

Knowing God: Formality And Customs (Part Two)

Coming Before God

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As I was preparing the beginning of this sermon an interesting sports news blurb was given announcing that Michael Vick, a professional quarterback football player for the Atlanta Falcons, was fined \$5,000.00 for wearing sloppy socks during the game the preceding Sunday. That is kind of interesting. Sloppy socks in a football game? They later rescinded the fine, but nonetheless they thought enough of him being ill-dressed for the football game that they fined him \$5,000 at the beginning.

Now on the same day, the National Football League fined one man \$50,000 for an illegal tackle, and then fined another man \$75,000 for an illegal tackle. Both of the tackles were judged to be dangerous to the men tackled, and thus the fines. Then about a week or so later the National Football League let it be known that they fired a line judge. Do you know why they fired him? It was not because of incompetence, for he was deemed to be a very fine line judge. They fired him because he was overweight. When they were questioned about this, they told the reporters that he was fired because his overweight condition projected the wrong image for the National Football League.

I bring these things up because I gave you (in that last sermon on this subject) the definition of the word "formal." I got that definition from the *Reader's Digest Complete Word Finder Dictionary*, and it means "to be in accordance with rules." Those men broke the formality of a mere game, and they paid for it. It showed me the respect the governors of the game want shown to the rules of the game. But by way of contrast, many seem to feel no compunction about disrespect for the Great God in their supposed worship of Him.

In that first message, which I titled "Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part One)," I laid the foundation to show us that there is good reason why things are done the way they are. At the very base, upholding all other things, is God Himself, and He should be the issue dominating all things in

our life. It is He who is the Fountain of Living Waters. He *is* the Tree of Life. He *is* the Giver of every good gift. He is the Author of formality. He is the Creator and Ruler. He is the One that we worship. He is present at services, and He sets the rules about worship, thus establishing the formality of that worship.

This morning I was telling some that I thought of Art Macarow. It was the first time I thought of him in a long time. Maybe his name will not even register on your consciousness, but I was listening to a lecture given by him quite a number of years ago at a ministerial conference, and he gave us all a very simple law of success. It is only about five or six words. "Find out what the boss wants, and do it!" There is nothing hard about that. "Find out what the boss [God] wants, and do it!"

It is our responsibility to please Him by devoting and doing all things to His glory. What I want to impress us with is that we are dealing with a personality who is a reality. He is not a form of blob anymore than you are, but a person of awesome power, honor, majesty, and dignity. The whole mix of His intelligence, wisdom, and love is also mixed with purity (called in the Bible "*holiness*"). He is undefiled in *everything* that is a part of His being. Every attribute of His is holy, and it is our responsibility to honor that by submitting to it, understanding as best we can *why* it is required of us. There are going to be times that we do not know why He is requiring things of us, but we do it anyway until we find out more fully *why* it is that it is required of us.

Now why is it required of us? In one sense I can broadly give an explanation. It is because He is what *He* is, and we are what *we* are—created to be like Him *through* our relationship *with* Him. But we will never become like Him unless we start some place—*deliberately* thinking and acting like He does. Practice makes perfect.

In this sermon I want to continue to give you reasons *why* we must upgrade our formality and decorum before God in services and elsewhere. We will continue to explore the foundational principles that are many times given within the *spirit* of the law in the Old Testament, and yet *affirmed* in many cases in the New.

Turn now to II Peter 1:12-16.

II Peter 1:12-16 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth. Yes, I think it meet [fitting, right], as long as I am in this tabernacle [meaning his body], to stir you up by putting you in remembrance: Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

II Peter 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

The word "prophecy" in verse 19 is being used there in a general sense as the infallible revelation of God, and thus he is saying that we can tie what we do to the Scripture.

I have to admit that I am somewhat embarrassed to be going into this subject, because we, of all people, should know better regarding what is appropriate in dress and decorum. We, too, have to resist degeneracy, or forgetfulness, or even ignorance from time to time, because the first thing you know, the way we dress or the way we act shows that our guard is down, and the world has wedged its way in.

I am going to read to you something that I clipped from the *Washington Times Weekly Edition*, September 23-29, 2002. It is a letter to the editor, and it is titled "Show Some Dignity." It was written by a man from New York City.

