

## Division, Satan, Humility

### Atonement

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I hope that all of us are feeling at least some small measure of discomfort today. Some of us, perhaps, are feeling a *great* measure of discomfort—splitting headaches, emptiness in the stomach, or dryness in the mouth. We may be feeling a bit woozy or weak in the legs. However, God intends that we do feel some measure of discomfort on this particular day, because it was not intended to be physically comforting. It should be, however, *spiritually* comforting because of its significance.

In times past, I have occasionally mentioned that my preparation for this Holy Day message tends to meet with more resistance than the preparation for any other one. Sometimes it seems as though I am almost forcibly held up from finishing. There may be an unusual number of telephone calls that hinder me from concentrating on the Atonement subject or perhaps some other distraction. I have tried all kinds of different ways to get around it. I usually try to prepare the sermon at a time that is nowhere near the date of Atonement if at all possible. Even if I am preparing the sermon sometime in October, though, and try to get away from the rush around Feast time, somehow or another, these things seem to occur anyway. Today's message, however, was prepared a week or two in advance and I was able to muddle through all the distractions.

I think it is obvious to every single one of us that we live in a horribly divided world. I think, too, that the reason I have trouble preparing an Atonement sermon is the same reason that the world is so badly divided: there is someone tampering with the attitudes, conduct, and communication necessary to have a truly united world. It seems as though virtually every piece of news about which one reads or hears is met, in the media, with disagreement as to *why* that particular story is reported to the general public in the first place. We all listen to radio talk shows from time to time, and if there were ever a tragic witness as to how many varying opinions there are about any given subject—especially if political, monetary, or religious—we

are going to find it there. In fact, there are so many different opinions that, if people were to hold to them, there is *no way* that there will ever be agreement; there is no way that people are ever going to be at one.

**Galatians 5:19-22** Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Just look at these "works of the flesh" and take notice how many of them are, in actuality, elements of disagreement. Do people commit adultery because they agree with the one against whom they are committing adultery? Do people murder because they agree? No, there is disagreement there! How about people who are characteristically hostile, hateful, and contentious? There are two of them from the list right there. Jealousy—do people live in agreement with the one of whom they are jealous? Can people dwell together in unity when they are filled with such character flaws as outbursts of wrath (meaning sudden explosions of temper), selfish ambition (where the opponent, the competitor, the rival is run over in the rush to attain that which is desired), dissensions, heresies (opinions held by people that are against the orthodox thinking or against the doctrines), envies, drunkenness, and on and on?

These actions do not reflect the nature of God, and if one does any of these, then I would have to say that the person is unconverted—or converted but carnal and weak, as Paul said in I Corinthians 3)—and he is not being led by the Holy Spirit. It is possible for that to occur.

When we look into the Bible, we find not only a record of people being at variance with God, but also a record of the result of that disagreement. We are going to go back to the very beginning and take a number of scriptures, all of which appear in the book of Genesis, which will exemplify what I just said. We are going to see people at variance with God and we are going to see the results of that variance. Then we are going to understand why Isaiah said in Isaiah 59 that it is sin that separates us from God. We will never be at

one with God as long as we are practicing a sin, or many sins, as a way of life.

I think we understand that we are being created in the image of God. I think that we understand, too, that if we are sinning, then we are not in the image of God. I am not talking about isolated sins that we do from time to time as a result of weakness. They are not ingrained in our character. I am talking about sins that are *lived*, sins that are practiced as a way of life and are, in fact, part of our very nature—part of our very character.

We are all familiar with the transgression of Adam and Eve. Here we see the result of sin:

**Genesis 3:24** So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Not only were Adam and Eve and their progeny separated from God and removed from dwelling with Him in the Garden of Eden, they were also separated from the source of life—the Tree of Life! The tragic results are very clear there for anyone to see! God simply and clearly expounds upon the result of sin. Next we have an example involving Cain and the curse coming upon him.

**Genesis 4:12-14** "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." [Cain is separated, in effect, from mankind.] And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! [He realized that this separation coming upon him was not something he was going to find very pleasant.] "Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."

