

## Intimacy With Christ (Part Two)

**Knowing and Using God's Words**

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 19-Oct-96; Sermon #260**

Turn to Hebrews 12, and I can use this series of verses as a foundation upon which to build this sermon, and a bridge to tie it in with last week. Recall that last week I was talking about people neglecting their salvation, and I used the scripture that appears in Hebrews the 2, and we are going to continue in that same theme as we go through the sermon today

**Hebrews 12:12-15** Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

This sermon is going to be a continuation of last week's sermon, which in turn was a continuation of the series that I gave during the Feast of Tabernacles ["What Is the Church's Work Today (Part One)"]. So I am going to begin with a review of some of the main points that I covered in the last sermon, because I believe that we have reached the place that I called during the Feast of Tabernacles, "The Hour of Decision," picking something out from Billy Graham. I think that we have reached the place in this little group's life that we need to make sure of the direction in which we are going because I want every one of us to make progress in his relationship with God.

Now to understand an overview of what and why things happened in the church—the greater church of God, and most specifically the Worldwide Church of God over the past twenty years or so—and be convicted and justified by Christ's blood because we have repented of things that have come to mind that helped contribute to that trouble. Now that is a very fine beginning.

When I say a very fine beginning, I am referring here to the sermons that I gave during the Feast of Tabernacles when I called on you, I think very strongly, that we have reached the time that we need to seriously consider repenting. We need to seriously consider that **we**, not Joseph Tkach, but we are just as much a part of the problem that occurred as anybody else and it does no good at all for us to be pointing the finger, accusing others of what **they** have done. This is not to deny what they have done, but we have to remember that we are part of the body and we contributed to the problem as well, and so it is the responsibility of each one of us to repent. If the shoe fits, we have got to wear it regardless of where we think we might be within the body. So that makes a very fine beginning for change, or for growth, or for overcoming, or whatever label we might apply to this process that God intends to conclude with us in His image.

We have a great foundation for overcoming because we are now in the attitude to proceed toward holiness, which, according to this verse, ". . . without which no man shall see the Lord." Now there is a goal—holiness. Holiness is the result, it is the fruit of the relationship with God, knowing God, and applying His way in the practical circumstances of our lives. This is the process by which His laws are written in our hearts. I said in last week's message that I felt one of the major reasons we failed to grow as much as we could is because we do not see ourselves as involved in a cause, and thus we lose a great deal of motivation for overcoming.

Now brethren, it is the gospel—the gospel of the Kingdom of God—which informs us of the great cause that there ought to be in our lives, and that is why Paul said what he said there in Romans 1:16. I want you to turn to look at that verse and burn that thing in your mind so that you understand it, and understand it clearly, where Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation."

It is that knowledge, it is that understanding, which plays a major role in producing in us the **will** to go ahead, the drive to overcome, because we know where our lives are headed. That good news tells us where our lives are headed, and instills within us the attitude of having a cause. If we really believe what that gospel, what that good news, tells us will capture our imagination, it will give us vision. It will strike a chord within us. It will stir

us up. It will say to us, "This is the way to go," and we will make the steps to go in that direction. So that "good news" plays a major role in empowering us with the overall direction of our lives.

The details of that are also contained within the gospel. So hearing the gospel does not stop with initial conversion, but "hearing of the gospel" continues in the **feeding of the flock**, because this (the Bible) **is** the gospel. It is the whole book which is the gospel, not just one little section of it, and the whole thing contains bits and pieces of it—all the way from Genesis to the book of Revelation—and it is the ministry's responsibility to give that knowledge to the people in the congregation so that they can be empowered and know not just the overall sense of things, but also the fine details of how it is to be applied in our lives. From that, brethren, comes "living faith"—the faith to make the right choices in our lives.

This is why I feel so strongly at this time that it must be preached with greater intensity to the church, because people are floundering around, having lost their way, and are spending their time and their energies on virtually useless spiritual technicalities. In order to get reoriented, in order to get back to our first love, in order to get back to the faith once delivered, we have got to make the initial turn right there.

In the first century church, you can tell primarily from the general epistles—that is James through Jude—they tell the story, not in a great deal of detail, but they give us an overview of what was happening in the church.

