

Leaving God out of the Picture

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn together once again to Ephesians chapter 4. I want to take with you the passage from verse 17 down to verse 24, the beginning of this new section in which Paul is going to describe for the church of Ephesus and for us the Christian qualities and the features of the Christian life. And he's going to cover all different walks of life, including how we speak, our anger or otherwise, truth or falsehood, drunkenness, the family, wives and husbands, children and parents, the workplace, and lastly, the battlefield in which every Christian exists.

So let me read this chapter, these few verses between verse 17 and 24 in which he begins this section, this very practical section. Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learn Christ, assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus. To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

What Paul is saying is this, that if you have come to this new relationship with Jesus that he's been describing all along, you must live a life which is consistent with what you are as a Christian. The worst kind of hypocrisy is the person who claims to be in Christ and with Christ and a follower of Jesus and yet lives just the same as everyone else. And the way he roots, the way he does this is to root the Christian life in Jesus himself. So he begins, and he begins with a very interesting way, he begins by asking the people in Ephesus to have a look at the world around them and to try and to assess, make some kind of assessment of the character of the world around them. And he describes the character of the world around them. Now you might think on first reading that this is a terribly insulting passage. After all, who would want to look at the world around us and describe them as the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and the hardness of their heart. They're callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Of course, you might say that, well, that's not particularly complimentary. Well, Paul is not in the business of being complimentary or otherwise. He was quite happy to speak with and relate with other people and to spend time with them, speaking to them and interacting with them just the same way as Jesus was. And yet, he was under no illusions about the kind of world that he lived in. And that was the way in which they were to be described in terms of their relationship to God. These people that he was describing, they were perhaps pleasant enough people. They were polite people. They were successful business people. They were stalwarts in the community, upright people. And yet, as far as their relationship to God was concerned, their lives were in a mess. And nothing has changed. That's what the

Bible is all about. The Bible is not concerned about what we are in society or whether we have a good standing in the world or whether people think well of us and whether we're polite and good to people or otherwise. The Bible is concerned about where we stand in relation to God. And if we don't have that relationship to God, then the same thing applies to us. If you've decided to live outside of God, exactly the same, to a greater or lesser extent, applies to you. Futility of our minds, darkened in our understanding, alienated from the life of God because of our ignorance due to the hardness of our heart, callous, given over to sensuality and greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That was the world around Paul that he looked, that he observed in the Roman Empire. You might think, well, it may be true for them, but it surely isn't true for the civilized world in which

we live. It's true for the world wherever you find human beings, where Paul says dead in trespasses and sin. And I want to just make this one statement when it comes to that, when it comes to comparing the world in which we live in and the world that Paul lived in. Because you might be tempted to say, ah, but we live in a Christian country. We live in a Christian country where we are upright and where we have been influenced by the gospel. And all of these descriptions that Paul gives here, they don't apply to us because we live in a Christian country. So all we need to do is to remind ourselves of the values which our forefathers had, and therefore then everything will be all right. But I don't know where you've been for the last 20 years, if that's what you're thinking. It's all very well to say we live in a Christian country.

You may be right constitutionally, or according to the monarchy, or according to the principles by which our government operates on paper. But anyone who looks around us will very quickly come to the conclusion that we do not live in a Christian country. And the quicker we come to that realization, the better. We have to tell the truth. We have to describe the world as we see it. That's the way that Paul did. And I think we do ourselves no service at all by continuing to insist that we live in a Christian country. It may be true on paper officially, but as you look around us at the Presbytery last week, we had Neil McMillan, who is our home mission support worker, he gave us a lecture.

[6 : 34] He said in Edinburgh, 2% of people go to church. Let me say that again. 2% of people in Edinburgh, that's our capital.

Please don't tell me that we live in a Christian country, where only 2% of people go to church. There is no way you can describe it as anything near to a Christian country, if that's the kind of statistic that is true.

Now, what does that mean? It means that for the vast majority of the population, they were similar, they thought similarly, to the way they maybe practiced slightly different.

They had different cultural activities, different way of living, and yet the principles by which they lived were the same. And that is simply this that boils down to that God did not enter into their living or their decisions.

