

I want to discuss with you tonight why you should not be interested in the deeper Christian life. And I am dead serious. And that's the subject. The reason you should not be interested in the deeper Christian life is very simply: it could very well destroy you. It could destroy you physically. It could destroy you psychologically. It could destroy you spiritually. It doesn't fall to everyone to get interested in the deeper Christian life. It's dangerous to get interested in it, and in fact, the truth of the matter is it's dangerous to be interested in the Christian life at all, because the Christian life can destroy you. I think that the deeper Christian life is more equipped to destroy you than anything else. We all enjoy the word "destroyed" because we think of all the bad that is going to be destroyed, but that's not really what I'm talking about. I mean, you could end up being a blubbering idiot, or you could end up dead. This is a dangerous matter, friends, to get involved in.

Most of us get drawn to the deeper Christian life because of a seeking within our spirits. What you two young brothers are going to get this week...you're not coming here particularly out of this great interest. You just stumbled in on this. What you're going to get this week is what all of us should have gotten when we first got saved. In fact, probably this is the warning we should have received before we got saved. The warning that I'm going to give you tonight because if you took out the words "the deeper Christian life", you would actually be talking about the Christian life as it ought to be. There really should not have ever been a Christian nation. There should not have been a Christian Europe. There should have they should still be German and Italian blood-drinking pagans over there right now with little groups of hidden Christians, but because of Constantine, there came the Christian nation. This thing should still be dangerous.

Well, here's the first reason you ought not to be interested in the deeper Christian life. It is not well known, and therefore it is open to great misunderstanding. Let's say that you have been a Christian for a while. You've gone off on all the ordinary things, the retreats, you've heard all the sermons, read all the books, and it doesn't satisfy you. Now you've either touched something singularly or with a small group of people, and your friends have found out about it, and they are Christians, but they have never heard of this, and you don't know a label to put on it. They don't know what you're into, and someone has said we have a tendency to kill that which we do not understand, and if you don't understand some mysterious aspect of what's going on in another Christian's life, you tend to get suspicious of what's going on. And this has been happening for the last 1500 years. A few people have gotten interested in the deeper things of Christ. Other Christians have not understood it, and they get caught in a spin dry. They get caught in the ringer. Anything that's not well-known is subject to misunderstanding.

Now, what comes out of that is social rejection and being socially ostracized. I wish Christians could understand how painful that is. Persecution is an overglamorized thing. Until you go through a grocery line, checking out your groceries, and you accidentally got behind and in front of another Christian and they stand there going through the checkout line and they both refused to speak to you, and these were close friends of yours in the Christian faith, and they really are embarrassed to be standing there with you and they don't want to talk to you or they refusing to talk to you. Until that happens to you, you don't know what social rejection means. And I'll say just like this,

most Christians can't handle that. They immediately just...this is not what I had expected, and they give up whatever it is they're chasing at that moment.

This used to happen to people 50 years ago in the charismatic movement, the Pentecostal movement. That doesn't happen anymore; now it's the charismatic who's standing there in the line, not talking to you. They've gotten very accepted in the Christian world, and they're the ones who begin to look peculiar at folks who are doing something besides speaking in tongues. I'm not picking on the charismatics. All of you charismatics out there, relax. Wait till you find out what I've got to say about the fundamentalists, and especially Southern Baptists who are neither charismatic nor fundamentalist.

As I read the literature written by Christians of long ago, you kind of read between the lines because sometimes they just hint at what they're trying to say, and sometimes they address a situation and call it by a word that doesn't make any sense to us today. But you get behind the pen, you get behind the heart, and sometimes the broken heart, and you say, "What's really provoking that sentence? Why has this devout saintly Christian written this way? What's he saying? What's she saying?" And one of the recurring themes of Christians who belong to this little group who get interested in the deep things of Christ is that they are the natural enemies...and it works both ways in this case...the natural enemies of the intellectual. And that, of course, in itself is a word most of us don't understand. What do you mean by the intellectual? The intellectual is naturally averse to and afraid of the deeper Christian life, and the brother or sister who is really involved in it, he is just really angry at all of the volleys being shot from the intellectual side of the Christian faith.