On the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks a great many Americans exhibited wonderful intentions to honor our dead and to

reaffirm their patriotism. Unfortunately, far too many Americans were clueless in the execution of such intentions. What so many people seemed to lack was dignity for themselves and for their country. September 11 was a day of mourning, a day of respect, a day to show dignity. It was not a day to wear gaudy tee-shirts emblazoned with eagles and flags and the collapsing World Trade Center. It was a day to dress respectfully, especially at memorial ceremonies. The fact that some people who attended ceremonies at Ground Zero at Battery Park were wearing such tee-shirts, with their hats on backward as though they were at beach, was quite simply disrespectful and undignified.

It was very disheartening and maddening to see people at the solemn mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral loudly moving about, dressed in tank tops, whirling their cameras and snapping gum like it was a carnival. And then there is the flagrant abuse of the United States flag in the name of patriotism. The American Flag is not a bandanna. It is not to be taped over the hood of an automobile, or to be carried over the shoulder like one's laundry bag. It is to be displayed respectfully.

Being in my early thirties, I do not think that this crass behavior can be excused as belonging to a newer, less formal generation, because many culprits were much older than me. Rather, it is simple ignorance and lack of decorum on the part of too many of our fellow citizens.

Once again, the intentions were beautiful, but the slovenly exhibitions of their feelings were an affront to those who were murdered, those who saved lives, and this country in general.

I want you to add to this the transparent and shameful display of informality and casualness of many Democrats when they deliberately turned Senator Paul Wellstone's funeral into a political rally. It offended so many people that it undoubtedly played a part in the losing of that senate seat there in Minnesota.

Let me add yet another brief quote from John Adams, the second president of the United States. He was arguably the finest legal mind in the colonies at the time of the drafting of the Declaration of Independence from England. He was one of a committee of five that included Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin appointed by the Continental Congress to write the original draft of the Declaration of Independence.

After America won its independence and formed and ratified the Constitution, which became the foundation of law in the United States, Adams said this: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Brethren, the same is true for the Bible.

The writer of the first quoted letter was observant of the degeneracy of American behavior during what should have been a solemn event. John Adams was reflecting upon this same principle. He feared degeneracy from the high standards contained within the Constitution because he knew it was in the nature of man to do so. Of course he was worried that Americans would never live up to the fine standards that are in the Constitution.

Turn now to Hebrews 1:10. I am going through this because, brethren, we have to fight this pull to degenerate just like everybody else, and morally and spiritually and ethically there is nobody that has higher standards than God. They are not only high, they are right.

Hebrews 1:10-12 And You, Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hands. They shall perish; but you remain; and they all shall wax old as does a garment; and as a vesture shall you fold them up, and they shall be changed: but you are the same, and your years shall not fail.

We need to be on guard against the constant tendency in human nature to degenerate toward casual informality. This simple statement we just read in the book of Hebrews is a rough parallel of the second law of thermodynamics, and the author is comparing the creation with God.

Before I go any further I do want to go back to Romans 8, because there is a similar statement in Hebrews 1 that reinforces what it says in Romans 8:20-23.

Romans 8:20-23 For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope. Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption [decay] into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

We will go back in thought now to Hebrews 1 and the second law of thermodynamics.

To you and me the creation is the most stable, constant, and firm thing that we are able to see. However, it is not quite as stable as it appears to our eyes, and the Bible is affirming that it is running down. It is deteriorating, and it is degenerating. What Paul wrote in Romans 8:20-23 is on the same subject, but he called it there "vanity," "uselessness," "futility." Eventually he is showing that it is going to be replaced by a new heavens and a new earth.

One understanding of this second law of thermodynamics is that all material things inexorably tend toward disorder. However, by comparison, God is not transient in any way. He is immutable. He is unchanging.

Now if one buys a new automobile, it must constantly be maintained. But even then, it is a losing battle, and eventually it must be cast aside. Brethren, the point here is that you and I are material. We are one of the material things that is a part of this creation, and we are running down. We are subject to vanity. We are deteriorating. We are degenerating. We are tending toward disorder, and eventually, ashes to ashes and dust to dust. We are going to be dust. We are going to go back, as it were, to the earth.

