

4936U

WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

LAST WORDS AT THE END OF AN AGE

Speaker: Bro. Andrew Hill

Study #5: Christ - Behold I come quickly

Reading: Revelation 2:1-7

Thank you brother Phil, and my dearly beloved brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you think brother Michael Ashton and I look alike, you're right! We actually stepped out of our rooms today and realized we had exactly the same clothing on (same colours). I thought it was rather nice that he actually went back in his room and got a red tie! I also would like to pass on a compliment which I really believe is warranted; the young people today in their session were a little bit weary, you know that expression of Gideon 'faint yet pursuing', well, they were faint! They've been pursuing each other through the whole week

and I think they're a little faint today, but there was a good spirit there and we actually finished the session there a little early, we closed with prayer and we chatted awhile and it became obvious to me that a number of the young people come from quite small CYC groups. I mean literally 5 or 4 or that sort of number, and it impressed me with the fact that there is a lot of diligence, a lot of far sighted vision on the part of parents, to ensure that their young people come here from small groups and ecclesias and small CYC's, are able to get to as many of the activities as they possibly can, and rather than giving young people options, you say, 'hey, we're going', pile them into a van and off they go! So I think that I'd like to pay tribute to many families who have that kind of motivation, because it could be the saving of their teenage children.

Well, b&s, what we have before us today, and perhaps we are a little 'faint yet pursuing' ourselves today, this is the last session but it's one in which we can draw together a number of threads, but we could also bring into focus the real issues of heeding (taking heed to the Word of our God), and having the courage to do them. Lest we think this is all about work, perhaps this session might emphasize **love**; in the spirit of the words of the apostle Paul when he says, 'faith which worketh by **love**', and we're going to find in John 13 and in Revelation 2, there's a new commandment that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us and that is that we love one another even as I have loved you. So we show our love of God by our love of His sons and His daughters, and that will be the

focus for today. So we will actually be heeding the last words of the Lord Jesus Christ **before** Gethsemane, **before** Golgotha, and then we're going to have a look at one of those messages to Ephesus, one of the last words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the brethren and sisters at Ephesus.

So John 13. Let's join the disciples in the Upper Room where the actions of the Lord added another dimension to His words; so let's listen in and let's observe. You know, b&s, as we scan through the verses and words of John 13, we appreciate that what must surely be a demonstration of love to the uttermost, the Lord Jesus Christ is trying to extend the reconciliation to his betrayer, to Judas, to one whose heart had gone cold in bitterness and hatred. The Lord would have forgiven him 70 times 7, but he spurned the love of his Lord and he went out into the darkness of hatred and self loathing and suicide.

But have we noticed, b&s, in the events of that Upper Room, have we noticed what the Lord doesn't do? Something that I'm sure that if we were in the Lord's position, with all of the pressure mounting, we couldn't help giving vent to our feelings! The Lord **never once slandered that brother** once his back was turned. I'm sure, b&s, we would have given vent to our feelings of frustration, and we would be seeking sympathy from our friends, and we would do that by denigrating our brother and trying to get some support. But there's not a word! it just says simply that 'Judas went out into the night'. Just the focussing of the mind on preparing His principle, preparing His people for the crisis just hours away, so verse 31, 'Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in Him'. You know, the pressure of Judas's presence is lifted, and you get this feeling of almost a sense of relief, **now, now** Jesus has precious minutes to pour out His heart. Verse 32, 'If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him'. So in hours, b&s, the Son of man was to be glorified, God was to be glorified in Him, the triumph therefore of evil men was short-lived; their success was, of course, their own death blow. His victory was to be a glorious vindication of His Father's name. He knew that God would save Him out of death, so in His crushing of sin and death, God would glorify His Son and God would be glorified in Him. B&S, of course, God will yet be glorified when His Son is crowned with glory and honour, when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So whilst He must steel Himself for this final conflict, His mind is with His brethren, and by extension, with us. These are His brethren, the little children whom He loves! Verse 34, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you; that ye also love one another'. We have been considering , b&s, a number of commandments by faithful brethren. Here is the Lord's commandment to us! You know, it's not a new commandment in a sense really, is it? it's in the Law, but it's given a new meaning, another dimension. It's given a new emphasis, it's more than loving thy neighbour as thyself, that's not what it says; this is loving your brother **as I, as I have loved you**. So this is a repetition of a command that He gives in chapter 15 verses 12 to 14. But in verse 35, 'By this shall all men know, that ye are My disciples, if ye have

love one to another'. So His example, b&s, would live on in His followers; they would sacrifice all self interest for one another, not caring for self, but how they might assist or encourage one another to the kingdom.

