty and control of a God who is good. How do we respond to all the bad things that could happen? All the things that could happen to our kids? To our businesses? To our marriages? To our bodies? To our health? To the economy? To the health care crisis? To the church? How do we respond?

Well, we can more aggressively attempt to assert our own control, to build walls of protection and buy layer upon layer of insurance and have 18 plans for every contingency, along with being responsible, or we can find ourselves being lost in the wonderful freedom of recognizing the sovereignty [that means the control, the rulership, the domination] of God over everything. It ought to be an article of faith for every one of you that no matter what hits you, no matter what comes your way - something is sent to you right from Satan, someone is exercising their free will in a negative way, in an evil way toward you, toward your family, toward your business, toward your body, toward your ministry—that you call to mind immediately this article of faith: the sovereignty of God which says to you whatever was intended for evil, God will use for your good. No matter what happens in the doctor's office, in a court of law, whatever your boss decides about you, or a judge decides against you, at the playground at school—every one of us who believes in God ought to have Romans 8:28 committed to memory.



“For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.”

This is what we mean by the sovereignty of God. We do not mean that life is going to be without pain, without distress, without humiliation, without problems. What we do mean is that God is using methods that we don't understand, that we can't fathom, that will absolutely work out for our good.

Every one of us would like to avoid pain. I would like to. You would like to. But God chooses to use pain for good. The fact that God is in control releases us from our anxious control. You don't have to be God anymore.

I have shared this letter with you on one or, perhaps, two other occasions, but I want to remind you of the testimony of Sarah Edwards, Jonathan Edwards' beloved wife. Jonathan Edwards is one of my favorite people in church history. He was the father and theologian of the First Great Awakening here in the United States—the theologian of revival. We are talking about the Toronto renewal. Well, Jonathan Edwards gave explanation and language to that kind of activity.

And Edwards not only was a great theologian and a wonderful pastor, but he was a good husband and father and had a loving marriage for many years with his beloved Sarah. Well, Jonathan Edwards, a few weeks before he was to take a new job as the President of Princeton University, got a smallpox inoculation which was just being perfected in those days. And as a result of that inoculation, he died.

Sarah Edwards wrote a letter, a couple of weeks after receiving the news, to her daughter, Esther. On the occasion of the death of her husband of almost 35 years, this is what Sarah Edwards wrote:

“My very dear child, what shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. Oh, that we may kiss the rod and lay our hands on our mouths. The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness that we had him so long. But my God lives and he has my heart. Oh, what a legacy my husband and your father has left us. We are all now given to God and there I am and love to be. Your affectionate Mother, Sarah Edwards.”

Talk about relieving control and trusting in the great sovereign goodness of God; she understood that.

You know, you see this control in churches. “You shall be like God” becomes almost the mind-set of a church and church leaders when they begin to believe that they are responsible to fix people and to cure them. You know, there is this faulty notion that it is the responsibility of one person to fix or to cure another person. And that faulty idea can get worked into a church real quick where the church begins to say, “We see this group of people with problems, we are going to talk about those problems and then we are going to propose how to fix those problems.”

A church, church leaders and church pastors, elders, kinship, women’s group leaders, however the church is organized is not responsible to cure anybody of anything. We can’t fix people. We can’t make people. We can’t mold people. We are not responsible to cure other people. My responsibility as a pastor is not to cure, it is to care. I am responsible to tell you, week by week, and in our individual encounters, I am responsible to tell you the truth as I understand it in love. But I may not grow in the proportions of God-like status to say that I am responsible for the choices that you make with the truth that you hear.

I may not begin to intrude on your free will. Or on what God is doing in your life. What is codependency, but this idolatrous self-assertion that says, "I can be God for somebody else." "I can heal somebody else's addictions and dependency problems." "I can save my spouse." "I can save my child." "I can save another person in my kinship." I cannot. I can love you. I can pray for you. I can speak the truth to you in love. But I cannot save you. Only God can do that.

Let me move on. You must be like God. Not only in getting control, but in establishing and creating your own sense of self-worth! You shall be like God. And what that has come to mean is that you shall be able to create for yourself a sense of worth and self-esteem. So, we put happy faces on children's papers. And everyone gets an award for simply showing up. You go to any school awards banquet now and, my goodness, there are hundreds of awards given out for everything. If you're a library aide, you get an award. If you visited a hospital, you get an award. And if you had generally good attendance, then you get an award. Because we somehow have to artificially bolster kids' sagging self-esteem.