The apostle Paul, in Acts 20 warned the church that after he left grievous wolves would come inside and rend it from within. What you see from James through the book of Jude was that prophecy come true. Grievous wolves came within the church, and the apostle John said that they were not of us. So what happened? The true Christians like John got put out, or had to leave in order to keep the faith.

Now what was God's instruction to the church that came out of those experiences? Virtually every apostle—James, Peter, John, and Jude primarily, as well as Paul because he said it quite a number of times too—but

they all said it in somewhat different ways. We almost always end up quoting Jude because it is so clear. "**You've got to get back to the faith once delivered.**"

John put it this way. He opens the book of I John, telling the people where they heard what it was that they were converted to. They heard it from those who had associated with Christ for three and a half years. In the book of Revelation he said the Ephesus church left its first love, and then he added to that: He said you have to go back to what you did at the beginning. Every one of them said virtually the same thing. Paul said, "Follow me"—an apostle of God—"as I follow Christ."

So the first thing that we have to do is get back to what was delivered to us by God through Mr. Armstrong—that basic package of doctrines, of teachings, of hope, of promises, of vision, and everything that came through that man, and established within our minds what the great hope was.

Now in order to embrace the cause so that it really takes hold, we have to be able to see the need for it, both within ourselves and also within society. We have to come to the place where we understand and we believe with all of our being that it is coming, whether we are ready or not, **and it is!** It is inexorably on course. The Kingdom of God is going to come whether we are ready or not; God has given us the opportunity to be ready. As I mentioned a couple of different times in the Sovereignty Series, do not fall for this idea that God is waiting for the church to be ready. Nobody holds God up, and if He has set a time, it is going to happen right on time, and we are going to be ready or else. Now the beautiful thing is, He will expend every effort to make sure that we are ready, and if we do not get ready, it is our fault. Shame on us. So He has given us every opportunity.

We also have to believe that it is attainable. On the one hand it is so far beyond us we cannot see ourselves ever being able to achieve it. And that is the catch, if I can put it that way, because that very factor is intended by God to **drive** us to **Him**—to drive us to Him to get the strength and to have Him work through us. Your Savior and my Savior said, "Of mine own self I can do nothing. The Father that dwells in me, He does the works."

Even Jesus Christ was a weak human being, yet He appeared as though He had awesome power. The reason He had awesome power is because He was so close to the Father, the Father felt free in working through Him because He knew that Jesus Christ would give Him the glory for what was done, and He of course did. Now in order to do that, we have to follow Jesus Christ in being as close to the Father as much as we possibly can, as Jesus Christ was.

So our objective in this cause is to be prepared for when God's Kingdom comes, and then we can be used to bring about the social and cultural changes that God has in mind for His creation. We must show Him that we are trustworthy by yielding to His creative effort to mold us into what He desires.

My concern in this is that we live in a world created by and driven by Satan and that we will, through its distraction, be unwittingly led to neglect this "so-great salvation." I know there is not a single one of us within the sound of my voice that **intends** to neglect this great salvation; but rather it is something that just happens because we are so busy taking care of the things of life that the things of faith are shoved aside.

I do not know about you but sometimes I think that living in this world is like being in an automobile careening out of control down a winding mountain road, and that I am more concerned about the cliffs that are on the side than steering the automobile. Now what do you think ought to be of first concern? Steer the automobile so that you can stay away from the cliffs. In this little story, **we** are the automobile, and it is not that the cliffs (all the problems and dangers) are not real. They are real. But did not Jesus say, "Take no anxious thought for tomorrow," and that if you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, that all these things will be added? Certainly. It is pretty hard to refute what Jesus said. What He is saying is in effect, "Have faith in Me. Have faith in the Father. You point your automobile (your life) in the direction of the Kingdom of God, and you see if I can't keep you away from the cliff." You know, in that sense He wants us to put Him to the test, and we do that by living by faith, by believing what He says.