He is obviously concerned. There seems to be a measure of remorse in him, at least once he found out what the punishment was going to be—separation. We also find that God does not relent from what He wills to do.

**Genesis 4:16** Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.

Cain was sent into the land of "wandering."

**Genesis 6:11-13** The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

The earth was not filled with violence because they *agreed* with one another! It is obvious that they were disagreeing with one another and the result was that they were separated. They were divided from life itself because of the tragic quality and quantity of their disagreements with God and with each other. I think that these scriptures are extremely interesting in that they fall right at the beginning of the Book. The narrative that God provides in the Bible *immediately* shows the effect of what Adam and Eve did—and the effect of their separation from God. People began to divide into camps. They were not only divided from God but from each other and the source of life itself!

**Genesis 10:8-9** Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord."

The word *before* could very well be translated *against*. Nimrod was *against*; he was standing *before* God—and it was not in a friendly way! We will leap ahead (in terms of years anyway) into chapter eleven. We understand that the antagonist here is none other than this same Nimrod—the one against God.

**Genesis 11:6-9** And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered

them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Here were a people uniting themselves in disagreement against God, led by the arch-criminal who was trying to do all the uniting, Nimrod. This time, instead of wiping them out in death as He had done through the flood, God permitted them to live but segregated them by confusing their means of communication. So here they are separated from one another. All their glorious plans of building a great city and great tower had to be left off because they could not communicate with each other.

There is another tragic result from what happened in Genesis 11. All of these people who were scattered over the face of the earth were also separated from the holy line—a holy line that began with Shem. Actually, the line began with Seth and came down through Enoch to Noah and from Noah to Shem and from Shem to Abraham. These scattered people were, in fact, not only separated from that holy line, but they were separated, too, from God's Word. This was another tragic result of what they had done in their sin!

We will go from here all the way back to the New Testament and to the book of James.

**James 3:13-15** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom [or we might say "gentleness"]. But if you have bitter envy [remember the works of the flesh] and self-seeking [we have two of them mentioned right here] in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

Now we see why there is so much division involved in sin. There is a demonic influence. Satan is clearly stirring people up against one another and against God. You had better believe that he does not do it openly but influences them through the flesh to go in a certain direction. They have no defense against this, and the result is division among themselves and from

God. "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic."

**James 3:16** For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there...

As we continue right into chapter four, the context of this discourse continues, and we find people *at war* with one another.

**James 4:1** Where do wars and fights come from among you? [They do not come from agreement; they come from *disagreement*. They come from envy, self-seeking, and lust.] Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? [They come from sin!]

I think that this ought to set the stage for exactly *why* the Day of Atonement is needed—the day of at-one-ment, the state of being at one. It is needed because mankind is horribly divided from one another. There are those who are trying to pull the populations and the nations of the earth together as one, but this is going to be a failed attempt. It will utterly fail because this effort does not originate from God and is not being conducted in a godly manner. It is not being done by God or His Son, Jesus Christ, and is, instead, being done in a carnal way which will produce the exact same fruits that all of the other past efforts at unification have produced—division, destruction, and death! We are seeing, in one sense, a major worldwide attempt to bring the earth all together under one, anti-God system—even as it was attempted in Genesis 11. We read the tragic results of that.

We will again read in the Old Testament, in the book of Leviticus.

**Leviticus 23:27-32** "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any

work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people [separated from life]. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbath."

We are celebrating what I feel is the least understood and least appreciated of all God's Holy Cays. The world looks upon it as a curiosity. The Jews keep it as the most solemn day of the year. They, at least, realize that this day has solemn implications, but they do not know what they are.

There is an interesting interpretation within this verse and it is found in the word *atonement*. The Hebrew word in this verse does not literally translate into *atonement*. The word, *kippur*, means "to cover." What the translators have done is to take *covering* and, instead, use a word describing the *effect* of being covered. The *covering* of our sins causes *atonement*. This is the implication and meaning that we derive from other verses. It is the forgiveness of sin—the *covering* of the blood of Jesus Christ—that enables us to become at one with God.