What the author of Hebrews is doing, and what I am hopefully helping you to understand is that our very nature, besides our bodies, pulls us toward

moral degeneracy, disorder, disorganization, and casual informality rather than formality. Human nature pulls one to break rules in order to please ourselves, and so the tension to you and me is to be in harmony with rules, and it must be constantly maintained, or inevitably we will degenerate. I am talking about morally and spiritually. This pull must be resisted, or eventually chaos results.

We are experiencing the effects of this process in the church, and as we deal with doubts about what we believe, confusion builds, and as confusion builds divisions begin to occur, and finally we are scattered and disorganized, and the random informality of chaos dominates.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one [It is unified], and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

I Corinthians 12:20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

I Corinthians 12:27-29 Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

I do not need to go any further. I think I have gone far enough. This chapter reveals that God organizes. The chapter is devoted to showing that God organized His church, and it is not to be dominated by informality and randomness, but by organization. **BUT** we must *choose* to be organized.

In one sense my job can be summed up in a simple statement. My job is to give you reasons why you should submit your life to God so that the body *stays* organized. In order to do this, God gifts me with qualities to enable me to serve the spiritual body in the same manner similar to the way each body part is established or enabled to do its part in the human physical body functions as intended. The eye does not do the job of the big toe, nor does

the big toe do the job of the ear. God has organized the body, gifted the ear to do its job, gifted the eye to do its job, gifted the toe to do its job. That same God is still on the job.

I said earlier that the issue in our life is God Himself, but unless we see or perceive what He is in His personality, and then respect, or fear, or reverence, or stand in awe of what He is in His person, it does us no good. This fear of Him must be learned. It does not come naturally. It takes the ability to make comparisons from *His point of view* , and then deliberately choose to conform to His desires. In a basic way this can be described as comparing the experiences of our material life with the revelation of Himself in His word and in His creation.

The creation of the material world is evidence of the beauty of His mind—what the Bible calls *the beauty of holiness* . Everything in His creation, *except man* , works formally. It works according to the rules. Everything in creation works in accordance with rules that He laid down, but we must *choose* following analysis and evaluation.

In that first message we covered a number of foundational principles essential to making right choices. In fact there were four of them, and they are as follows:

Point #1 : We must see the reality of our union with Christ as the Father and Son see it.

That union is not loose. Your body is not loosely put together. Everything in your body responds to the head, and so that union is not intended by God to be loose in general, but specific and tight in the same manner as the human body is fitly joined together. We must know and care that what we do reverberates right on up the chain to the Head. There is no such thing as an independent Christian anymore than there is an independent cell in your body. And what we do either adds to or detracts from the strength, purity, and usefulness of the body.

I want to repeat the reading of the scripture given in Malachi 1:6 which I gave in my previous sermon.

Malachi 1:6 A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Says the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised your name?

God wants to be honored. Why? Because it is good for our development into what He is. Everything in His program is aimed in that direction. This is why God Himself is the issue, because what He *is* is the issue, and we have to see what *He* is, and become as He is.

Point #2: If we do not do all things out of respect for Him, life will deteriorate and stressful pain (mental or physical) will occur.

I am going to give another quote, this time from Thomas Jefferson, who was reflecting on what might be the ramifications of slavery as compared to the possible abuses of the liberties granted us in the United States Constitution. I will tell you this is meaningful, and it is sobering.

For in a warm climate no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves, a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor. Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis—a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gifts of God, that they are not to be violated, but with wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever.

God is just. He *will* chasten for our good. Most of the time I think that He allows us to suffer the natural consequences of our informal folly, and by definition a "liberal" can easily be a person who generously gives himself permission or justification for not submitting to God's intent. But as Jefferson concluded, it is folly to think that we can get away with it.

Point #3: God told Moses that he was to copy the patterns shown him in the mount. We are to do the same discerning the *intent* of the instructions given in God's word, many of which, for the purposes of this subject, are found in Leviticus and Numbers.