**Isaiah 55:1-3** Ho, every one that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

**Isaiah 55:6-9** Seek you the LORD while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. [Now look at these next verses within this context.] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For you and me, this is an exhortation to seek Him more deeply. Now preparing the sermon for the Feast of Tabernacles I knew that I could not just tell you what went wrong and why, how we got into this fix. To repent is not enough. Jesus made it very clear in Luke the 11. He gave this illustration that a demon is cast out, it goes out seeking dry places, and then it gets seven of its fellows and comes back to where he was cast out from, and finding it swept clean and bare, and the end of that person is worse than the beginning. What Jesus meant by that is, very briefly, that if something bad goes out through repentance, something good had better come in to take its place, or the latter end is going to be worse than when you repented. That is a pretty hard saying.

Just prior to that, in that very same section, He said, "He that is not with Me, is against Me." That is the leading verse to this thing about the demon being cast out. What He is saying is, "If you're going to be with Me, you can't be neutral," another way of saying you cannot be passive. Active steps must be

taken in order that something good is placed in after repentance occurs. That is the sum of that instruction that Jesus gave there in Luke 11.

I also used an illustration in that sermon. It was actually a part of the introduction to the next point that I was going to give. I told you about these pictures that are on the wall in my office, one which was taken up in Scotland, and the other is of the Grand Canyon. I used them as examples of **deep** things. The Grand Canyon is about a mile deep—5,280 feet plus deep—and you are standing on the rim looking down. It is an awesome sight. The picture upon my wall is one John Reid took, and you can see in the picture some of the, I guess you would call it, awesome stillness and depth and size and grandeur of the Grand Canyon with endless rock formations. I told you I can sit there and look at that picture for a long time. It humbles me. It makes me feel so small in comparison. I used that as a springboard to help us understand that God is deep, and we know that.

We read that in Isaiah 55:8-9 that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." His mind is awesome. It is out of sight!

Now here is the problem. God has designed things in His Word in the way that He has written the Book and in the way that He is operating His program so that the true God is not easily found. First of all, we would never find Him. He has to reveal Himself. Now even though He reveals Himself (I Corinthians 2, He says by His Spirit), "No man can come to the Son" Jesus said, "except the spirit of the Father draw him." So we would never find God. He is a mystery to us, and so He reveals Himself. He takes the initiative to begin the relationship.

But then we run into a problem that is good for us. He has caused the Bible to be written in such a way that "it's here a little, there a little," and so it requires that we make effort to find out more about Him to come to really know Him. We have information about His nature, information about His way, and so forth—it is spread out all over the Bible. There is information about the doctrines in Genesis. It might be in Leviticus. Part of it is in

Deuteronomy, or I Samuel. Some of it is back in Revelation. So we have to go through as many of the Scriptures as we possibly can, digging away to find the pieces of the doctrines that make up the way, the gospel of God.

In addition to that there is a third problem. That is the one that we are really addressing in these sermons, and that is, that even though we have the access through men like Mr. Armstrong to the doctrines, let us say, and we have access through the teachings that God has given through the ministry, there is part of this responsibility that falls upon us to do some searching on our own, and this requires time and effort. It requires that we do a great deal of deep thinking. So He gives us a warning in Proverbs 2. He says, "If you dig for it as silver and gold." He is telling us that He wants us to know Him better than just to have a surface view of Him, and that we are going to have to dig in order to find it.

So even as we have to dig deeply into the boughs of the earth to get things that we consider to be valuable and precious, we are going to have to dig deeply into the Word of God to find things of great value, and coming to know Him, and proving our relationship with Him, Remember, Jesus is the living Word of God, and the Bible is the Word of God—Jesus Christ—in print.

So we come to know Him in three ways. Once God has revealed, we come to know the primary means of our instruction is through the ministry, through the church. The second means of instruction is the effort that we make on our own. Even for the ministry to do its job, He tells us that He has to give the ministry gifts in order to do it.

During the summer, even before I began thinking about the Feast of Tabernacles sermon deeply, I received a book. It was actually a gift from a man that I had known in the past, and he is not with us. He is getting tapes from us and the *Forerunner*. He is not with us. He has left the Worldwide, but he is not with us, and I certainly respect this man. I always have, as far as I know, respected him. He sent me a little book. I mean, it was little, only about five inches tall and about one-quarter inch thick and even has big writings in it, with wide spaces in between the lines. There was hardly any material within it. But I read that thing, and what an impact it had on me.