Had this not been done, there would be no opportunity for us to be at one with God because our sins would still be a barrier between us. There would still be a separation between us and God. Because there was an atonement made by the blood of Jesus Christ, it bridges this gaping divide. Thus, the word *kippur* is interpreted into *atonement*.

The fact that this is a festival implies the act of eating and drinking in a convivial atmosphere. Though this Day of Atonement may be a festival, there is no eating or drinking permitted—at least physically. There is a reason we have trouble relating to this day, and it is because of the one who is, above all others, striving to hide its meaning behind a smokescreen of disinformation. He has tried to obliterate its significance in the minds of those who are aware of his existence.

If we were to mention the Day of Atonement to most Protestants or Catholics, they would look at us with a blank stare or give a shrug of the shoulder. To these people, the day has been, quite literally, obliterated. They

would have no clue as to what we were talking about. To the Jews, Satan has obliterated its significance. They are aware of the day and that it has a solemn significance and is most holy, yet they do not understand what it means. I have looked into their commentaries and you cannot find what it means in there. It does not mean the same thing to them that the Bible teaches us that it means, and this is mainly because they do not believe in Christ nor, then, do they believe in His atoning blood. Therefore they cannot make the proper connection between the blood of Christ and the blood of the goat that is slain during the symbolic ceremony on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

Let us pursue this—Satan's tactic of disinformation, misinformation, and obliteration. We will begin in Hosea.

**Hosea 4:1-2, 6** Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. [Can you imagine that?] By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed...My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

Whether we think of this in terms of being a prophecy for those of ancient Israel during the time that they fell to their Assyrian conquerors or geared more toward us in a modern way, I think that it almost boggles the mind to be able to read such an evaluation in God's own words that "there is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land!" He is, undoubtedly, speaking in a generality. He does not mean that there is absolutely none at all because He has always made certain to provide a witness to His truth, mercy, and knowledge. There were always those who have been His true servants through all time. However, generally speaking, the things that He is saying here are true. What is truly mind-boggling is that this land, the United States of America, is dotted with churches from one coast to the other! We have an entire nation that is called the land in which God is trusted. We have this inscribed on our coinage, do we not? "In God we trust." Still He says here that there is no knowledge of God, no mercy, and no truth! We have it right

there, yet God says, "This is **not true!** You are separated from Me! You do not know the truth about Me!" This is mind-boggling!

What we do have in the land is a great deal of confusion that is mistaken for knowledge about God. While there is a measure of truth, hardly anyone puts it in the right sequence leading us to the right answers. The result is a false image of God, and God can rightly say that there is no truth there. If the answer comes out false, is it truth? It cannot be both at the same time. There is no truth of God.

With what does this leave us? We are left with sectarianism. Do you know what sectarianism is? It is another word for division! Religions keep dividing, one after the other, because some groups consider part of the truth to be more important than all of the truth. Because the laws are not strung together properly, there is a breaking away that, inevitably, results in a new sect. We, too, have experienced this, have we not? We are caught up in this even now. It is a shame that it should occur, but it has occurred, nevertheless, because one group has gone completely away from the truth.

We will now turn to some New Testament confirmation of these principles. If you think that the prophecy in Hosea applied only to Israel just before they fell in 722 BC, let us look ahead some 750 years to the time of the Apostle Paul.

**Romans 10:1-3** Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. [Obviously he considered them to be in a "lost" condition—or, at the very least, an "unsaved" condition. I think that would be more accurate.] For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. [Does that agree with Hosea? It agrees with Hosea exactly!] For they being ignorant [and incidentally, there are quite a number of translations that use *ignorant* in the present progressive tense—*ignoring*—indicative of an ongoing, willful process. "For they *ignoring* God's righteousness..." This is a much stronger translation and shows the conscious life *choices* of a people who thought that they knew better than God.] and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

God accurately records that the Israelitish people had a zeal—but not according to knowledge. They were all confused. I think that the Apostle Paul before his conversion was probably the prime example of misdirected zeal. What did this zeal do to him? It so preoccupied his mind that it forced him to perceive Christ and Christians as enemies of the faith of his fathers. He was responsible for throwing a lot of them into prison and some were even put to death as a result of his zeal. He was so distracted by it that his mind could not tolerate somebody who thought a little bit differently from the way he did. God had to strike him down.