And that's what it means when only 2% of people come to church. It means that 98% of people, for them, God simply does not come into their living or their decisions.

[7 : 39] And so much of our country has turned atheist. And I just wonder, I suspect sometimes, what the end of the growing tide of atheism is going to be.

And when there will not be a full-scale onslaught against Christianity and against the church, that's what we need to be aware of tonight. That is what we need to be aware of.

And that's what we need to be praying about. And that's what we need to be alarmed at. And that's what we need to be confident running to the Lord for. And asking that God will come in great power. And that he will change the course of human history, just as he did before. But there is no point in pretending that things are otherwise. Things in Scotland today are exactly as they were in Paul's time.

It means that people live and they make choices. And the choice of whether something is right or wrong is in itself not part of that equation.

[8 : 43] And once you begin to live like that, once you begin to live in such a way that God doesn't enter into our choices, then you make your decisions on the basis of what you want or what benefit you're going to have in your own life.

And God takes no place whatsoever. Now he makes two descriptions of this. One is in verse 18 and one is in verse 18 and verse 19.

He tells us, first of all, that they are darkened in their understanding and they are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of heart.

Darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God. Let's just take these two then, because we don't have really much time to go into this in great detail. But let's just take these two descriptions of the world around the Apostle Paul.

They were darkened in their understanding and they were alienated from the life of God. Now I wanted to put these two things together and I want to say that you can't have one statement without the other.

[9 : 50] To be darkened in your understanding is to be alienated from the life of God. Or maybe I should put it in another way. When you begin by alienating yourself from the life of God, by cutting yourself off from the knowledge of God, then you become darkened in your understanding.

And the way it works is like this. The Bible tells us that every one of us has a natural register within ourselves, deep down within ourselves, that knows that God is.

Romans 1, Romans chapter 1 and verse 18, it tells us this in very great graphic detail. If you want an even more graphic account of the world around us, then you read Romans 1 verse 18 to the end, where it tells us, for what can be known about God is plain to us.

It's plain to us that there is a God. Because God has shown it to us. His invisible attributes, namely his internal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world.

Now what does that mean? It means there's something within you, a voice, a feeling, a nudge, call it what you want, that reminds you that there is a God.

[11:03] That there is only one God. That he is righteous and powerful, and that he rules over the universe. But our response to that, instead of being to try our best to find out about this God, and to listen to his word, has been to run, same as Adam and Eve did when God came into the garden, after they had sinned.

That's our natural response. You know why? Because we don't like what God will have to say to us. We don't like the fact that we are accountable to God, that we have to answer to God for the way in which we live our lives.

Because we want to make our own decisions for our own reasons. We want our independence in the world. And we don't want God intruding on that.

That's what it means to be alienated from the life of God. But it also goes on to say that we are darkened in our understanding. And you may object by saying, well, I can't believe that you're saying that.

We've never had so much understanding as the world that we live in today. We have the knowledge that we have of all kinds of science, physics, chemistry, biology, maths, medicine.

[12:17] We've put people on the moon. We fly all around the world. And we have internet and computers, technology that takes our breath away. How can you say there's never been a time when we've had more understanding and knowledge than we have today?

That's not what the Bible is saying. Paul's not saying that we have ignorance of all these things. Of course we don't. What we've done is, though, we've taken God out of the picture so that we have the knowledge without the understanding.

We know all about what God has created. We know all about the molecular structures and the mathematical formulas and we're able to construct great things.

And yet, what ties the world together and provides for us an understanding of why the world is, why we're here, and where the world is heading, is God.

And if you take that central factor out of the equation, you're left with emptiness. You're left with a random collection of knowledge and application and science and technology with no reason.

[13:36] The reason has gone. That's what he means by being darkened in their understanding. And what happens there is that, as I said before, once you take God out of the picture, you end up leaving him out of your life.

You end up living your life in terms of random processes which really boil down to what I want to get out of life. Let me ask you this question tonight.

How much does God figure in your choices? It could be a simple choice, a daily choice, it could be an important thing, it could be a not so important thing. How much does God figure in that choice? My guess is, not very much. Oh, you're reminded of him when you come here on a Sunday and very often maybe you go back home and you say, well, you know, I've really got to change my life, I've got to bring him into more of the things.