Well, Gene, I've never met an intellectual. I don't know what you're talking about here. Who is the intellectual? Well, then maybe I should tell you what it really is. What was Fenelon saying when he brought this up? What was Molino saying when he brought this up? What was Guyon saying when she took dead aim at something and blasted away? In her world, she was talking to people who had a lot of head knowledge about the Lord but very little internal experience with Christ, and, trying to find a word for it, she called them intellectuals or something like that.

I would say those who are very tied up in and defend, and have a real broad understanding of ritual. Those who are really into theology and can just tell you all the things we should and should not believe. Same kind of people. We don't run across those kinds of folks much, do we? Not a whole lot, really, we don't, but they're very tied up in this is and this isn't, and it's all up here. There's very little of their real personal relationship to an indwelling Christ, and they have a really natural, honest fear of people who talk about a Lord who dwells within us, and I'll get to that a little bit further. Okay, we don't know too much about those two, but boy oh boy, here it comes. Are you ready?

In our age, there are people who are more Bible-centered than Christ-centered. The word intellectual fits perfectly right there. Intellectualism: a basic objective understanding of the Bible, geography, geology, archaeology, Greek, the linguistics of it, the syntax of it, the interpretation of it, the exposition of it, the memorization of it, the parabolic, the eschatological, the ecclesiological,

and I'm running out of big words. The cosmological, I can go on, I just began to remember some of them, the... All of these things...books outline the doctrines, explain the methods of how to know the Lord according to steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. What you should and should not do. The seven ways to approach God in prayer; the four things you must do in the beginning. What it means to pray in the name of Jesus, what it means to pray in the name of the Father, and why you should pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Your relationship to the Lord on the basis of redemption during prayer, your relationship with Him, as far as your relationship with other Christians in prayer, and on and on, that all sounds good. It turns a lot of people on, but when it comes down to it, that's the mongoose and the cobra. And don't ask me which is the Christian who's in the deeper Christian life and the one who is very centered in the Bible, but they are just natural enemies. I'm sorry about that, but it's the truth. Every once in a while, some of these people get over here into this camp, as the Bible man gets over here, but almost never does this person move from here to here.

Now, the person who is really Bible centered will think for all the world I'm some sort of a liberal who doesn't believe in the word of God. This is the only thought that a Bible student can come up with: that man, oh boy, he's a heretic. Well, that's what I'm talking about, and that's why you ought not to get interested in the deeper Christian life, because that's what they'll tell you, whereas the man who is Christ-centered was long ago Bible centered. And as the old saying goes, he gave it up for Lent. He gave it up for Christ. His appreciation of the Bible is as great as that of a man who is Bible-centered; he just doesn't talk about it anymore. The center is Christ. There is no difference in their reverence for inspired Scripture, for written revelation, nor for their commitment and belief in the authority of Scripture, and the verbal inspiration of it, its accuracy, or any other term you wish to use. But nonetheless, they seem to be always at war with one another. And then, because this group is bigger than this group, you can really expect to catch a lot of criticism and be really misunderstood.

I said in the video previously, I'll repeat it. I have never seen a man who is Bible-centered as faithful to the Bible as a man who is Christ-centered. The man who is Christ-centered will consistently be more faithful to scripture than the man who is Bible-centered. A man who is Bible-centered can be Bible-centered, carry all the trappings and traditions of 1800 years, and find no problems with them. The man or woman who is Christ-centered is going to be naturally at war with traditions and modern-day practices that the Bible never mentions. I've always been fascinated by the man who is Bible-centered, and he hears that a friend of his has gotten interested in the deep things of the Lord, and immediately says, "That's dangerous." Oh, people have been drawn off of that throughout the centuries; they're always getting their lives messed up; terrible things have come out of that. I've tried to think throughout history, where did someone who was really wrapped up in Jesus Christ ever get dangerous? And there are a few instances.