The reason it had an impact on me is that I knew that I was breaking every one of these rules the man gave in the book. The title of the book is, *Intimacy With The Almighty*. It is written by Charles Swindoll. I did not read but through the first brief chapter and I knew then that I wanted to give something at the Feast of Tabernacles on it. And I never gave it. I prepared a sermon built around it. That is what you are getting now. But I never gave it, because what I did prepare for the Feast kept getting longer and longer. Those two sermons became four that I gave there at the Feast of Tabernacles. But you are getting something from that *Intimacy With The Almighty*—just several principles that I want to give to you that I **know** will improve your relationship with God a great deal.

**II Corinthians 11:23-28** Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death often. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which come upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

Well, I could go on, but I do not think there is any need to go on there. I do want to go on in II Corinthians 6—a little bit different context.

**II Corinthians 6:4-5** But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings.

Then he goes on to show the contrast to those things. Why was Paul doing these things? What drove him? Why would he put his life at such risk so often, almost daily it seems? His life seemed to be on the line, and there is not a one of us, including yours truly, that has even come close to even one-

hundredth of what he went through, practically it seems as a daily experience. He certainly was not doing it for the love of money. Brethren, his power to endure these things and keep driving himself came from a multitude of factors. It was not just one thing, and not the least of which was his knowledge of a Personality. That Personality's cause became **his** cause.

When we dig into God's Word, we come up with something that is of very great value. What we come up with, if we are looking in the right attitude, for the right reason, is the foundation for a great relationship with God. Now I am going to show you something that the apostle Paul wrote in another book, and I want you to see what this apostle, who produced so much in his life—this man who said that he **worked**, he labored more than they all, what he says was the consuming passion of his life, and I think that you will be surprised.

While we are reading this, I want you to think about what he endured as Christ's servant, and the fact that he worked harder than anybody. First of all I am going to read this to you from the *King James Version* that I normally use. Then I am going to read it to you from *The Amplified Version*. So in Philippians 3:10. It looks rather innocuous when you see it in the *King James* or the *New King James*. It says:

**Philippians 3:10** That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.

Before we launch into this reading from *The Amplified Version*, I want you to reflect for just a moment on that word "know." Every single one of us knows that word has sexual connotation. It is talking about intimacy, "that I may be intimate with Him." Think of this in terms of who it is that the church is going to marry, and two people in marriage are intimate with one another. What we are now in is the courtship stage, and we are preparing for that time that we are going to be married to this One. I want you also to think about this in relation to chapter 2 and verse 12 where it says to "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and to understand that verse is

a backdrop to what we are seeing here. Here is how you work out your salvation with fear and trembling. What we are expounding a bit on here is the sense of cause yet being a part of a **cause**.

**Philippians 3:10** (AMP) For my determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and clearly, and that I may in the same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection, the power that He exerts over believers, and that I may so share in His sufferings as to be continually transformed in spirit into His likeness to His death.

What a powerful statement of purpose! If that does not tell you what drove that man—what drove that man was the desire to know his Savior and be like Him! He wanted to be conformed to Christ in every way before they married, which is the way a courtship ought to be conducted, so that when two people finally marry, most of the kinks have been worked out and that two people are conformed to one another. The only difference in this marriage to which we are headed, is that the One is already perfect. We are the one who has to do all the changing so that we are conformed to be like Him. Jesus Christ is going to marry **His own kind**.

So the consuming passion of Paul's life was to be **exactly** like Christ in every way. Perhaps maybe the way that might have most impact on us, is this want to be continually transformed in spirit, even into His likeness, to His death, because people who share sorrow, pain, and suffering together are **joined** in such a way that you cannot be joined in good times. You know that is true. All of the tragedy in a community draws people together as they share one another's sorrow. That is what he is talking about here, only here it is the sorrow of being persecuted. It is the sorrow of the pain of overcoming. It is the sorrow of being crucified daily, and of course, eventually maybe being put to death in the same kind of way that He was.

Let me just emphasize some of the key words in this amplification of that scripture: (1) determined purpose; (2) that I may know; (3) progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him; (4) perceiving; (5)

recognizing; (6) understanding; and (7) continually transformed into His likeness.