You know, I'm reminded of a little story, a very fond story of mine that I heard many, many years ago. It's of two young lads, one lad might have been about the age of 12 and the little lad was about 4. They're walking along a stony path on a long journey to an orphanage that was their destination. The little lad had not been able to keep up in this long journey, so his older brother picked him up and put him on his shoulders. Various people passing by stopped and said, 'Can we help you?' He said, 'no it's fine'. He kept going and it was a long hot day's journey to the orphanage; finally, someone stopped him and said, 'Look, I'd really like to help you, can I help you with your little brother; you look like you're pretty weary carrying the little fellow!' He said, '**he ain't heavy, he's my brother!**' You know, b&s, that's the spirit of what the Lord is saying here, and I know that's a fairly well known story, in fact, I think it was made into a song. But the spirit of that, that we will shoulder our brother's load quite happily, we'll persevere to the very end. That really is showing our love of God by our love for one another, so here's the chain of love, as the Father loves the Son, so the Son loves His brethren, so the brethren love one another.

You know, we do live in a very selfish, self-promoting and self orientated age. When all others naturally look after their own interests. People like Paul and Timothy who naturally cared for each other's state, and the welfare of the brethren and sisters, they are comparatively speaking 'rare', they are like their Lord, they are selfless! They **extinguish self**, they will gladly spend and be spent for the brethren. They will endure all things, as we've found from Paul's comments to Timothy; they would endure all things for the elect's sake that they may obtain salvation. Today, b&s, in this selfish age, we need more brethren and sisters like the Paul's and the Timothy's; people who are self-effacing, people who show a love-mastered inclination, to serve in small things or great things, without thought to renown. This is humility! this, b&s, is an unconscious meekness, too committed to worry about reputation. Every brother and sister must love their brethren and sisters as Christ loved His own, for all of us, b&s, to seek each other's highest good, and that means making every contact positive and uplifting.

B&S, to really love your brethren and sisters in the ecclesia, is to treat them like you would treat your own **family, your own siblings, your own children**. You see, in a family we know our family, for happy, united family life, we all blend together our various strengths and we all talk together; we express our concerns, we resolve our problems, we face each day, submitting to the good of the family. **We are not guests in a hostel, we are brothers and sisters and family knit together in love;** quick to defend each other, quick to heal in the upset. Because we love each member of the family, we pass by their odd little mannerisms, their quirks of character, those idiosyncrasies that we find so irritating in others. We know that we all have faults in the family, but 'hey, he's my brother!' So, b&s, do we treat each other in God's family as though they were our siblings? and if ever we have to deal with our brother, would we treat him the same way that we would treat our own brother, our own sibling? You know, in our own family each

member is different (we've been blessed with 5 lovely children, but they're all different; you can speak to each one of those 5 children quite differently and get what you hope is a common resolve, but you speak to the heart of each one differently because that's the way they are!) So, b&s, shouldn't we show a similar discernment in our dealings with our brethren and sisters in Christ? Let us, b&s, try when we receive the love of God that flows to us, does it flow to us and stop there or should it through us flow on out? and out towards our brethren and sisters? Shouldn't it be transmitted on to those in the ecclesia? in the same sacrificial spirit from us to our brethren and sisters and to our young people? So, despite their failings, does the love of our God flow through us to them? You know, if the mercy in Lamentations 3 verses 22 and 23, if the mercies of our God are renewed towards us every morning, then should not every day see us trying again, and again, and again, always hoping, always persevering in love to gain our brother? to win our brother? to save our brother and sister, or young person?