I can think of some of the really devout, pious, holy men in the Roman Catholic Church who really knew the Lord well who got into particular positions and, because they were in positions of authority, used that authority to persecute believers, people not in the Catholic church. That's happened on a few occasions. The thing that is almost always referred to is...this is proof...this is

it...this is what's going to happen to you for sure, is the Munster rebellion. Have you ever heard of it? A bunch of people just went crazy. There was nothing of the deeper Christian life in that day. That was mostly a matter of lust and two or three leaders going crazy. Polygamy broke out. I want to say to the intellect and to the Bible student, Martin Luther rejected a deeper experience of the Christian faith. He believed in an intellectual approach to it. He was Bible-centered, and man, he caused the deaths of thousands of people. The Catholics who defended the doctrines and traditions of the Catholic Church have been responsible for the deaths of millions, and we who are Bible-centered in America today fight with one another like cats and dogs over doctrines, and hundreds and thousands of people are injured.

I do not see that coming from the lives of people who want to get to know the Lord better, in a real, deep way. I think the intellectual...I think he dispositionally wants everything to be set in nice little categories, and he really is mental. That's why he gets interested in the Bible. He's first mental, and he hears someone say, "I feel like the Lord is telling me." And he goes, "Don't trust your feelings." He is just afraid of someone trusting their feelings.

If you trust your feelings, that's not the deeper Christian life; if you trust your mind, that's not the deeper Christian life either. But my point is, you're going to catch it from the intellectual. They, in turn, will cause you to catch a lot of guff and problems from everywhere. I think people who get interested in the deeper Christian life are more subject to rumors and misunderstanding than anyone else in the Christian family, and labels, and I want you to know that most brothers and sisters simply cannot handle it at all. They cannot handle persecution.

I think I want to say something at that point. I think whenever I hear it said or I say you could get persecuted, I'm almost afraid to bring the subject up, because I know that somewhere out there is someone who really wants to get persecuted. He is really wanting to be persecuted. He has a persecution complex, and he's looking for it. He wants it, and that has to go to the cross. You shouldn't want to be persecuted. There is the other Christian...there are three kinds of people in the face of persecution. Those who want to be, those who absolutely cannot handle it, and they are not going to be persecuted, and just, you know, give me some idea how, and I will get out of this, and I will, and then there is one other group, and there are just these three, and that is the Christian who is utterly unprepared for it. Those who want it, those who can't handle it, and those who are utterly unprepared for it, and they're not any others. This is something you never get used to. You never get used to it. You never understand it, and you never get used to it.

If you want to know the Lord in the depths, you might as well understand it's going to happen to you. I hope all you people who enjoy getting persecuted will run quickly to the TV set and turn it off. I don't want you to hear anything from me, because I don't even want you to, I mean, could you go get some psychiatric help before you read anything else or do anything else? We should not wish to be persecuted. That has nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. That has to do with a stinky personality and a twisted disposition. That's from the outside. That's from the outside. But there are also things from the inside, and this is where it really begins to hurt.

Let me tell you something. I have the most marvelous product in the whole world to sell: the Lord. And not only is the Lord a wonderful product to sell...I hope you'll understand me because I'm making a point. He, when you get interested in knowing Him, He seems to come off His throne and make Himself so real to you, and He will love you, and He will draw you, and He will make you feel so good, and I don't know any other way to put it. You know the feeling when you pick up a warm puppy? It's a warm puppy feeling. The Lord is tricky. He is tricky. He will make Himself so available to you. He will make Himself so known. He will love you, and you will love Him, and it will be like paradise, and you will feel like you have died and gone to heaven, and finally your searching is over, and the hunger is passed, and you found the reality of Christ, and it is glorious. It is wonderful, and you thank God for those who told you and showed you how to know Him better, and this is the only way in the world, and He is so near and so dear and so wonderful and so beautiful. This is so glorious, and no one's ever had it any better. And this is the greatest thing on earth.

And then He walks off and leaves you. Just walks off and leaves you high and dry or low and alone. This is why you should not be interested in the deep things of Christ. This is a guaranteed experience. Be clear, all of you. This is true, and it can become...and be...an extremely bitter experience to the believer and very destructive. Hear me: this will happen to you. You have been forewarned, and it'll happen to you. Why does it happen? Well, before we talk about why it happens, let's talk about what it does to you.