Could anything be more important to a child of God after his initial conversion? I will tell you brethren, that will bring about holiness. Holiness will be the fruit of that kind of people.

Now let us ask what could be a very embarrassing question, as it was for me when I read that book. How many of us set aside the time to deeply pursue this rather than getting caught up in this hectic system that Satan has devised to keep us distracted and neglectful of "so great salvation"? I am not talking here about being intimately acquainted with theological technicalities, or even being, as important as it is, intimately acquainted with the church. I am not talking about proselytizing to get others to join the group. I am talking here about being intimately acquainted with a Personality—Jesus Christ.

He died for us. He is our friend. He is our Savior. He is our High Priest. He is our Lord. **I am His slave!** And yet, in every aspect of our relationship, there stands a Personality. We are not going to marry a legal blob who somehow forgave our sins. Do you not think that if you desired to marry somebody here on this earth that you would want to spend time with him or her to get to know him or her? Dumb question! How can you get to know Christ in most of the things that we do?

Now there is some spin-off, if what we are doing is something that He would approve of. Please do not think that I am saying everything of this life is of no account and we should all become monks and go live in a monastery somewhere. That is not what I am talking about here at all. I warned you last week in that sermon what I am going to tell you is very simple in the telling, but I am going to give you probably the most difficult assignment that you have ever received in your life. **I challenge you, brethren, to find time!**

Satan has purposely designed this world to burn up our time, and to cause us to have fun doing it. Digging for gold and silver is hard work, and it is something that we would rather avoid unless we think the payoff is going to be worth it. In the same way, digging for the true treasures in life out of

God's Word is hard work, unless we think that it is worthwhile doing it, and the payoff is going to be so great that we will drive ourselves. We will be motivated to do it.

Let us look at David, at couple of verses from Psalm 42. Please do not think that I am setting myself apart here as one who has the solutions to all of this. Again I told you last week that I am going to speak in generalities. There is a reason for that, and that is that everybody's life is not the same. You have to work out your *own* salvation; I have to work out mine. You have to find the time in your life, the places in your life where you can do this thing of devoting time and energy. So your schedule, your demands, your requirements are not the same as mine. I have to find time to do these things just like you.

**Psalm 42:1-2** As the hart pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

David describes that with, I think, a great deal of vivid intensity, like an animal in a desert looking for water. That was how deep and intent his desire to seek after God was. No wonder God says David was a man after His own heart. It did not mean David was perfect. But, boy, what a wonderful attitude! That impressed God that this man, even though he was king, set aside time, he somehow found the time to seek God. He only had twenty-four hours a day too. I do not know how successful David always was, but he is given a pretty good testimony in the Bible by Somebody who does not lie. So he must have been pretty successful, even though he was king of a country.

Incidentally, if you read Psalm 42 in its entirety you will find it was not the word of God he was seeking after. It was the Personality that he was seeking after. "My soul thirsts for **You**, O God." Now every once in a while I have to throw something in here so that I do not lose my way in the sermon, and you do not lose your way following me, and that is that we are not on some kind of intellectually vain pursuit here just to get intellectual knowledge. That is not the purpose. The purpose of this is to come to know the Personality.

Let us go back to Philippians 3 again because I want us to see verse 10 in a little bit broader context, because he adds a little bit in some of the preceding verses that are helpful once again. Again I am going to read this out of *The Amplified Version*.

**Philippians 3:5-8** (AMP) Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, and a son of Hebrews; as to the observance of the law I was of the party of the Pharisees. As to my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church, and by the law's standard of righteousness I was proven to be blameless and no fault was found with me. But whatever former things I had that might have been gain to me, I have come to consider a one-combined loss for Christ's sake. Furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege, the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing work, the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord deeply, and intimately acquainted with Him, recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly. And so for His sake I have lost everything and consider it mere rubbish, in order that I may gain the Anointed One.

That just emphasizes to me further what the consuming passion of his life was. His passion was "to know God." It is no wonder that Jesus said that eternal life is to know God. Do you know why? It is really very simple. Those who really know God are going to be like Him. They will be in His image, and because they are in His image, they are going to be in the Kingdom of God immortal, because those are the people that God wants—those who are just like Him.