But when it comes down to it, by Monday morning, you've forgotten all about it and you're making choices Monday through Saturday. And really, when you come to the end of the week, he hasn't really figured in any of your choices at all.

[14:44] Problem is, when you've left him out of your life, you do things for your own reasons. And you do things because of your own instincts and your own desires and your own pleasures rather than God, rather than glorifying God.

So that's why Paul goes on in verse 19 and he says, they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

So we've started off the description by leaving God out of the equation and we've ended up with essentially sexual immorality. And Paul is saying here exactly what he said in Romans chapter 1. He starts off in verse 18 by telling us that we've left God out of the equation and where do you think he ends up? He ends up exactly the same place. Doing what we want with whom we want. That's the kind of society and world that we live in. That's what the world wants to do and that's what the world wants to hear about and that's the way the world wants to live.

[16:01] How many times do you hear a discussion on morality where a Christian is on it and a Christian tries but perhaps on TV or radio or whatever the Christian tries to suggest even that there is a proper way of exercising our sexuality and he gets laughed at.

He gets thrown out. Nobody wants to listen to him. And yet it's an area which the world just wants to hear more and more of all the time. Why is it that today doesn't it strike you as odd that amongst all the pressing problems there are in Scotland that the headline news for the past I don't know how many weeks has been Tommy Sheridan.

Why do you think he's on the headlines every single I don't want to be personal what interest does our country ever have in perjury?

Nobody ever gets headline news because of perjury but this is different isn't it? This is something that everybody wants to hear about because of the nature of what the man is being accused of and the details we want to know the details because it involves swingers clubs and wife swapping and all kinds of things.

Why do you think that so much time is given to that? Because that's what we want more than anything else we want to hear it we want to hear the detail I don't need to go on into all kinds of different areas where I don't believe I need to because you know perfectly well what kind of world we live in I don't need to go into the details you know perfectly well the kind of world we live in and that's what Paul is talking about they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality I've just simply given an example of that from the modern world what does it mean that they've become callous again looking at the personal aspect because there's we have to look to ourselves and what it means simply is this that we have lost our conscience we have lost that voice within us that nudges us again as to what is right or what is wrong

[18:18] God has given to each one of us a conscience I'm not entirely sure what the conscience is and yet we know what it is don't we every one of us has a conscience it's a kind of a register it's a kind of a smoke detector that God has placed within all of us and that goes off when there's smoke and of course you all know how important it is to have a smoke detector in our homes I hope we've all got one because if we don't we run the risk of losing our lives or losing our property it's such a little simple device and yet it's so vital it's saved thousands of lives God has given us a smoke detector and it starts bleeping in the most uncomfortable tones when we do something wrong but sometimes like the smoke detector our consciences can become confused and it's a very interesting thing is our conscience a final authority no it isn't our final authority is God's word and yet every one of us should be training our conscience to coincide and to register with God's word so that we train ourselves to know the sound of God's voice and for our conscience to operate likewise and yet within every single one of us but the problem is this that we take the battery out of our consciences don't we we don't like the sound it annoys us to hear God's voice and what we do we take the battery out we don't want to hear

God's voice and we and we make up a God of our own choosing if you were to go into Scotland today and ask the population if they believed in God I've just told you that 2% of them go to church in Edinburgh but if you were to go around the population you would get a lot more than 2% who said they believed in God my guess is this if you probed deeply into the belief that people have in God it's a very different belief from the God of the Bible and what you'll do is if you choose to ignore God's voice in the Bible what you end up doing is you end up creating a God of your own making perhaps I'm talking to somebody tonight and that's exactly what you've done you don't even know you've done it this is the problem this is how deceitful sinfulness can be you've created a God so if I say to you tonight do you believe in God you'll say yes I believe in God and so everything looks great but if I probe deeply into what kind of God you believe in then we both discover that the kind of God you believe is very different from the God in the Bible and the reason is this because instead of first of all listening to God as he talks to us from the