First of all, most Christians are not prepared to separate from the Lord, the loss of this wonderful love relationship. They cannot separate it from the feeling of guilt. I must have done something wrong, and the Lord is displeased, or the Lord is punishing me. It is almost impossible for a Christian not to feel that way. You have to go through that, it seems, and most Christians just can't handle it; they don't want it, so they figure out something else to do. By the way, I want to tell you, and this is just an observation. I don't even know if it's accurate. It seems as though when we end our forward plunge into Christ and stop, the hard things also stop; the blessings return. It's almost like the Lord said, "Okay, if that's as far as you're going to go, I'm going to give you what you want, and I'll give you the desires of your heart. You want the warm puppy? You got him." But if the plunge continues, things get more difficult, and more difficult, and more difficult, and more difficult. You will regret your hunger for the Lord Jesus Christ. You will live to regret it.

Now, this is not the Christ that is getting preached a lot these days. It is nonetheless the absolute truth. You know, you could end up losing your health. I remember a day in my life. I remember a week in my life when, if I'd been somewhere else, I remember a summer in my life. If I had been somewhere else doing something else instead of chasing the Lord in this church, I wouldn't have lost my health. My Lord is responsible for my having lost my health, and as far as I can tell, it's permanent. It's been going on for 22 years. I could get very angry about that. So, you want the deep things of Christ, huh? Are you sure you want them enough to live a large part of your life in poor health? It could happen. It could happen to you on a level besides physical, too. It could happen to you in the areas of your soul.

I don't know how to describe to you how lonely it can become when you make Christ Jesus the center of your life. To find people who are interested in this is often very difficult. Every once in a while, I meet an old saint, and I'm speaking of the psychological here, who has followed the Lord through all of those downward plunges and just kept on, and that person seems to be marked by a sense when you meet them that you feel devastation, that somewhere in their life they were just virtually destroyed. Sometimes the pain will even show a little bit, but usually the enthusiasm, you know what enthusiasm for Christ is like, you really get excited about Him; that's not there. In its place is almost a holy sorrow, a brokenness, a shatteredness of nature of their own basic nature, and that's what's holding them together. That's their strength, that one day everything was so whipped apart in their life that that's what you see when you meet them, it is devastation. They're not tied to particular needs.

The Lord would like to establish a relationship with you, brother. He would like for you to have a relationship with Him, very much like the relationship He has with you. You have all heard, have you not, the term "unconditional love," and someone has said to you, "Oh, brother, don't feel guilty. You reek, but don't worry about it. The Lord loves you unconditionally." Now, that's encouraging. No matter what you do, He loves you. You're backslidden. He loves you. He didn't care. He really doesn't care. Get this through your head. He's not impressed with your goodness. He is not really impressed with the days when you really get it together. Today I prayed. Today I witnessed. Today I loved. Today I forgave. Oh, yesterday I cussed, yesterday I stole, yesterday I cheated, yesterday I got resentful. And the Lord in His eyes cannot tell the difference between those two days in you. That's unconditional love. He is not affected by what you are, what you do, what you say, what you believe, or how you feel about how the Lord feels about you. I'll repeat that. He is not affected by how you feel that He feels about you. I feel today He feels very badly toward me. I feel today that He feels very goodly toward me, but the Lord is saying, "The day I saved you proved I'd put up with anything."

Now, that's unconditional love from the Lord's viewpoint, but turn that around. This is the part no one ever talks about. *He is seeking to establish in you an unconditional love toward Him.* He took your help; love goes on. Oh, I was in love with the Lord, and the Lord was so good to me. Then I began to see His church, and I joined this wonderful group of Christians. We were having such a glorious time, then this fellow came in and split it, and I'm mad. I have never known the presence of the Lord since that horrible, hideous split. I'm just sitting here and pouting till I die.

I loved the Lord. I spoke in tongues. I got to be president of this or that or the other, and people, and I spoke to thousands, and then all of that ended, and now nobody loves me, and everybody hates me, and I'm going to go off and eat worms. I was a member of this wonderful group, and I was an elder, and I got to be an elder. I eldered in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evenings, and boy, I really eldered a lot of people, and I laid elder on them, and it was fun. Then the church got into a fight, and I got accused of being a heretic, and they "diseldered" me, and now I'm mad, and I've been sitting out here for 15 years, and I'm still mad, and I'm going to keep on being mad, and I'm hurt now. I don't like Christians, and I'm not sure I'm liking God too much, either.