In the suburbs we do it through these counseling groups that we have released into the school system. In the inner cities, we have been told that the cure for inner city violence is these programs of believing in your self and self-esteem and "I am worth something." And we hand out buttons to all the kids, you know, "I am great" and "I am something."

But deep down we feel, in the 90's, worse about ourselves than at any other time in our history. Because we all know that manufacturing for ourselves a sense of self-worth is like having a printing press in our basements making counterfeit money. We can create a lot of it, but it won't be worth anything at the end. We pay ourselves with this phony

money and we try to count it up and tell ourselves we are rich, but it just doesn't pay the bills. It is worthless.

Now, don't get me wrong. I believe that we do need to have a healthy sense of self-worth. That what psychologists have discovered regarding the fundamental nature of having a sense of self-worth and self-esteem to live a healthy life is true.

Dr. James Dobson, several years ago, put out a questionnaire to several thousand women in which he listed a variety of problems that a woman could possibly have. And on the list were money problems, career problems, family problems, and problems in marriage, sexual problems and problems with loneliness and friendship. And on the list he put the issue of low self-esteem. And then he asked the women in this survey to rank the problems from number one to number ten in terms of their perceived order of severity in the women's lives. 50% of the women in this survey listed, as their number one problem, feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth. 80% of the women listed them in the top two or three.

So, we see that the effects of all of this would be an inability on the part of many women, and I am sure if we could get honest responses from men (and that would be a big question mark), but if we could get honest responses from men, low self-worth and personal insecurity would be one of the top problems facing men as well as women. You see this played out in the inability on the part of even successful people to feel good about themselves.

You shall be like God. And what we are saying here is that like God, we human beings can give each other a sense of ultimate worth and ultimate acceptance and ultimate personal esteem. If we only loved better and complimented better and used different

phrases with each other and disciplined our kids better – man, then everyone would feel O.K. But all of our efforts and all of our pats on the back and all of our compliments, fall flat on their face because we cannot give ultimate self-worth to each other.

Teachers cannot give self-worth to their students. And parents, no matter how good you are, you cannot give a sense of ultimate worth to your children. It is not in your power to give that. You can't do it.

Husbands can't give it to their wives. Wives can't give it to their husbands. Pastors can't give it to people that they are pastoring. Counselors can't give it to their clients. Self-worth cannot be conveyed from one human being to another. We are not like God. Psalm 8 puts it so wonderfully well regarding the ultimate source, in fact the only source, of self-worth and self-esteem when it says:

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet. The only worth that we have is that thou, O God, are mindful of me.”

If you suffer from feelings of low self-worth and low self-esteem and you find yourselves always reaching for a compliment and when somebody says something negative to you, it just levels you; if you find that you can't handle the fact that there is a percentage of people that simply, no matter who you are and what you do, there is a percentage of people that just don't like you, if that is unacceptable to you, then you need to renew your

mind and soak yourself in the truth that God is mindful of you. That you have true worth because God values you. God has honored you by sending his Son, Jesus, to die for you. He loves you so deeply that he sacrificed his own Son to save you. Even while you were his enemy, he passionately reached out to you. His desire for you is so great, so wonderful that he calls you “child,” “beloved,” “royal priest,” “the apple of his eye.”

Our minds need to be renewed continually in the worth and value that God gives us. That is not creating something out of nothing for ourselves. It is simply receiving, by faith, the words of life that God, himself, speaks. We have value only because God values us. That is the only secure base of self-worth and self-esteem—what we are in the eyes of God.

Everything else is phony, counterfeit currency and when we experience distress it will not pay our bills. What God thinks of us is what we need to convey to our children. What God thinks of us is what counselors need to convey to their clients. Not phony self-acceptance methods, but renew your mind in what God thinks of you. This is the only currency that we can pass along to another person.

Short of that, about the only thing we live off of is our latest press reviews, our latest achievements, our latest accomplishments. We can never be honest about our weaknesses, about the real us. We can never take the mask off with each other. Because to do so is so frightening. We are nothing otherwise.