So Paul was saying here that nothing in this miserable world, no matter what our pedigree, no matter what we attain in the way of notoriety, no matter what we achieve in our employment, or academically, if we be righteous according to the law, **nothing** is as important as having a family relationship with and knowing our brother Christ. You can see that Paul was anything but passive in doing what he could to enhance that relationship.

Maybe this is a dumb analogy, but we might consider Paul to be like the woman that is sometimes really looked down on and spoken sneeringly of,

who chases after the man. But that is exactly what he did, because he is part of the bride, and here was the bride chasing after the man, Christ. He really wanted to marry Him! And by chasing after, he was doing everything he possibly could to conform, and in making those efforts it made him "just like Christ." It was as if he offered his life: "Anything you want me to do, I'll do, if you'll just marry me." He was not passive at all.

So what can we do? Well, there is no doubt that for most of us there is going to have to be some decisions made to reorder our living pattern if we are ever going to break from the tyranny of urgency that the world impresses upon us everywhere we turn. Why do you think people drive the way they do on these expressways and on the freeways and on the city streets? Everywhere you go, I do not care whether it is Charlotte, or Chicago, or Los Angeles, everywhere we go everybody is in a hurry. They are urgent to get where they are going, to be one minute faster than they would be if they just obeyed the law.

Even on the way out here the speed limit was 55 on the Kennedy most of the way. Maybe the last five or ten miles they stepped it up to 65. When we were going 55 miles an hour, everybody was passing us. When we went 65 miles an hour, everybody was still passing us. Everybody is caught up in it. These people who are caught up in it, they are not mean criminals or anything. They are your next door neighbors. But they are caught up in this drive for speed everywhere you look. It is this sense of urgency that Satan is supercharging this world with; that we have got to get there, we have got to do it, whatever it is.

These decisions are going to require some discipline if we are going to carry them out. You are going to have to be the one who decides what needs to be done in your life. We are going to have to remind ourselves from time to time that we do not merely go to church and believe certain doctrines. We are doing what we do because we **believe** that we are part of a cause, and that cause is the focus in our lives, and that cause is going to determine how we order the use of time in our lives.

A couple of sermons ago I mentioned the importance of Matthew 6:33 where Jesus is setting for us the first priority of life. That is its importance. "Seek you **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things

will be added." There is Priority No. 1; not your job, not your wife, not your husband. Priority No. 1—the one that makes everything else work—is to seek the Kingdom of God. After that you can begin to arrange the use of time.

There is an interesting statement that Solomon made, and I think that he was an interesting one to make this, because here he was, the king, the center of power in his nation, and you would think that if there was anybody in that nation that was busy, it was him, and we know of course that God gave him a great deal of wisdom. He was able to perceive into circumstances and situations and arrive at a judgment that maybe others could not possibly have made. But in Ecclesiastes 7 he says:

**Ecclesiastes 7:29** Truly, this only I have found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many schemes.

Now I am going to give a couple of alternate translations here. This first one comes from the *Revised English Bible*. It says:

"This only have I found, that God, when He made man made him straight forward; but men invent endless subtleties of their own."

Think about this world and how complicated it is. Think about how busy it is. Think about how demanding it is. Are you willing yet to tell me that maybe half or more of the things that you have in your house you have no real need for? You could get along without them without any trouble at all.

I am going to give you the version of this verse that I like the best. This one came from *Today's English Version*:

"God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated."

You see, Satan has found a very willing and yielded instrument in man to produce the society that we live in, and it is increasingly complex. It is interesting that that complexity never really makes anything really simpler. You will have to think that one through. It was in 1982 that Mr. Armstrong urged us to simplify our lives. Fourteen years have passed, brethren. How

much progress have you made? See how quickly things slip from our mind. We forget, we relax our discipline. But brethren, time is running out.