I watch brothers and sisters get involved in movements, and when they enter those movements, they are of the Lord Jesus Christ. When that movement gets in trouble, or they get in trouble with that movement, or that movement gets branded, or they get thrown out of that movement, or there's a split in that movement, and people get hurt, you go try to find that Christian, and he doesn't love the Lord anymore because of the conditions. Two Christians marry, they have a knockdown, drag-out, and they get divorced, and because of the conditions, the passion, love, and commitment to Christ are no longer there. When God conditions come, love stops.

Where is unconditional love for Him, that is not affected by whether you are an elder or in the world's only great movement, or whether or not it's wet or dry, or whether you are in good health or poor health, or whether you're married, single, or divorced? I love the Lord a whole lot, and I never did get married, and the Lord never gave me a husband. The Lord never gave me a wife, and I don't like those conditions, so I don't follow Him anymore. He loves you unconditionally. And I want you to know if you seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ into the depths, your conditions are going to get very dire. They are going to get bad. The Lord's going to watch, I suppose He watches, to see if you love Him conditionally or unconditionally. I will love the Lord as long as the Lord's people like me. As long as I'm receiving approval. As long as everybody listens to what I say and does what I tell them to do. As long as everything is peaceful and calm and in order, as long as I can just do those things I like to do, as long as I get all the glory, each of us has conditions. I'm really concerned about single brothers and sisters who get with the Lord and into the things of the Lord, and conditions that they anticipated do not turn out, and they leave the Lord. Whatever happened to consecration?

I never liked this term, but this is where Guyon used the term "divine indifference." You have to be indifferent to what's taking place in you. I don't think you should be indifferent; I think it's all right to cry a little bit. I think it's okay to even get discouraged. In fact, I think it's all right to get despondent and in despair. But you can be despondent and in despair and not give up on the Lord. Well, I haven't given up on the Lord. I still believe it, and I still believe there's a God, and I think Jesus Christ is the Savior. I even believe the Bible's the word of God. But you look at that person, and you can't say that he has the commitment that he had years ago. You have to go and talk to him with kid gloves on. Be very careful. Or you have to speak to him and encourage and admonish him to come and be a Christian again. That's not unconditional love toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord will change your circumstances, and he will sit back, or he will stand back, or whatever he does, and watch to see what you do when the rug comes out from under. Am I saying this happens more to people who seek him in the depths than to people who don't? I think I'm saying yes, or maybe it's just the difference in priorities. The person who never really makes the Lord his greatest priority has all these other supports to hold him up. When you make the Lord Jesus Christ your priority and your concept of the Lord, the props are removed, then you fall. Or maybe you don't. By the way, all this was about the psychological. I've already mentioned the physical. This is the tremendous psychological impact that can come in the circumstances being changed, but the

worst of all, the worst of all is what John of the Cross called a “dark night of the soul,” and more accurately, it would be called a “dark night of the spirit.”

I have a very dear friend who read something I wrote in *The Inward Journey* on the Dark Night of the Spirit, and this is what he said to me. He said, "Gene, you wasted your time and energy writing that chapter. Those who read that and don't know what it is won't know what it is and won't have the foggiest idea of what you're talking about. And those who do know about it don't want to be reminded, and they don't want to read about it, and they don't want to hear about it."

Have you ever read *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by CS Lewis? It's a great saga. It's an adventure that goes everywhere. And one of the places they go is to the Dark Island, and there is a shield, an area of darkness, and their ship goes into it. The front of the ship is dark, and the back is in the light. They have to light torches, and they disappear into the darkness. And even just as they go in, they feel they'll never find their way out. Queen Lucy says, "Oh, Aslan, please get us out of here." They come up alongside an island, the dark island, and they hear this hideous scream, and a man plunges out into the water, and there are people or something chasing him. And they pull him out of the water onto the boat, and he is stark-raving mad. They get him calm, and they turn the ship around, and they get out of the darkness into the light, and everybody is just horrified at what that man must have gone through on that dark island. The man looks up, I think, in the face of Prince Caspian or whoever it was, and says, "I beg you one thing. Never, never ask me what happened on that island." And Caspian says, "Sir, I beg you for one thing. Never, never tell me."