Even today Israel's land is dotted with church buildings, as I have already mentioned, and I think that the vast majority of these people are truly sincere. However, true knowledge is still lacking. The book of Romans reflects the Jewish proclivity toward self-justification on the basis of merit. There is a difference between the Israelitish zeal of today and the Israelitish zeal of the Apostle Paul's time. The zeal in Paul's time reflects—and I do say "reflects" (this is extracted from what Paul has written here in the book of Romans)—a belief that a person is capable of justifying himself before God on the basis of merit. In other words, as long as one did what they considered "good works," they were earning "points." If they were earning points, then God was obligated to mark this to their account and, therefore, owed them something.

Today's Israelites have gone all the way to the other side of the pendulum swing. They have largely thrown out responsibility to law and substituted a specious faith. Justification is by grace through faith, but that faith includes obedience to law, as Paul clearly shows. If the law has been done away, then there is no such thing as sin—but there is sin! James explains very clearly that the faith that is "living" obeys the royal law. Thus, the faith that justifies, or is the basis by which God will justify, is an *obedient* faith. Most of Protestantism does not believe that way. Theirs is a "just-as-I-am" faith.

**Romans 11:1-3** I say then, has God cast away His people?

Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "Lord, they have

killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Then God had to show him that he was *not* alone; there were seven thousand who had not bowed their knee to Baal.

**Romans 11:7-10** What then, Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it and the rest were hardened just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

This little inset in verses eight through ten is important to understand. Israel has zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. God has not cast away His people. He is still going to save them, but He lets us know *why* things are the way they are. He has given them over to being deceived; He has permitted it. This is why it says that God gave them a spirit of stupor. He permitted it even as He permitted Adam and Eve to be tested in the Garden.

These scriptures show that Israel's spiritual diet was what was misleading them. Their table had become a snare. A table is a symbol of where we eat. It is literally where we eat physical food, but spiritually, it is a symbol of that which is providing our mental and spiritual nourishment. What is he saying here? It was what they were feeding their mind that was so distracting them to the degree that they were not able to see the truth when it was presented to them.

**II Corinthians 4:3-4** But even if our gospel is veiled [the spirit of stupor], it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

God has permitted this for His own purposes. We find this explained in Romans 9-11. However, Israel is contributing to it mightily!

I am going through this because I want us to be aware that, if we are not careful, we could just as easily fall into the same spiritual condition! That which we feed our minds can veil God's purpose from us. That which we feed our minds can prevent us from becoming at one with God because it will create confusion and uncertainty within our minds as to what is right and what is wrong. As a result, we will not be able to clearly see the right path and will fail, therefore, to make the right choices in life. If we do not make the right choices in life, then are we really going to be walking with God?

This is what happened to the Israelites. Their sincerity did not save them. If God and a person are walking side by side for a while, but on different paths, sincerity is never going to bring them together. This is a truth from the Bible. We are to worship God in spirit **and** truth. Sincerity is good; sincerity is wonderful. It is part of a true Christian's make-up—but sincerity will not stand on its own in creating and building a relationship with God. There are billions of sincere people out there who are, nonetheless, deceived because they are in a spirit of stupor and not even aware of it. Being religious is not enough. It is being religious and having and *following* the truth that matters. That is why I quoted from and used the example of the Apostle Paul as one who had zeal and sincerity but in his *misdirected* zeal threw people into prison and had them put to death—separating them from life, separating them from their loved ones. It takes both to produce a true and living faith.

Elijah was undoubtedly sincere when he uttered to God that he was all alone, but God straightened him out. "No, there are seven thousand others who are walking the same path as you." He did not even know it. His sincerity did not reveal this truth to him.

It was and is Israel's spiritual diet that is feeding their minds and misleading them so that they cannot come up with the right kinds of answers. We find in Revelation 12:9 that it is Satan who is deceiving the whole world. How is he doing this? I have a very interesting article from *Newsweek Magazine* dated August 30, 1982—eleven years ago. The subject of the article is Satan the devil and is entitled "Giving the Devil His Due." It is interesting in that it clearly demonstrates that people do not believe what the Bible says.