This is what John 13 is all about, b&s! You know, Christ needed to remind John and his brother James, the sons of thunder, that the Son of man had not come to destroy men's lives but to save them. So the Spirit of the Lord is not to threaten thunder bolts from heaven, but to exhort for repentance, for conversion, and for salvation. So, b&s, the love of Christ **constrains us** to save our brethren and sisters. So what we have here in this Winfield bible school, is a very wonderful bond of fellowship, we feel privileged to share it with you, we really do! It's been built up by many faithful and committed brethren. But also, b&s, relative to the truth itself, many of us have come into this light of the truth, we've come to this love of the study of God's Word and we, when we came in from the outside into the light of this truth, we were deeply impressed by that fervent spirit, the love of God, the love of His Word and the love of His sons and daughters. So we came into this positive atmosphere, we soaked it up and it became part of us; but brethren and sisters, whether it is the truth or whether indeed it's this bible school, we are in danger of losing so much of what has been handed down to us; we are in danger of losing that joy of spirit, that mutual confidence, that mutual respect for each other. So, b&s, let us use this as a springboard to consolidate and to strengthen the ties that bind us together. Let's not let the love of the brethren, here and worldwide, let it not be broken down by any feelings of alienation, of distrust or any degree of animosity between brethren. Let's all count the blessings we share, and they are huge! the blessings we share in our common heritage and our common persuasion of fundamentals. Let's strengthen also the hands that hang down and the feeble knees because they're our brethren who guide us, who feel weary at times! So, b&s, let's encourage those brethren because they do get disheartened and discouraged. So every brother and sister from this school, can go back into our ecclesias and we can resolve to put back into our fellowship, something of what we've received from it, and we've received much from our fellowship, so let's strengthen the things which remain so that not one is lost or discouraged in the way.

Revelation 2. The Lord in His last words to the ecclesias, we've just picked out one of those letters, the Lord walks amongst the lampstands, He walks amongst all seven of them and of course, however many there are in the earth today. He holds each ecclesia

firmly in His hand, He knows them as He knew then, as He knows now, what was happening in Ephesus. He knew what was happening in all those 7 ecclesias, He knows what's happening in your ecclesia, He knows what's happening in my ecclesia, so we can hide nothing from the Lord. He knows, b&s, every thought that we make about each other, He's (if you like to use that expression), He's the silent listener to every conversation!

So firstly, He commends their patient endurance and resistance to false teaching. 'These things, saith He, that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, I know thy works and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars'. So, brethren and sisters, let's try and summarize this ecclesia from what we've just read! Here is toil until they were weary, but they never wearied of their toil. They could not bear those who were evil. Verse 3, 'but they had borne, and hast patience and for my name 's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted'. So they persevered in maintaining a purity of life and of doctrine. This is a strong, vigorous ecclesia where I'm sure, b&s, we'd all feel right at home, **BUT**, verse 4, 'nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee (the RSV has, 'I have this against you) that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I'll come unto thee quickly and will remove thy lampstand out of his place, except thou repent'. Remember then from whence thou art fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, then I'll come unto you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

So, b&s, their future was at stake, the continuance of this strong ecclesia was at risk. You know, the Lord isn't talking about zeal and enthusiasm. In all of their works and in all of the fulfilling of the commandments, the heeding of the word of the Law and the doing of the commandments, is all there! They had performed it and performed it well, all of their works, b&s, there was tons of it, tons of zeal and enthusiasm; He's commending them for their zeal! He uses the 'agape' word for love. **That was missing!** So they may be unflagging in the maintenance of the purity of life and doctrine, but if they didn't get back to their former love of God, their love of Christ, their love of the brethren, they were finished, the light would go out, the lampstand would be removed. Brethren and sisters, try and place yourself in this ecclesia where I'm sure we would feel quite at home; imagine the Lord saying to you, this ecclesia is finished, unless you repent! They were gone unless they went back to the zeal and the love of their former days. They were exemplary in zeal, but in terms of their first joy and fellowship, the cupboard, b&s, the cupboard was bare.