Point #4: In II Thessalonians 2:15 Paul told the New Testament Church to "keep on clinging to the traditions given through the apostles." He reinforced this in his letter to Timothy in I Timothy 6:20, telling him to "guard those things given to him."

My job as a pastor is to pass them onto you, and not innovate. This point involves Herbert Armstrong, because he was the interpreter of these things for the end-time church, as the apostle used to raise up the end-time church.

We saw an example for the reverence for God in Nehemiah 8. When Ezra started reading the Bible they stood up, and wept, with their faces to the ground. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, I will be in their midst." The key is, "*in My name* ." Now Sabbath services are an occasion that we are gathered "in His name."

Observing services in your home during the occasion of this scattering should be given the same degree of reverence and formality as would be expected in a large congregational meeting if it were held in a large cathedral of some kind. It is the purpose for the occasion that determines dress and decorum, along with the fact that *God is there* in attendance. Parents, it is your responsibility to teach, to train your children to be self-controlled and respectful, or shame and pain will follow, because God is just.

Exodus 25:8-9 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall you make it.

The Jerusalem Bible, which is a Catholic translation, translates verse 9 in this way: "In the making of the tabernacle and its furnishings, you must follow *exactly* the pattern I will show you."

The same principle of exactness holds true for the tabernacle's furnishings, ceremonies, garments worn by the priests, and even its transportation. In the New Covenant *we* become the tabernacle, and God wants us to take care of our appearance, among other things. Let me show you just a couple of examples. First we are going to go to John 1:14. I am going to show you the usage of this word "tabernacle."

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and *dwelt* among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

That word "dwelt" literally means (in the Greek) that "He *tabernacled* amongst us." It can also be translated "tent."

In II Corinthians 5:1, there is a link between Exodus 25:8-9 and the New Testament.

II Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul was talking about his own body being a tabernacle—the tabernacle of God's Holy Spirit. This is why I said that under the New Covenant we become the tabernacle. Just as surely as God wanted that Old Covenant tabernacle to be taken care of in a very formal manner (It was beautiful!), He wants us to take care of ourselves too, and our appearance as well. We are to follow the intent that He gives in the Old Testament in the manner of our formality and our decorum.

The principle of following what is given exactly agrees perfectly with what Jesus told the apostles in Matthew 10 when He was giving them counsel regarding what they were to do when they went out representing Him. It is a governmental policy, and someone under God's authority (which we are) has to begin one's thinking by taking God, first of all, into consideration. God is the issue.

When Moses directed the Israelites under him about what to do in the wilderness, did those people have to think that maybe what was being told to them really had its genesis in God? Yes they did. In the New Covenant framework this sort of directive ordinarily came through an apostle, and only occasionally through a prophet. What if Moses, or anybody else, really did not respect God and inserted some of his own innovations? We have to always seriously consider that maybe there is very good reason why things are done the way they are.

Do you know why things are done the way they are—things like the order of our services, whether in the home area or at the Feast of Tabernacles? It is because there are principles contained within God's word, and when these are combined with the experience over a long practice, it was found that they produce the most and the best toward *God's* purposes. That is important.

Producing the most and the best toward God's purpose is what is important. Things cannot always be convenient and comfortable for everybody concerned. If you are uncomfortable with a policy or a procedure, it might be that it is your thinking that is wrong because you are not looking at it from the right perspective and experience. Are these ways open to suggestion and change? Of course they are. But even though open, it does not mean that they will be changed. You will find that I am very reluctant to change anything established through Herbert Armstrong because my perspective of him is of his being the apostle for the end-time church, and because I also bring to mind these scriptures and their principles that we just touched on.

Let me give you an example.

Leviticus 23:34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days *unto the LORD* .

Leviticus 23:36-39 Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you: and you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and you shall do no servile work

therein. These are the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire *unto the LORD* which you give *unto the LORD* . Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land you shall keep a feast *unto the LORD*

Leviticus 23:41 And you shall keep it a feast *unto the LORD* seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Did you see that phrase "*unto the LORD*" [for] seven days, followed by the Last Great Day? "Unto the LORD" means "in His direction," or "because of Him," or "in recognition of Him," or "in accordance with His will."