Bible we've created our own God let me guess if you've done that tonight he doesn't really think a great deal of your wrongdoing he thinks you're okay doesn't he he thinks that you are okay you're

not perfect there's many things wrong in your life but compared to others you're doing okay and he's a God that is so loving and so flexible so accommodating that it doesn't seem to matter what you do in life if you go really badly wrong then well he's bound to forgive you and if you make mistakes from day to day well it doesn't really matter does it that's the way your God operates because you've made it so that God operates like that it's not because God does operate like that it's because you've made it so that he operates like that you've created and controlled him by yourself he does what you tell him to do and so that everything is comfortable and you're not accountable to him and if you were everything would be okay isn't that the case that's what Paul is talking about when he talks about somebody who's darkened in their understanding alienated from the life callous and have given themselves up to sensuality because at the end of the day what's happening is your God has become so pathetic that you can pretty much do whatever you want to do and you can do all you've forgotten a long time ago what's right and wrong because you've quashed your conscience the voice that

God has put within you to tell you what you do wrong you've silenced it taken the battery out you've created you've modified God so that he lets you do anything you want to do and you know or you think you know that everything is going to be okay isn't that the case ask yourself this is a very important question because you cannot afford to carry on in that you know if I was you I would be asking some really important questions before I'd spend one more day in this world the first question I'd be asking stop am I for real is the God that I believe in and the God I pretend to follow tonight really like that that's what I'd be asking or could it possibly be that I've gone wrong somewhere along the line if you have you absolute you are making the biggest mistake you have ever made in your life and if you carry on that mistake that's it lost eternity and you go into a lost eternity believing and hoping that everything's going to be okay there are millions of people in hell tonight who believed in this world that everything would be okay and that's why

I hope you are never comfortable in church because you can't be comfortable in church we're talking about reality we're talking about meeting with God and what the greatest mistake you can be the greatest mistake you can make is to modify God to treat God as if he was a piece of blue tack molding him and shaping him into the way you want him to be rather than coming to him with all reverence and asking Lord Lord show me who you are that's what we need to do tonight don't go one more day in this world if that's what you are my dad said to me once if you button your jacket and you discover you've put the button in the wrong hole don't carry on because you'll make an utter fool of yourself you know that's what we do isn't it make a wrong move you say ah carry on doesn't matter it does matter when it comes to your relationship with God and your standing with God then nothing else matters apart from that we're talking about the most basic fundamental issue in all the world and if the people in Paul's time needed to be saved you need to be saved and you need to come to

[25 : 44] God and you need to say Lord for the first time in my life I want to destroy all my preconceptions all my misconceptions and if I have twisted you in any way I want to turn away from all of that and I want to turn to the Bible I want to know you tell me who you are as you really are not as I want you to be but as you really are because it's only when we come face to face with God as he really is then we come face to face with ourselves this morning in the Gaelic we were talking about the chapter where the Israelites come to Mount Sinai and how God revealed himself to the Israelites in the most horrific manner with thunderings and lightnings and the most frightening thing they were so petrified that the people of Israel they said we can't hear this any longer we can't we'll die if we have to listen to this any longer but it was only as God as they came face to face with God as he is that they came face to face with themselves and it was only then that God could do anything about it because it's only it's only as we see our own need to be saved that we'll come to him but as long as your

God just does what you want him to do and as long as he is what you want him to be you have no hope whatsoever but he's not God if he's like that God has to take the first place you need to give him the first place and you need to come to him as never before you need to ask him to take you and to show you and to open up your heart to what you really are that's the problem isn't we don't want to discover what we really are inside that's the real problem and we know that if we if we really turn and turn to God as he comes to us in the Bible that we're going it's only a matter of time before we see our own ugliness that's the worst lesson that's the worst thing we discover in our world in the world our own ugliness well and that's the description then that that Paul gave to I don't have

time to go into any longer darkened in their understanding alienated from the life of God and callous giving themselves up to sensuality greedy to practice every kind of impurity so let me say one more thing once you go down the road that