You know, the lesson cannot be lost on us, whether we've been in the meeting one year, ten years, fifty years, we've got to get back to the zeal and the love of the early days, the joy of conversion, the joy and praise to the God of truth, the warmth of fellowship. Perhaps it's things like the hall building projects, perhaps it's bible mission campaigns, whatever. Whatever has brought us to the heights of thanksgiving and

prepared us for the kingdom, in honest self analysis, b&s, have we lost something along the way? Has our love waxed and waned and is but a flickering ember of what it used to be? You see, this is not a love of thy neighbour as thyself, this is a **love one for another as I have loved you**. This is in days of self-orientation and self-interest, this brethren and sisters, is a laying down of our lives for the brethren, not inward or in time, but in deed and in truth! So far from losing it, we are to increase more and more in loving service.

You know, the brethren and sisters at Ephesus, when we read Paul's writing to the Ephesians, they had been rooted and grounded in love. Paul says to them in his 4th chapter at verse 15, 'they were to speak the truth in love, growing up into Christ their Head, making increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love'. So Paul warmly commended them, they had shown faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, they had done that! **past tense!** That was all in the past. You know, b&s, no one would have passed a resolution at a business meeting that we might diminish our love for the brethren. No one is going to move a motion and say, 'I'll move that we all diminish our love for the brethren', and someone else puts up their hand and says, 'I second that' and we all pass it! It would never, ever happen like that; it just happened by attrition, an almost imperceptible decline, a shift of focus. Maybe they were too busy to notice what was missing! B&S, if it can happen in marriages, we shouldn't be surprised if it happens in the spiritual ecclesia, in the time of our ecclesial life!

So let's try to assess this ecclesia then, not being high-minded as though we're any different, but let's try and work it out!

For vigilance, b&s, **for vigilance in maintaining doctrine**, full marks. 10 out of 10.

But the report card **on maintaining their first love** was barely a pass. You may have seen those report cards from time to time, 'unsatisfactory', this student is a poor performer, they show great potential; they need to get back to basics. The report card on their first love had words like that on it! They, no doubt, prided themselves in having a strong ecclesial platform, they had earnestly contended for the faith, but they forgot about people! They had inquired about the genuineness of certain brethren, they held their meetings, they were checking, they were probing, they were challenging, they were rejecting false brethren; it created tension, an air of suspicion, of mistrust, an air of negativity hung over the meeting. **That critical, judgmental manner infected the whole ecclesia!** So what was really in danger? The **gentleness, the patience, the meekness** got swept away and all the cut and thrust of debate and character denigration; in its wake, b&s, love withered and died.

Yes, of course, the Lord commends them for persevering, commends them for their zeal and preserving the truth, but really it was a hollow victory! They had fought many battles in the Lord's name, but it tended towards being negative and soul destroying; it was the **way they did it**, they weren't building up, **they were too busy combatting error**, to notice that the ecclesia was standing still and fragmenting, because the **vital**

**glue of love, binding and strengthening the brethren was missing!** B&s, we shouldn't be surprised if it happens today! so how do we fare, brethren?

I'm certainly not speaking of this community at all, far from it, but it's my perspective perhaps back home in some quarters that we are in danger of these words being said of us. Now don't get me wrong! this is **not a plea for laxity**, this is a plea for zeal and love. Not one at the expense of the other! This is a plea for zeal and love in all that we do. The shepherds need to look well to the welfare of the flock, we need to create an atmosphere where we can be sure of our foundations **and knit our ecclesia together**. So let's rise up and as watchmen, let's cry aloud and spare not, let us do that, and not neglect to speak the truth in love.

It's been said, 'let's **give peace of mind to our brethren and sisters, not A piece of our mind.**' You know, we can be so focussed, even obsessed with negative issues, that love withers and dies and folk, folk that are desperately seeking reassurance for their spirit, suffer and die! It's like that little plant 'Herbie', drooping, (I hope that little plant has revived after all the love we gave it, by the way. It's doing well, good!). So you see, b&s, there are folk and we feel it at times, there are folk who come to the meetings and they've had a hard day! They really do need reassurance, and some of them need it in a big dose, so that they can go on their way rejoicing.