Saint Anthony wrestled with him; Luther taunted him; and Milton immortalized him in *Paradise Lost*. To Saint Paul, he was the god

of this world. And he and his helpers figure in the New Testament twice as often as the Holy Spirit.

Can you imagine that? Do you think that there is nothing written about Satan? According to these carnal people, he appears in the New Testament twice as often as the Holy Spirit. I just recently read that *holy* is used in conjunction with *spirit* (indicating the Holy Spirit) upwards of ninety times. Apparently, Satan, demons, and things of this ilk appear somewhere around 180 times in the New Testament. Is that enough witness that Satan exists and that he is a real personality?

We are going to see from this article that even the churches no longer believe that he exists. No wonder he is able to pull this deception over on people. We are seeing how he is able to do it. No one believes what God says—it is that simple. It is not complicated. It goes right back to the first sin. Adam and Eve did not believe the simple instruction that God gave to them: "Eat this; do not eat that, because the day you do that you are as good as dead!" They did not believe it and they died. Because they died, they were separated from God.

He is, needless to say, the devil—next to Jesus Christ the most familiar figure in Christian lore. For all that, he is not what he used to be. Ever since the last witches were put to death in the 1700s, his hold on the Christian imagination has been slipping.

Over the last two centuries, he has been debunked by rationalists, exorcised by psychotherapists, and demythologized by theologians. [Do you hear that? He has been *demythologized* by theologians!] Though the problem of evil remains just as serious as ever, by the middle of this century the devil had become a mere metaphor to all but the most persistently literal-minded. [Because we believe in Satan, we would be considered by the authors of this article to be "literal-minded."] As Robert Frost [the poet] wrote of Satan [Listen to this; this is telling], "church neglect and figurative use have pretty well reduced him to a mere shadow of himself." [He is real! He is very real, and he is still stirring things up. However, these people recognize that he is fading into the background, and when he is fading into the background, he is doing his most destructive

work.] Now, however, as the second millennium approaches, interest in the devil is rising...

Just why the devil has returned to haunt our cultural and social psyche is not hard to explain. "In times of great social unrest and political instability," observes Northwestern University historian Joseph Barton, "the individual feelings of impetus tend to elicit a sense of overwhelming evil at work. The devil is an ancient way to *symbolize* the existence of evil," Barton argues, "and people are groping about for that suppressed image." And so are the scholars. [What fascinates them about Satan is how he first crept into and then, apparently, out of Christian consciousness. In and out—do you see how he is able to deceive people?]

As most figures of myth, the Christian concept of the devil is a composite drawn from many disparate sources, most of them ideas and legends that originated outside the accepted Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Now wait a minute! Satan, demons, demonology, and things associated with Satan and demons appear over 180 times in the New Testament alone, yet they say that most of the ideas and legends that originated were outside of the accepted Christian and Hebrew scriptures? People do not believe what the Bible says! Do we wonder *why* there is an identity crisis with God, *why* God says that there is no knowledge of Him?

The article then goes on to provide a listing of these "sources" that are outside of the Bible and from which the idea of Satan came. Listen to this evolutionary approach:

In the last four centuries before Christ, the Israelites gradually developed the need for a powerful devil. That "need," scholars believe, was born out of their spiritual despair arising from their dashed nationalistic hopes. And during their exile in Babylonia, Israelites had imagined that a new golden age awaited them once they were restored by Yahweh to their Promised Land. But that is not how things worked out and, after their return, the temple was not rebuilt to its former glory and Israel's political fortunes

worsened. And as Roman legions followed Syrian and Greek conquerors, the Israelites could no longer blame their sufferings, as the prophets of old had done, solely on their own unfaithfulness to Yahweh. [Blame somebody else. Now they could blame Satan.]

Never mind that one of the oldest books in the Old Testament was the book of Job. There are those scholars who argue that it is the oldest of the scriptures—and Satan appears in the first and second chapters of the book of Job. If this is, indeed, the oldest of the Old Testament scriptures, then it was written around one thousand years *before* the Jews returned from their captivity. Besides that, do you think that these people did not know that the serpent of Genesis 3 was Satan? They most certainly did know. This is what happens when people get scholarly with the Bible. They, in effect, invented Satan—enter the devil as a powerful figure in his own right!