Paul said there in Romans 13 that we need to redeem the time because we are now much closer than when we first believed. **Fourteen years** have passed by already, in the blink of an eye! That came to my mind when I was reading that little book, and I was **stunned** that fourteen years had gone by, and have I simplified my life? Boy, I will tell you, it is more complicated now than it ever was fourteen years ago. Virtually everything in this world, (I do not know whether you realize this) has been designed to consume our time on what are essentially useless pursuits. It is not that these things are evil, but their intrinsic value toward the Kingdom of God is virtually useless. It is not that these things are sin per se to do, but they drag us into sin because they drag us away from God.

Now fellows and girls, answer this question. If you were going to marry somebody, would you marry somebody who did not want to spend any time with you? Would you want to marry somebody that found every excuse possible to spend [his or her] time doing something else or being with somebody else? You would be insulted, especially if you were the one who invited [him or her] to spend time with you, and [he or she] ignored you. Do you see what I mean? This is not something that we intend to do. It happens. Do you know why it happens? The answer is simple. We are walking by sight. You see, we see God, according to Hebrews 11—we know Him who is invisible, by faith. And it says about Moses, "As seeing Him who is invisible."

Yes, God made it plain and simple, but in 6,000 years we have made things really complicated. From being on the farm and growing vegetables, we find ourselves now tangled up in computers, worrying about gigabytes and megabytes, wondering if there is not some chip that will speed up the computer from 100 megahertz to 156 or something, so that we can have an extra five seconds a day. We have got this complicated machine in front of us. Is it not interesting that God had the Bible written by farmers, by shepherds, by priests, prophets, who could spend their time thinking? Think about that.

In James 4 it talks about lust, covetousness being the cause of war. Now war is very complicated. But I was going to use those verses as a sort of little starting point, and that everything in this world seems to work against simplifying our lives. We live in the midst of a very complicated system that mankind created. God did not make it this way.

One of the major elements of our lives is advertising. Everywhere you turn advertising hits you in the eyes. It hits you in the ears. You are assaulted by it. Think about this. What is the purpose for which a businessman advertises? I am going to put it very bluntly so that everyone of us can understand. It is to make you and me discontented, so that you will buy his product. Discontented with what you already have, because now there is this **better** product that will do things better, faster, cheaper, they tell you.

See? How many catalogs are delivered to your home every week in direct advertising? Do you look at them? Well I look at a lot of them, because we not only get them at home, we get them at the office—different ones, because they send different ones to businessmen normally than they send to the consumer, because the businessmen are a different type of consumer. So they try to make me discontented with the computers we have, discontented with other machinery, discontented with the way we are doing things, because they have a better way to do it supposedly. I can burn up oodles of time just looking at catalogs every week, whose object is to make me discontented and to want more, more, more.

Every six or seven minutes on television—more, more, more! You have got to buy this. Every time you go to your mailbox there is direct mailing there to make you discontented, so that you will spend your time, first looking at the catalogs or the mailing, then to get you to the store, then to get you to buy it, then for you to bring it home, and there you use it and then you spend your time maintaining it when it breaks down. There goes the time.

You see, God made it plain and simple, but we have made it complicated. By comparison, life on the farm—that was pretty simple. You have to depend on God to send the rain and those kind of things, but nonetheless, it was pretty simple.

And so we get discontented. We buy, we take home, we keep, we accumulate, we spend time maintaining what we accumulate, and when we tire of accumulating what we have, we spend time clearing it out of the garage for a garage sale and hope that we do not have quite so big of a loss. And on it goes.

So in II Corinthians 11:3 Paul was so concerned that those people were going to be deceived away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

I can see a master schemer at work in what is happening within the greater church of God. In a way brethren, I hope that you are not scrutinizing what is going on in the greater church of God too closely. Do you know why? Because I can guarantee you that if you look at it very closely, you are going to be confused by its complexity. There are hundreds of voices out there, formerly members of the church of God, and people who still consider themselves to be members of the church of God. Do you know what they are crying? They are crying "Change the tithing doctrine; change the calendar; change the holy days; change the born again doctrine; change the gospel; change, change, change." They are trying, just like the world, to get us discontented with the faith once delivered, and they have become tools of Satan to make you feel that something needs to be changed, except what was originally delivered to the saints.

Do you know what it is creating? **Confusion!** Perhaps even greater than that, it is creating a tremendous sense in the people of distrust—of loss of faith. That is not the work of God. Satan is having a heyday. So we see working in the church the very same principles that created this confusing world out there, sucking people in, something you have to read or study into this doctrinal change, and that doctrinal change. I hope that you do not fall for it.