Paul describes there's no satisfaction there's no contentment there's no peace no peace once you start giving leaving God out of the pick once you leave God and live without him and live your life making your choices on what how you want to live you'll want more and more and more and you'll never rest maybe some of you discovered that already I hope you have and I hope that now is the point now is the time in your life where you're saying well I've tried living my life without God and what you're saying is absolutely right I am as discontent today as I was 20 years ago and everything that I put my hope in 20 years ago all the promises that I rested my life on they've never come to being if that's you tonight then come come you might say well I've wasted my life yes you've wasted a life just like many other people have wasted their life but God's mercy and his grace extends to those who have wasted their lives years decades and as long as God's mercy extends then you come and that you take hold upon God and come to him in faith and see what Jesus has done for someone like you now look at look at what he says as we're running late callous and sensuality greedy to practice every kind of impurity but notice that word but it occurs several times in the letter to the Ephesians it's something similar to what he said in chapter 2 it's the great turning point in verse 4 you remember how he described the Ephesians as once being children of wrath like the rest of mankind but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us and he made us alive together with Christ and by grace you have been saved this is the fantastic turning point in which a person he comes to Christ and comes to the new life that God can give and does give when we come to faith in Jesus now at this point I want us to just spend five minutes looking at the rest verses 21 down to 24 I'm very conscious that next week is communion God willing and I want us to look at these verses in terms of perhaps a checklist in which we're asking the question what are the marks of a Christian because many people stumble and struggle with this whole question of am I a Christian what should I look for in my life in order to come to the Lord's table for the first time what are the marks of a Christian I believe that these verses contain the marks of a true Christian so if that question is on your mind tonight then here we are in verse 21 to 24 let's read them assuming you have heard the first thing is that you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus Christ look at what he says you've heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus Christ you notice that what

[31 : 31] Paul is saying here is that being a Christian is a person with a new mind and a new life a person who thinks differently and who acts differently because his life has been changed the life that he once lived is dead and the life that is now has been raised from the death and the turning point is Jesus death at Calvary now how does this work out well you notice how Paul begins when he talks about the importance of hearing about him and learning in him the truth in Jesus and it all comes through hearing Paul said this before in Romans chapter 10 he said that faith comes by hearing so a Christian is somebody who has heard the voice of God now that can the voice of God can come in all kinds of different ways it can come through the pulpit here on a

Sunday it can come through your reading of the Bible many as a person has been converted and has heard God's voice through his reading of the Bible that's why I would ask you again to make sure you're reading the Bible whether you're a follower or not make sure you're reading the Bible and asking God to speak to you through him it can come through a conversation from a friend perhaps of a friend who's a Christian that person has been praying for you has been talking to you about the Christian life but in any case the person who is a follower of Jesus is a person who has heard God's voice and has come to know the truth in Jesus Christ you know it's fascinating being a minister sometimes very difficult being a minister but it's also fascinating and the minister will tell you and some people come to me and say do you see the faces of everyone as you're standing in the pulpit and the answer is yes gives me a unique view of every single person

I don't take any pleasure in that it's not something that gives me any sense of power I don't feel any sense of power at all in myself but it's fascinating to watch people now I know this doesn't describe everyone because some people actually listen better when their faces are away but for the most part people tend to watch as they're listening and if they're listening they tend to show that they're listening not saying it happens all the time but they tend to and I've been in the ministry long enough to know and to have seen lots of people who come to church at first and it's quite obvious they have absolutely no interest in the gospel and then sometimes something happens and you can tell that

something's happening in that person you know why because they are listening as they weren't listening before they have an interest that they didn't have before and that's what Paul is talking about and very often that person who begins to listen is the person who will go on eventually to come to Jesus and because faith comes by hearing that's why it's important to come to church even if you're not a follower tonight please keep coming to church it's not that coming to church in itself will save you but it is in church that you hear the gospel and that you hear the voice of God and Paul describes it going on it's not just casual hearing but it's learning learning is when you absorb the truth not just it's not just talking about the facts of the Old Testament the New Testament the stories that we learn as children but absorbing the truth but notice it's a personal information that we have as you heard about him and we're taught in him because at some point as we listen we discover that this word that Jesus is speaking to us has actual power to change our way of thinking so that at some point in time we realize something's happened