Today secularized, western society finds themselves in much the same position as the despairing Israelites who first fashioned the figure of the devil. Despite the high promise of science, technology, and other tribal "gods" of the modern era, evil persists on a truly awesome scale. "Under such circumstances," observes Peter Williams, a specialist in American religious history at Miami University in Ohio, "belief in a menacing, personal devil is a way of focusing anxiety about a perceived threat. It is something that you can get a hold of that explains everything."

To most people, however, the existence of the devil is an inadequate explanation for such dense demonic realities as war, poverty, mass starvation, and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. And even among otherwise orthodox Christians his figure has become mythical [something not real].

What a smokescreen that has been created! We know the one who has created it about himself. Even the theologians agree that he is nothing more than a myth. How does Satan get to mankind? He gets to mankind through mis-education.

It all began with Adam and Eve. This was and is his primary approach to deception. He gives people just enough truth so that what he is saying, what

he is "palming off" appears plausible and that maybe, just maybe, he is right in what he is saying. However, we see that the result was separation from God, which in turn led to every horrible condition that man has ever experienced. The degeneracy that began with Adam and Eve prevails to this day, and we dare not forget that, at one point, the division had gotten so bad that God had to wipe out all life!

It is obvious from Genesis 2 and 3 that Adam and Eve had exercised their free moral agency. God instructed them, but He did not force them to choose either way. They *willingly* chose the path they followed; and I see, from the account given there, that there was no hot-headed rebellion in what they did. What they did was thought out, at least to some degree, and consciously entered into.

Let us further pursue this as we come forward in time about two thousand years from Adam and Eve. The time period is thought to be a couple of centuries following the flood. What do we find?

**Romans 1:18-19** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

Not only does Satan's deception play a part in man's separation from God, but the Word of God also shows that there is a *willfulness* involved in man's choice of the direction in which he is headed. That is so clear! Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness because what may be known of God is manifest to them!

Satan, in his deception, has been so forceful, his argument has been so "good," that sincere men will argue *against* God and fight *against* God and think they are doing God service. You know what I just said is true because Jesus prophesied that people are going to *kill* in the name of God and think, sincerely, that they are doing God a service. This is how effective Satan has been—and is—with his deceptions.

If he has been that effective in deceiving people, can you imagine how wide the gulf is that separates mankind from God? It is so wide that in the parable

in Luke 16, it is described as "impassable," and so it is. Sin brought death, and for us to bridge the gap to eternal life is impossible.

We are in a horrible state when one looks at it from the evidence that God has on His side. Do you want to look at it bluntly? We deserve every bit of pain, every bit of torment, every bit of hurt, and every bit of anxiety that might come our way. We have no basis whatsoever for complaining to God that we deserve His forgiveness. God has every right, based on our activities, to do what He could do but, in His mercy, will not do.

Let us update this right into our present time, in II Peter 3, just in case we think that this attitude has disappeared or has been overcome. Some may feel that those things only happened in ancient times, that it only happened to Nimrod; it only happened to Cain; it only happened to a few people way back when. God prophesies of our time:

**II Peter 3:3-5** Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water

He is talking about the Flood. Again, the problem is the same. It is a simple one: people simply do not believe what God says. Satan has made it well nigh impossible for them to believe because he has so confused them as to what truth is. The truth is so simple that, when it does come to them, they tend to reject it. There is an entrenched tendency to reject the simplicity that is in Christ.

**II Peter 3:8-9** But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

People misinterpret God's mercy, patience, and compassion and instead look upon what they are doing as something of which God approves. Thus, they *continue* what they are doing in blissful ignorance.

I am going to continue adding more and more to this case that God has against us. We must continually have in our minds just how merciful God is and exactly what He is offering to mankind.