Let me share with you an experience that happened to me at the Richard Foster Conference. We had Richard Foster, a writer, in, as many of you know, several months ago. I shared this experience on a couple of occasions. I don't know if I shared it in a message or not. But there was a point at one of the conferences when I was waiting on

the side to come up and actually I was going to introduce Richard to us again and just say to all of you that he had done such a wonderful job and could we stand and applaud for him. What he did was that he walked up in front of me. Marlene, my wife, was playing the piano. The rest of the worship team left and he said, “Marlene, just stay here.” And then he invited me to come up and as I was about to say, “Can we say thank you to Richard?” Richard turned and he said, “Your pastor is so wonderful [or something like that], can we say ‘thank you’ to him?” He turned the spotlight on to me. And then people began to applaud.

And that much approval was too overwhelming for me emotionally to receive. I stumbled back and began to cry. Because something was reached under at that moment. My defenses were caught so totally off-guard in fending off approval that I got touched real deeply in my heart.

I walked off the stage and the Lord immediately spoke to me and he said, “That is what you are going to receive on the last day from me.” That feeling of “I really do approve of you.” And I sat down in my chair and just cried. Because we live so much with the sense that God probably really doesn’t think very much of me and he probably doesn’t notice. But to think of Jesus Christ applauding and giving us a rich welcome—well, if that is not a firm foundation for feeling OK about ourselves, then nothing is.

Well, “You shall be like God” is not only seen in issues of control and self-worth and self-acceptance, but self-atonement—I must pay my own way. We find that tendency right back to the Garden of Eden. Immediately after Adam and Eve fell, it says that they realized that they were naked. And so, what did they do? They sowed fig leaves together

and made coverings for themselves. Self-atonement. The desire to cover up your own sin, somehow, someday!

You know, we conservative evangelicals laugh at the Roman Catholic practice of penance. And we say, “My goodness, look at those Roman Catholics. After they sin, they go to confession and a priest tells them that they must do penance. They must pay for their sins by saying seven ‘Hail Mary’s’ and six ‘Our Fathers.’” We say how foolish is that Roman Catholic practice of self-atonement through penance.

But we have the exact same self-atonement process in the conservative evangelical wing of the church. We just call our penance “quiet times”. Isn’t it the case that you feel like God approves you more because and then you can fill in the blank. God approves of you more, he accepts you more because you prayed this morning; because you spent quality time in the Bible; because you are involved now in a ministry; because you have been helping someone; because you exercise self-control, therefore, God loves you more. You have been able to balance the scale out of your badness and your goodness. Self-atonement. This runs through the scripture.

Last week I read to you the story of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. The servant who had run up a bill with his Lord of a billion dollars. And that servant had a mind-set of self-atonement thinking that he could somehow be like God and pay for sin. He turned to his Lord and he said, “Give me more time and I will pay it off.” That is what all of us say as fallen human beings. We say that this grace of God that would atone and pay for my sin is too wonderful and too good to be true. How can it be that it is unmerited and unearned, undeserved, totally free? Given because of nothing in me? Surely, I must add to that atonement a little bit. Self-atonement.



You see it in the story of the lost son in Luke 15. The son who runs away from his father and rebels. Then he comes back to his father, he has his little speech rehearsed. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and I have sinned against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” Perhaps I can pay you off, pay you back through good performance.

You know, the Bible says that there is only one way that people are kept from the forgiving acceptance of God. Only one thing keeps people from being forgiven and radically accepted by God. It is not sin of any kind. It is not your sexual sin. It is not your anger. It is not your bitterness. It is not rage. It is not your financial misdealings. It is not anything other than your attempt to atone for your own sins. Just one thing keeps human beings from the atonement of Christ and that is the attempt by each human being to atone for their own sins. To pay for it ourselves. There is only one thing that keeps people from being saved by God and that is human beings’ attempt to save themselves. We are like drowning swimmers in the water who won’t stop kicking and fighting long enough to be rescued.

Romans 9:30 says this:

“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

It is an absolute either/or proposition. Either I establish my own righteousness and pay for my own sins, or I receive God's righteousness, God's acceptance, God's declaration of my OK-ness, and let Jesus Christ pay for my sins.