God has somehow or other given me an interest in this Bible I never had it before and now I'm reading things and seeing things and discovering things that I never saw before and that I ran away from before I had no interest in them before and now somehow or other I don't understand why because I've got a million questions in my mind I don't understand but there is something in this word that draws me to want to have a greater knowledge of Jesus that's what Paul is describing you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus now am I describing someone here I believe I am I don't believe I believe that the Lord is working where his word is and that he is drawing people to himself maybe nobody else knows maybe you in the secret of your own heart you just know that something is happening you're not able to say what it is you're not able to articulate it but you know that something is happening then you listen to

[36 : 48] God please continue to listen to God and stop if you're tempted to fight him stop fighting the time has come surely to stop fighting him and to stop running away and maybe you tonight you have been affected so much by the Bible perhaps over a period of time long or short that you maybe want to take the next step and take your faith to a new level publicly well I believe that next step is to make it known make it known to the church make it known to other Christians and to take that place to show what the Lord has done in your life perhaps you're saying tonight well I'm not really sure I think I might be changed but I'm not sure well let's let's let's press on just for a couple of minutes to what Paul says in the next verses because he talks then about the consequence of the new life the consequence is this to put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self created in the likeness of God and in true righteousness and holiness holiness let me just summarize what these verses say to us this evening what he tells us is that there has been a change in my life secondly what

Paul tells us is that the person I am today is not the person that I used to be there's the old self and there is the new self the old self which belongs to your former manner of life and the new self which is being created after the likeness of God thirdly what it tells us is that whilst I am not what I would like to be and not what I know I should be somehow God has touched my life and has affected through me through the gospel fourthly are you able to say as Paul is able to say instead of me being the center of my life as it once was now Jesus is the center can you say that this evening perhaps there is still too much of me at the root there always is there is too much of me at the root of my life but I can say tonight that I really want to have more of Jesus and I want to be more obedient to him before in my in my life that was what made me unhappy was what I when I didn't get what I wanted to get and when things didn't go my way but tonight what makes me unhappy is when I know I have disobeyed the Lord are you able to say that tonight fifthly are you able to say tonight that the greatest event in all of history for you was Jesus death at

Calvary I always ask anyone who comes to the session of communion times what does Calvary mean to you it's the most important question you can ask somebody in relation to sitting at the Lord's table what does Calvary mean to you and then lastly I want you to notice that Paul says that the new self is created it's not because you've changed yourself it's not like you've pulled yourself together and decided to live differently it's not like when somebody realizes that they're unfit and they sign up for the gym and they and they they do the treadmills and all the rest of the stuff you do at the gym and then a year later when they're looking really good somebody comes to them and says well you're looking really fit and they say well a year ago I realized I needed it and then I've gone to the gym and I've worked really hard that's not the way the Christian life is at all it's not your

doing it's not my doing the new self is created he says created after the likeness of God when somebody becomes a Christian tonight it's because God has worked in that person's life and he has created within that person a new person now do you notice in all of this there's nothing really dramatic is there there's no Damascus road experience this is Paul you would imagine that having gone through the dramatic experience that that he went through at the beginning he would expect everyone to have the same experience but he doesn't say that does he these are the ordinary ways the silent ways in which God works in a person's life don't expect a Damascus road experience I haven't had one I guarantee you that most of the vast majority of the members of this congregation haven't had a Damascus road experience in fact I would even go as far as to say there was only one Damascus road experience and that was Saul of Tarsus so why are you expecting one when everything that is necessary for your own salvation is here in the Bible in the person of Jesus Christ nothing dramatic no drama no noise ask yourself have I been affected by God in his word well tonight I'm going to leave that with you it's God's work it's God's power it's God's message his son having come into the world to take away your sin and having made the way so clear and so simple before each one of us tonight we are saved by grace through faith alone no other way and when we're saved we come to the God before whom we must give an account who has provided only one way for us to be saved then come to him come to him and come now let's pray father in heaven we ask now that you will work through your word we thank you lord your word has been working ever since the apostle Paul lived in these dark times and we ask that you will continue to press home your truth to each one of us and open up our hearts and bring us to you we pray for anyone who's struggling with perhaps coming to make that profession of faith for the first time we ask Lord that you will be with them in that struggle and that you will make the way clear for them we pray for anyone who hasn't taken that step to come to Jesus in the very first place we pray that even tonight that your word will speak powerfully to them forgive our sin in Jesus name amen amen you