So we need to champion a cause rightly, but in championing a cause for the upholding of the truth, we can so easily neglect to **succour some of Christ's little ones!** because, unless I'm mistaken there are families who are finding the way difficult; there are individual brethren and sisters finding the way difficult. There are brethren and sisters without partners, there are brethren and sisters who would love to be like that little boy that's given a lift upon an older brother or sister's shoulders and be carried for a little way! We will do that, won't we? because he or she is our brother and our sister?

So many in these perilous last days do need words of consolation and cheer, over and above our present days of trial and testing; there is coming, b&s, a day of account, when our Lord with final words will assess our lives, and do you know what? A very big factor in that assessment of our lives will be our treatment, our attitude and our works **to His brethren and sisters!** So with what judgment we judge so shall we be judged. Our actions, few or little as they may be, our actions will be weighed up, and our motives will be weighed in the balances and if it were not that **mercy rejoiceth against judgment** and will triumph, I'm sure that we'd all perish because I think we'd all admit to having fallen short, and have become unprofitable servants. But thanks be to God that He is a just God and He is a Saviour. He has commissioned His Son with perfect judgment and He will know what is in our hearts, will look to see a heart that reflects His own and a love that reflects His own. He will be overjoyed to see a kindred spirit. Can you imagine that warm smile of 'welcome' as He takes His beloved brethren and sisters to His right side? Can you just see the warmth in that welcome? He will be overjoyed to see that kindred spirit. He will also feel terribly sad at the loss of the hard hearted, of the unrepentant and the unforgiving. He will, as the Psalmist said, 'He will praise Yahweh in

the congregation of all the saints, they are all there if they're redeemed by His blood; they're all commended for being faithful in a few things, and everyone of them will be deeply conscious of **grace**, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So, brethren and sisters, we enhance our prospects of hearing the Lord's final words to us, the words of 'welcome' with that warm smile, we will enhance our prospects of the Lord's final assessment of 'grace', by now fervently serving our God and seeking the salvation of His sons and daughters.

So it's our hope that the Lord's final words to us, to you and I, will be that we've been faithful in a few things; that we endured faithful unto the end and in keeping His commandments we loved our brethren and sisters **as He loved us!** B&S, we have before us a clear choice, Moses described it as 'life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore, choose life'. We know it's not a vain thing, we know it really is our life. Joshua encouraged us, b&s, to 'be courageous; to keep and to do all that is written in God's Word and in serving Yahweh in sincerity and in truth. We know we must do what He commanded of us, to put away anything that would defile and ensnare us. Like David and Solomon, let us serve our God with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. Let's be strong and let's do it, but let's also realize that Yahweh searcheth the hearts and the imaginations of our thoughts. Like Paul and Timothy let us hold fast the form of sound words in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. There is, b&s, there is that wonderful crown of righteousness which is laid up for us, for all those that love His appearing. We **know** that the Lord shall deliver His saints from every evil work. Let us believe, b&s, that He will preserve us unto His kingdom, to whom be glory for ever and ever!

Brethren and sisters, I'd like to leave you with this thought!

We do not know, we cannot see  
What God's wise hand prepares for thee,  
Nor can our glance pierce through the haze  
That covers all our future ways;  
And yet we know that o'er it all,  
Rules He who notes the sparrow's fall.

We know not where His hand shall lead,  
Through desert waste or flowery mead  
Mid tangled thickets set with thorns,  
Mid gloom of night or glow of morn;  
But still we know, our Father's hand,  
Will bring us to His goodly land.

So at the close of this school, here at Winfield,  
Let's banish care and doubt and fear;  
And clasping His kind hand, assay to walk,  
With God from day to day, trusting in Him who hath us fed,  
Walking with Him who hath us lead.

Brethren and sisters, the Lord is coming quickly, may these final words from our faithful brethren of the past inspire us all: to be watching, to be ready and waiting for His coming; because He comes bringing His reward with Him. He's going to give that reward, to those brethren and sisters according as our works have been. The spirit of those works, b&s, the spirit behind them is that **we love one another as I have loved you!** He laid down His life for us, that's an agape, self-sacrificing, God honouring love, of our beloved brethren and sisters, of like precious faith. God be with you, till we meet again!