Now, we think that we can add to the atonement, that we can have God's declaration of righteousness and our own declaration of righteousness and our own efforts to make ourselves OK, but it is false. Romans 10:3 I think really lays out why it has to be either/or and not both ends when it says that because they sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

We either establish and try to build up our own case, or we submit and bow down to what God does. You build yourself up or you bow yourself down. You walk tall like Clint Eastwood in a movie, trusting in something that you did spiritually, or you bend low. The door to the kingdom of God is very, very low. And you have to bend down, stoop down, get low, do the limbo to get into the kingdom. Jesus says that unless you become like a little child, unless you take away your high-mindedness, your lofty thoughts about yourself, your lofty thoughts about what you can produce and how you can cover your own sin, unless you get rid of all of that and receive salvation as a gift, you will never get in. You must be willing to say, "I need the atonement of Christ. I need a Savior. I can't manufacture my own righteousness. No matter how fast I run on the treadmill, no matter how many laws I keep, no matter how I stack up compared to another person, despite all my efforts at self-atonement, I am utterly lost. Inside of me is brokenness, uncleanness, filth, anger. I can't ever be saved by human effort." Psalms 49:7 says no man can redeem the life of another; the ransom for a life is costly; no payment is ever enough that he should have eternal life and not see decay.

If it is not regarding salvation, it is regarding the spiritual life and ministry that we all get into in the self-atonement business. That is why I love John Wimber's old statement where people asked him, "How did you prepare for this healing meeting tonight?" expecting that he would say, "Well, I prayed for 14 hours and I fasted for 9 days." His come-back line was always, "Well, I ate a pizza and drank some coke." Now, that is not the whole truth. John does pray. And there is something to spiritual disciplines in getting us into a receptive mode, but John was saying something that really needs to be underlined in the evangelical church. And that is that ministry and power is all grace. It is all about God. It is all about him. It is not about us. It is not about our activities. The anointing comes from him.

And so it doesn't make a lot of difference if I eat a pizza or fast for a day in the sense of earning something from God that he would then bless the meeting with. There is a lot of truth in what John is saying. I am not saying it is the whole truth, but there is a lot of truth there.

Well, the antidote, of course, for this particular lie of self-atonement is the grace of God. What I would like to do is to read to you a wonderful hymn of grace and just let this soak into your being. It was Charles Wesley's hymn as he spoke to the guilt-ridden, perfectionistic, self-atonement heart. It is called "Arise My Soul, Arise":

" Arise my soul, arise. Shake off thy guilty fears. The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears. Before the throne my surety stands, before the throne my surety stands. My name is written on his hands. My name is written on his hands. He ever lives above, for me to intercede. His all redeeming love, his precious blood to plead. His blood atoned for all our race. His blood atoned for all our race.

And sprinkles now the throne of grace. And sprinkles now the throne of grace. Five bleeding wounds he bares, received on Calvary. They pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me. 'Forgive him, oh forgive,' they cry. 'Forgive him, oh forgive,' they cry. Nor let that ransomed sinner die. Nor let that ransomed sinner die. The Father hears him pray. His dear anointed one, he cannot turn away the presence of his Son. His Spirit answers to the blood. His Spirit answers to the blood. And tells me I am born of God. And tells me I am born of God. My God is reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear. He owns me for his child. I can no longer fear. With confidence, I now draw nigh. With confidence I now draw nigh. And Father, Abba, Father cry. And Father, Abba, Father cry."

One last way that the lie "You shall be like God" works in our own lives is the lie that we can continually live without limits. "You shall be like God" can be translated into "You should be infinite."

We so regularly live beyond our means. I don't mean just financially that we live beyond our means. I mean physically, emotionally, spiritually. That we spend down our accounts by a thousand acts of busyness. Taking no time to read our gauges and see that we cannot continually violate the physical laws of energy and spirituality and emotional strength and still do OK.

I want to say something to those of you who are in ministry, who are Christian leaders or Christians in a highly demanding profession. Do you know that God does not suspend his laws just because you are a kinship or women's group leader, just because you have made a commitment to do work in the church or to evangelize or to work in prisons, or to

spend 70 hours a week caring for patients, working with kids, or whatever you do—God’s laws regarding your needs for rest, your need for a break, your need for friendships and non-work relationships cannot be continually violated and you get away with it. You can’t spend yourself beyond your means on a regular basis and not suffer some kind of collapse, and neither can I.

The collapse can be found in a whole variety of ways. It can be found in the hardness that grows in our hearts so that we become dull to our own little sins. The little things are no longer setting off alarm bells. We get loose with our mouths. We get loose with gossip. We get loose with our minds. We get loose with our money. We are not in touch with the little things. Our hearts become hard when we are exhausted. We become insensitive to the various ways that we hurt other people. We become insensitive to our anger. We become insensitive to our families.