**Matthew 23:37-38** "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"

Picture this: You are a parent sending your child to appeal to someone whom you love and know is misdirected, misguided, misinformed, in anxiety and anguish because of sin and deception, and whose life you know could be turned around and be glorious and wonderful for him. You send your child to appeal to him, and he kills him or her—when all you wanted to do is to help him out of the mess that he is in but could not see the condition in which he lives. "The one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"

**Matthew 23:37-38** "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! [**You were not willing!**] See! Your house is left to you desolate."

**Romans 3:9-12** What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. [*We being Jews.*] For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. [This means under its sway, under its domination, under condemnation because of sin bringing upon us the death penalty. He begins to quote the psalm here:] As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. [They are too confused, even though they are religious. They do not know what God is like. They do not have a proper image. They cannot pursue after it; they cannot seek it because they have no idea where or for what to look.] They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one"

**Romans 3:19** Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, [including mine and yours,] and all the world may become guilty before God.

Do we have any defense? All of mankind is included here—us, too. All have rejected God's truth out of hand when confronted with it and before God took deliberate steps to open the minds of some. Even now, we wrestle in our flesh—where our mind sets itself to decide the law and rule of God—with lies, misinformation, misleading statements, spiritual things that have been said in the past. This is how deeply it is ingrained.

What is it that keeps us from submitting even when we recognize something as being true? The lesson of this day reveals where the root cause stems in us: it is pride. This is how we, with the help of Satan, contribute to the myth. When we add to this that the first man's sin involved food, it provides an interesting dimension to this day. Is it possible that fasting is commanded on this day to remind us of this—that the first sin involved food? Is it also to remind us, at the same time, that we **can** humble ourselves, that we **can** control our drives, our desires, our passions, and our attitudes?

There is no stronger drive in human beings than to preserve their lives. God has not told us to stop breathing—that would end our lives immediately—but He has commanded us to stop eating and drinking food and water because these are the next two essential things to life. They are so essential that even after only one day many of us are already sick, nauseated and vomiting, lying on our beds hardly having enough strength to get out of them, woozy-headed.

God is teaching us from where strength comes: from those things He provides. God freely gives to all of mankind air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat. He gives these to everybody. However, God is also the source of all spiritual qualities that enable us to live on His plane of existence. These can come only from Him, and they will only come to us if we will humble ourselves and work to control our drives and our passions and our attitudes—and to submit!

We find ourselves being hit from both directions. We begin, through this day, to really see the nature of the problem that separates us from God. The nature of the problem is *pride*; the solution to the problem is *humility*! If Adam and Eve had been humble enough to simply believe what God had said, their separation from Him would never have happened. They were proud enough that they thought they knew better. That is what pride does: It makes us feel that we know better than what the Creator says or even what other people may say.

There has to be atonement. There has to be a covering. There has to be something that will bridge the gap. We will not now go into the part that Jesus Christ plays in this because He does play **the** major role in providing the death, the blood that pays the penalty for sin. He also is our High Priest, and He keeps things moving in the right direction. He appeals before God on our behalf and administers the Spirit of God. He gives leadership and guidance to each one of us in order to keep us on the path. However, we have our part to play in this, too, and we will never fulfill this part until we submit! That is our part—to submit—and we will not submit until we stop thinking that we know better!

**I Peter 5:5-6** Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.

Do you know the most important thing that we can get out of these verses here? It is the understanding and the knowledge, the belief and the conviction that humility is a choice. He says, "Humble yourself!" We can *choose* to go the right way. When we make the choice to go the right way, we have, then, humbled ourselves. Humility is not a feeling; it is a state of mind wherein a person sets his course to submit to God—regardless of his feelings. This is a hard thing to do. I kid you not! You know that it is hard to do.

Reflect once again on the fasting. The purpose of fasting is to make us think about from where the real life-sustaining provisions come. They are not inherent. They have to come from outside of us—even the physical food,

water, or air. We do not have self-sustaining life. The spiritual provisions are from exactly the same source. All the necessities which sustain spiritual life and produce the kind of strength that we want to have—the kind of sense of well-being that we want to have along with a good, clear conscience—all of these vital "nutrients" come from God. They are directly tied to our submitting to Him because "God resists the proud, but He gives grace [gifts] to the humble."