Let me give you several examples of how I have heard this abused in the Church of God.

Sometimes people will leave the Feast several days in its middle, doing whatever. They are either returning home to conduct business, going sightseeing to some attraction near the Feast site, or visiting with relatives who live close by, and then they return for the Last Great Day services. I ask you, is that keeping the Feast seven days "unto the LORD"? I have known men who went to the Feast and then used that time to set up a business partnership. Is that keeping a Feast "unto the LORD" seven days?

I had an interesting experience at the very first Feast of Tabernacles of the Church of the Great God in 1992. A group of people came to me requesting that we change the meeting arrangement of the Feast of Tabernacles. Basically what they wanted was for people to sit in a rough circle and to spend time discussing the scriptures. Almost every year since the scattering I hear of people who want to do this at a Feast of Tabernacles location (at this location, or that), but it is always the same. Usually it is a location with small numbers of people, and they keep the Feast in much the same manner as these people wanted there in San Antonio that year.

Now these people report that they had a most enjoyable Feast. I do not, in any way, doubt their sincerity, but brethren, over the long haul, what way of

keeping the Feast *is* the most enjoyable, profitable, and most importantly, in accordance with God's purpose, and is going to produce the most according to His will? Well, I will tell you. It is when it is kept the way that God's revealed *will* says to do it.

Let me show you, or at least remind you of some scriptures in which God shows us the general principle that clearly shows that keeping the Feast in the manner briefly described is not according to God's clear revealed will. This chapter is dominated by the keeping of the Holy Days. It is not all that is involved here, but it is the primary subject.

Deuteronomy 12:17-18 You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your corn, or of your wine, or of your oil, or the firstlings of your herds or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill offerings, or heave offering of your hand: But you must eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God shall choose, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite that is within your gates: and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all that you put your hands unto.

Deuteronomy 12:28 Observe and hear all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you forever, when you do that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 14:22-26 You shall truly tithe all the increase of your seed, that the field brings forth year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. And if the way be too long for you, so that you are not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from you, which the LORD your God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD your God has blessed you: Then shall you turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and shall go unto the place which the LORD your God shall

choose: And you shall bestow that money for whatsoever your soul lusts after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever your soul desires: and you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you, and your household.

He is very clearly showing that at that time there was only one place people could go to. The principle here is that He wants us to go where there are larger than normal congregations. I think the reason He wants this (and this is coming off the top of my head) is that most of the time, especially now because of the scattering, we spend our time in small groups consisting of two, three, and sometimes only one person, or there can be ten, twenty, thirty people, or whatever.

At the Feast He wants us to congregate in larger groups because He wants to impress upon us that we are part of something that is far bigger than mere small local congregations. We are part of something that is big. It is bigger than the little town or city or whatever we are in. It is not only bigger than national things, it is now something that involves worldwide operations at the very least, and we might even include *heavenly* operations.

While we are in those groups we can draw upon examples such as in Nehemiah and Ezra. He showed when they came together they were instructed by the ministry in congregation, and the ministry expounded on the scriptures in that kind of a situation.

In Colossians 2:20. I am just doing this to pick up a principle. The specific subject that Paul is talking about is not an issue in the church today.

Colossians 2:20-23 Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are you subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not: Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

The principle that I am picking up here is in verse 23, which is, "there are things which have a show of wisdom."

The issue the Colossians were facing was not specifically the same as what I am talking about here. But nonetheless it was an issue the Colossians were facing that seemed good to them on the surface. It was one of those common pagan religious practices—asceticism—that had an appearance of wisdom. But the apostle is telling them, and us, that asceticism is not in accordance with God's revealed will. There is a difference between one being merely, what I will call *disciplined*, and being ascetic. They were being deceived by their ignorance and their feelings. I think that this is true in the case that I just described that was put forth to me.

Understand this: Herbert Armstrong was under authority to the examples given in the scripture, and I am a man under authority as to what was given me. So the issue comes right down to God again. Who is it that we fear? Who is it that we are trying to impress? To whom should we be conformed? Is it God, ourselves, our friends, or the world?

We are going to go back to the book of Leviticus again.