In exhausted state, we stop caring about those who have needs. We stop being lovers. We stop being friends. You are not God. You have limits. We cannot pile one activity upon another and say that we can carry it all. We cannot.

And when I saw the office staff several weeks ago just weighed down spiritually and emotionally and I looked at my own condition—I have gone nine months and I think I have had four days of vacation. This is crazy. This is pretending to be like God.

Psalm 127 puts it so wonderfully well for the over-stretched, over-worked, over-busy, limitless people that we think we are, the generation of workaholics, when it says:

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain, you rise early

and stay up late, toiling for food to eat [I like one translation which says, “To eat the bread of anxious toil”]. For he grants sleep to those he loves.”

The universe will not collapse if you are not on the job. We are not indispensable and we are not unlimited. Our bank accounts are not unlimited and neither are our emotional, physical or spiritual reserves.

Not only do we struggle with self-worship, “You shall be like God,” and we apply it to ourselves, but then we turn our attention to others and we say to other human beings, “You shall be like God” for me.

You say, “How do we do that?”

Let me give you a few simple examples of how individuals turn others into God for them. Married couples do that all the time. And you can see the heart assumptions of a married couple in this regard when you listen to yourself or another married couple fight. As couples fight, they begin to disclose all of the false assumptions and all of the lies that are in the heart. One of the things that will sometimes come out in fighting is, “You didn’t meet my needs. You haven’t met my need for intimacy. You didn’t read my mind. What is the matter with you? Can’t you anticipate everything? Can’t you read my mind and my subtle mood changes? Can’t you make my life better, more pleasing, more fulfilling? Can’t you be the perfect person for me? Why are you not like God? I still have needs that you have not been able to meet.”

Now listen to me, I am not in any way playing down a legitimate confrontation with a husband or a wife who has been sinning or a legitimate plea for help or counsel in a marriage that you have judged to be much less than the biblical standard of marriage. But I am wanting to challenge the notion that another human being, my wife or my

husband, ought to be able to meet all my needs. Ought to be able to read my mind. Ought to be a perfect person in every way.

I see this same thing with singles and particularly single men who can't make a commitment to a woman because she is not like God. Single men who have in their minds this set of criteria, this list of perfections that are never met by any woman at all—she must be the perfect conversationalist, she must have extraordinary sex appeal, she must look like Cindy Crawford, she must bake like Betty Crocker, she must enjoy all the recreational activities that I enjoy, she must be articulate and witty and like to do everything that I like to do when I like to do it. I haven't met such a person.

No. There is no perfect person outside of God. No human being can satisfy all of your needs.

I think it was Larry Crabbe who came up with the illustration in describing to a married couple, both of whom are trying to reach into one another to meet their deep needs. He said, "It is like two ticks and no dog." You know, both trying to suck the life out of each other. But no one really supplying life.

And how can we, as human beings, when we have so many of our own needs, how can we possibly meet the deepest needs of others? And yet, that is what couples fight about. My ultimate needs for security, for acceptance, for self-worth.

And it is here that I think we can draw the line and say that if you are reaching into another human being for ultimate needs, ultimate meaning in life, ultimate purpose, ultimate acceptance, fundamental Agape love, a foundation for secure life, that other person cannot meet it.

And yet, in a whole variety of settings, we attempt to get this from another human being. Teenage girls who decide to get pregnant because they are unloved by their parents often will say to themselves, “If I had a little baby, that little baby will supply me with a feeling of ultimate worth because they would love me unconditionally. They would love me in a way that my parents never loved me. They would be dependent on me. I would now have value because I am a mom.”

How tragically disappointed every teenage girl is, who is having to care for a baby who, themselves, are fallen little creatures.

Well, not only do we make other people into God when we say to them, “You must meet my needs, church member, women’s group leader, pastor. You must give me that love that only God can,” but we also turn other people into God when we say to them, “It is your fault that I am so unhappy. It is your fault. My spouse’s illness; my spouse’s alcoholism; my spouse’s lack of ability to hold a job; my spouse’s addiction; my parent’s problems—it is your fault. You have doomed me to a life of misery; unless you change I can never be happy.”