If we are waiting for a "feeling" to come along before we submit to God, we are going to be waiting a long time. It may come; it may not come. We may use *feeling* in the sense of a decision that is reached. When we say that we "felt" we had to go in a certain direction, we may not have been speaking of an emotion at all. In that case, our feeling is correct and would be a right understanding of I Peter 5:5-6. Our part in settling the disagreement with God is to be humble before Him. The separation will not be bridged until one does what Adam and Eve did not: humbly submit!

**John 17:20-22** "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; [He is referring to you and me. We believe through the word of the apostles.] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.

Salvation can very easily and accurately be described as "being at one with God." As long as we are separated from God, we do not have salvation. When we are "at one" with God, it means that we are becoming like Him. It means that we are walking along the same path and will be saved.

Jesus Christ's death bridges this impossible situation for us. We can, then, begin to contribute our part to being at one with God. What remains yet undone, even though the gap is bridged, is a change that must be worked in us, a change in character and in attitude in order for us to become like God. It takes *living* God's way in order to become like God. This is why the humility is necessary.

We can see from Jesus' prayer and from our own experience (and we can see from the history of man) that mankind is not at one with God, yet that is God's aim. It was Satan's influence that motivated Adam and Eve and all the rest of mankind to separate themselves from God. As long as Satan can keep us separated from God, salvation is impossible. Satan's thinking, which was passed on to Adam and Eve and then passed on to us, is that we all have the right to set our own standards or codes of right and wrong. He has convinced mankind that they have the same prerogatives and that these Satan-inspired, man-made standards can produce abundant prosperity, good health, peace, and a sense of well-being in our lives—but they do not, and that is the problem! Humbling oneself means giving up that notion and submitting to what God says. He has given us free moral agency to choose whether to obey His standards and codes, not the freedom to set our own

Fasting can humble a person if it is properly used. It is undoubtedly an uncomfortable experience and requires a measure of faith, discipline, and willpower. I say it requires a measure of faith if one is going to do it God's way. It can be done—and you are doing it today. Fasting is a *tool*. It is a self-imposed affliction. It is important for human nature to gratify itself, and that is exactly what we do when we sin. We gratify the self. We gratify natural desires: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Fasting, then, can bring a person face-to-face with what he really is, not what his human nature tells him he is. Human nature always puffs us up. We are, in reality, a mortal being. We need all the help we can get just to stay alive. Fasting makes one weak and makes one aware of how much we need what God provides.

God's part in this equation is to forgive sin and dispose of Satan. It is no wonder the world is so ignorant of this day. This day is a thorn in Satan's side and he would like nothing more than to forget it—and for all of mankind to not even know of it. He has done a wonderful job of doing that!

I think that this is a good place to stop, with the understanding that God does not owe us a thing. God is the giver of **every** good thing. It is God who has taken the steps to bring us to be at one with Him; we did not do it on our own. His actions enabled us to have peace with Him through Jesus Christ. His actions and Jesus Christ's actions enabled us to have our sins covered

through the blood, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God leads us to repentance and gives us a true picture of what we are. God reveals Himself to us so that we can have faith in the true God, and this opens the way of repentance. God shows us the need to turn our lives around because of what we have done. It is God, too, who supplies us with the will to humble ourselves before Him and to begin to submit.

It is God who has ordained our High Priest, Jesus Christ, who helps us strengthen this oneness. He is daily serving before our God in appealing the case that is against us and separates us from Them. He is also supplying us with the Holy Spirit—enabling us to grow and overcome.

We think that our part in this whole process is so difficult yet, by comparison, it is the smallest part. We think it is the largest part, but it is not. God has done 99% of the work and all He wants us to do is to humbly submit before Him.

Make use of this day. Think about the resultant weakness and sickness from going just one day without food and water. Then consider how quickly we would deteriorate spiritually if we did not have God doing His 99% of the work of salvation. We would be spiritually dead in practically no time at all! Let us rejoice in what He has done and in what He has supplied for us in His grace. We can now look forward to the Feast of Tabernacles and observing the final two Holy Days picturing this great work of salvation because He is making possible the fulfillment of His purpose—an essential part of which is being made "at one" with Him.