I personally have dropped my subscription to the *Servant's News* and *In Transition*, because I do not want them to complicate my life any further than it already is. I will give the publishers of those magazine the benefit of the doubt that they are publishing them with the intent of informing people about what is going on within the church. But after about six months of it, I began to see that those articles are for the most part saying "Well, here's the

way I see it." I do not feel that I need that. I do not need that cluttering up my life. I already **know** what I believe. I know what I was converted to and I do not need those other things.

There are potential traps everywhere. I happened to think of this one the other day. Can you remember when the evangelists used to come out to the church, and they would generally almost always say something about Ambassador College at that time? They would say Ambassador College is a pressure cooker. That is not good, brethren. That is bad! I did not know that until I was there as a student, and I began to see from my own life the bad effects of it, because they put us through that wringer the students were going through.

When I say us, I mean the local church elders that they brought in. There were seven of them that year. They put us through the same thing that the students were going through, **plus** the fact that we had a family, plus the fact that we had church responsibilities—giving sermonettes, taking care of Spokesmen Club and those kind of things, visiting, anointing people. So our schedule was more hectic than any student's schedule. Well, my conclusion from that was: this is not good. Eventually the very next year they made a change. Even they saw that that was not good. It was too much—trying to accomplish too much in too short a period of time.

But what I observed on campus was that students were so busy, so pressed to produce, so exhausted trying to maintain balance between work schedules, study, recreation, physical rest, family needs (if they were married students), that it gave the students a distorted example of what God intended life to be like, because it was largely nothing but **busyness**. And if you tried to step out of that, the administration punished you by labeling you as a non-conformist who could not be trusted. And all the student might have wanted to do was concentrate his time and energy on studying, or doing the job by which he was earning his way through school and did not want to get caught up in the other things. It is not being antisocial at all, but picking and choosing and governing the time.

Well, I could go on and on here, because I as usual have far too many illustrations to try to help us to see things that need to be done, and maybe

areas that we need to work on, and maybe one or two of them I will develop into a sermon because I think that they are worthwhile.

I have an article here from, I believe, the latest *Time* magazine entitled, "Desperately Seeking Laurie." It is very interesting because this Laurie is a real person and she is an unmarried working mother. According to this article, this group within the United States has grown to such proportions that they constitute the largest bloc of uncommitted voters in the United States. And so the campaigns are largely being targeted toward these ladies. What this article teaches me though, is the hectic pace of these women's lives. If this article is true, and I think that it is, these poor ladies hardly have time to turn around. How can you have a relationship with somebody when all you do is go to work, eat, and go to bed? That is what her life amounts to.

So we are caught in a very difficult situation. But it is part of our responsibility to work out our own salvation, and time management is of exceedingly great importance because it fits within the first priority that Jesus Christ laid down for His people to "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Then He promises that all these things that we need for life will be provided for us.

It is a difficult assignment, and I do not consider myself to be a success in any way. I know that Evelyn and I are evaluating things that we are involved in, what we are doing, scrutinizing them more carefully than we ever have before. We have already, in a way, made a dumb decision. One of the decisions that we made I think helped me considerably, but it punished her. So she is paying for our decision. And that is not fair, see.

So you have to be very careful in working these things out, that the decision does not relieve one person, and impact on another, as it did in that case. We have yet to come up with a solution for that, but we will. God will open up a way, because in our relationship with Him, He knows how to deliver His people, and He will come up with a way that it can be done. So it has to be evaluated carefully, and those of you who are married, make sure that you consult with one another in doing this, but think it through. Do not make a jump decision like we did in a way, before you have something thought through.

There is one little principle here that I learned from Art Macarow (whose name many of you will remember)—and it is true. **There is no perfect decision. There is no perfect solution. Every solution creates its own problems.** Just understand that. We came up with a solution. It was good for me. The problem was, it was bad for Evelyn. When you make what you might think a good move, it will create other problems. Keep working at it, because even though our salvation may not entirely depend upon it, our growth is very greatly going to depend upon it.