Do you understand that when we attribute all of our problems to another person - and married people do this all the time, and the whole psychological environment does this with parents and grandparents - when we attribute all of our problems to another person and then we take the next step and say, “I can’t be happy. I am doomed to a life of misery because of who they are and what they have done,” we have elevated that person to God-like status.

Do you think that anyone of us will get off the hook on the Day of Judgment by being able to point to somebody else? That is as you stand alone, as all of us will, as you stand



alone before God, your Judge and Maker, will God say to any of us, “Well, I know that because your life was made so difficult by this other person’s actions, therefore, I am not going to hold you responsible for what you did with your life. I am not going to hold you responsible for what you did with your talents. I am not going to hold you responsible for what you did with what I gave you. I am not going to hold you responsible for the opportunities that were opened up to you for service and for ministry and for love because of this other person.” You must meet my needs. And it is all their fault. You should be like God.

Well, let me respond to however “You shall be like God” plays itself out in your life with the most basic and fundamental answer for all of it, whether you suffer from the feelings that I described of low self-worth, whether you make others into God, whether you try to atone for your own sins—however this plays out in your life. Perhaps you are a person who is rebellious and independent and likes to make your own standards, thinking that what you believe is the standard. However it plays out in your life, the answer is worship of the true and living God.

See, again, the ultimate sin is to make ourselves the center of the universe. But in true worship, we say along with the Psalmist,

“Praise, oh servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised both now and forever more. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

You see, as we turn our attention to God in worship, it suddenly occurs to us that the prophet’s message to us in the Old Testament is true. Who is it that we would compare with God? How can I, as a human being, say that in some way I compare, we are the

equivalent, we can stand shoulder to shoulder with God? Who is God's equal? That is the cry of worship. Who will you compare God to? The most high, the most exalted, the very center of all life and all being, who holds the universe together. Who is like God? Your spouse? Your boyfriend or girlfriend? Your parent? Yourself?

You want to know, in part, why Vineyard spends so much time singing and in worship? Why Vineyard continually communicates over and over again that worship is our highest priority? It is because God is worthy of our worship—yes. But it is also because worship drives a stake into the heart of personal sin. True worship alone deals with our continual self-worship, that great temptation to be like God. It is in worship that we deal with the Tower of Babel temptation to make our name great, to gain a reputation for ourselves. To draw people toward us. It is in worship that we say, “There is only one name that will be great. And there is only one whose fame will spread and that is the Lord.” It is the name of Jesus that will cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess.

In worship, we turn our eyes away from the contemplation of our own works. Our performance. What we have done. And we say to one another and to ourselves, “Come, let's meditate on the works of God and what God has done.”

In worship, we hear the words of Jeremiah,

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom. Or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts, boast about this, that he understands and knows me. That I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth.”

In worship, we meditate on the great character of God and on his works and on his attributes. The church that does not worship is a church that will be so full of itself, so self-idolatrous that it will reverse its roles with God and begin to say about itself, “Ain’t I great? Aren’t we special?”

In worship, we come to the place that David came to in 2 Samuel 7, when King David said before the Lord,

“Who am I, O Sovereign Lord? And what is my family that you have brought me this far? And then, as if this was not enough, in your sight O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?”

In worship, the Vineyard, as it appreciates what God has done for us, by way of condescension and grace and kindness, the Vineyard says, “Who am I, O Lord? What is my family? What is this church, that you have dealt with us so kindly? So graciously?”

Not “Aren’t I great?” or “Aren’t we great?” but “Isn’t he great?” See, the ultimate thing that happens in worship is what John Calvin described in the opening of his great Institutes of Christian religion where he said that true religion consists in this, a true knowledge of God and a true knowledge of ourselves.

How are we going to get a true knowledge of God and a true knowledge of ourselves except that we turn to God regularly and personally in worship and in corporate worship? As we turn to God in corporate worship, we sing along with the angels in the book of Isaiah, “Holy, holy, holy...” We gain a vision of the true God and then we gain a vision of ourselves and we say, “Woe to me. For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in a midst of people of unclean lips.”

Now, this is the challenge then for Christian leaders, for Christian pastors. We have really only one call. And that is to cry out along with the prophet Isaiah, “Behold, here is your God.” Stop holding yourself up, your ministry up, your particular place in the body, what has happened to you. Stop exalting yourself.

And in worship, in worship, take time to contemplate the greatness of God. Let’s pray.