That's a perfect description of the dark night of the spirit, and it happens to some Christians, and it's the best reason I can think of why you ought not to get interested in the deeper Christian life. No one has ever tasted that bitter cup and come away with anything but horror. It actually seems that when the Lord begins to love us in those beginning days of loving Him, and He just loves us, and He begins to draw us truly into the deep things of Christ, He wants to introduce us to His sufferings. He wants us to know what he's gone through.

I don't know any statistics, but I would say one Christian in a thousand gets a real hunger to know the Lord in the depths, and that's, you know...he doesn't want to evangelize, he doesn't want to teach the Bible, he doesn't want to speak in tongues. Those are not his paramount drives. He no longer wishes to be a great theologian. He doesn't wish to be a missionary or a martyr. He doesn't want to be a Bible teacher. He doesn't want to be well thought of as a good Christian. He's no longer interested in prayer. He wishes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, to personally know and fellowship and embrace and adore and know Him. That's rare. But for every one of those, if you would go collect them, one out of a thousand or ten thousand or a hundred, I don't know if go and collect them and get a hundred of them together. I would say not one in a hundred will keep their original desire to go on and never back up.

Maybe my statistics are too pessimistic, but by the time you have known social authorization, by the time you have done battle with the intellect, by the time you have found even the difficulty of the pursuit, when you have been wooed and won and then left at the altar or left somewhere by the

Lord, at least it seems, when He has taken you into His suffering, and when those things deepen and deepen and deepen, I'll tell you, you lose at least your youthful enthusiasm.

Sometimes you don't blame the Lord; you blame circumstances. If things had been a little different, it would have been a little better. I wouldn't have lost that warm puppy feeling. It's not true. If it hadn't been one thing, the Lord would have thought up...He'd have dreamed up something else. I've watched a lot of people plunge into knowing the Lord, and I watched a lot of people just stake out their place somewhere along the road and say, "Well, this is fine right here." I don't even know what the end is. Ask me when I'm 80 if I'm still alive. I don't know if this adventure has a Cair Paravel at the end of it, or I don't know if there's an enchanted land out there. I don't know where this is supposed to bring us. I only know part of the journey, and I know I'm supposed to make that journey. I know I should really want the Lord with all my heart and mind, but most of us stake out a claim somewhere before it seems.

There's one other thing about it that would wreck your life, and why you shouldn't get interested in the deep things of Christ. Because eventually, if you get to know Him well and begin to see and know Him, you're going to get interested in something else. You're going to get interested in His church, and that if the Lord won't wreck you, his church will. If the Lord can't wreck you, his church will.

Well, on that I'm going to end. I'm going to say, in one summarizing sentence, that I've watched many people say they were interested in knowing the Lord better, and believe it or not, the reason most of us turn around or quit where we're while we're ahead, quit while we're even, or quit while we're only slightly behind is incredible, incredibly simple. They quit because the good feeling went away.

Well, I want you to give some consideration to this. I don't want you to go out and deliberately dig up the cross. I don't want you to deliberately dig up pain. If the Lord's good to you this week and you go away saying, "That was wonderful," if He keeps on blessing you and every once in a while, oh, wouldn't you like to be that rare Christian in church history where the Lord, the day you get saved, the day you give your life to Him in a real and meaningful way from that day of the day He died, they're always blessed, everything is just great. Yeah, Robin, I would have liked to be that person.

I want you to start considering your commitment not to me, not to the church, not to conditions, not to a visible church or an invisible church, but your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and where it ends. Does it end in discouragement and despair? Then it will definitely end. Does it end when things aren't going well? Does it end when you get hungry for a bigger home, a nicer car, and more security? How really interested are you and knowing your Lord? Will you follow Him when the good feelings go?