Leviticus 10:9-10 Do not drink wine nor strong drink, you, nor your sons with you when you go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest you die: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. And that you may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.

The terminology is very clear here. The instruction is aimed directly at the priests, but we should not think that its intent is limited to them only in that specific circumstance. We are to be kings and priests under Jesus Christ, and Peter directly called the church "a holy priesthood." Even now, at the very least, the entire church is a body of those who are priests in training under our High Priest Jesus Christ. The spirit of the context is instruction to you and me. The context showed that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of alcohol while performing their duties in and about the tabernacle. The alcohol motivated them to act casually about their responsibilities.

Now alcohol fogs the mind. It reduces inhibitions. It relaxes self-control. It diminishes a person's ability to perform. It motivated them to act casually about their responsibilities. Alcohol also diminishes a person's physical capabilities as well. Though God permits us to use alcohol, it most assuredly must be handled with considerable care.

But now here is the interesting thing to me: Alcohol is not the only thing that fogs the mind. So does a combination of eating too heavily and not getting enough sleep. An overdose of sugar, and pasta and breads fog the mind too. Right now I again have the Feast of Tabernacles in mind. Did you keep a Feast unto the Eternal in over-indulgence in your taste bud's pleasures?

The justification almost invariably given is, "Well, it is the Feast, isn't it?" It is as if school is out, the bars are down, and we can do as we good and well as we please. Yes, we are free to do that, but does it please God? Does it fit into keeping a Feast "unto the LORD"?

Deuteronomy 14:26 says, "whatsoever your soul desires." Do you know what people have a tendency to do? They have a tendency to turn that into permission to over-indulge. Brethren, does God *ever* give us permission to do anything of the sort? Can you imagine Jesus over-indulging? I am not talking about alcohol. I am talking about food. Can you imagine Jesus over-indulging, letting His hair down so to speak, and spending time sinning a little? Brethren, we are to strive *always* to have ourselves under control, whether it is our tongue, our tummy, our eyes, or hands.

The Feast of Tabernacles is in some ways one of the more intense trials that we face each year. It requires a fair amount of planning, organization, and self-discipline. For some it is an intense period of sacrifice, and it is usually quite tiring, and *very* often people get sick during and after it.

Most of us go to the Feast with more money to be spent in less time than at any other time of the year. The Bible shows clearly that prosperity—especially *instant* prosperity—has a way of wearing down and destroying our inhibitions and self-discipline. We have to learn to rightly use that money too.

How did you feel at services? Were you logy, dull-headed, and sleepy? Did you find your focus of attention wandering away from the fact that we were there specifically to learn, to stand in awe of God? Like an athlete, we have to bring ourselves to the peak of condition for the game, and brethren, a major part of the game for us is in service to God in the assemblies when we are to be instructed.

Leviticus 10 is a reminder—an *eternal* reminder—that Nadab and Abihu *paid with their lives* for not being in peak condition. I might add that Aaron, the parent, paid heavily too in shame and in embarrassment as it fell upon him. God is just. His wrath is not always withheld.

Please consider seriously what I am about to say. We have been summoned to appear right in God's sanctuary. He is the One who sets the standards. In no way can we overestimate the value of this tremendous privilege that is given to so few. Our permission to be there is precious and beyond price, because it has already cost the life of God in the flesh. And it is precious beyond price because it gives us the opportunity to have life more abundantly than we ever dreamed possible. Do we have the faith to accept the conditions that go with this awesome privilege?

We are going to look at a very interesting arrangement in the wilderness as portrayed by the Israelites that I think will help in understanding the degree of privilege that has been extended to us by God's mercy. What we are going to see took place each and every time that Israel camped. Whenever the cloud stopped moving, first the tabernacle was set up, and then each tribe camped in specific locations around it. There were three tribes on each side. None of this was done haphazardly, but *formally*, according to what God told Moses. Turn now to Numbers 2:1-2.

Numbers 2:1-3 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by *his own standard*, with the ensign of their father's house: far off [meaning at a distance] about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch. And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of

the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies:
and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be captain of the
children of Judah.

With Judah, on the east side, were also the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun.

Numbers 2:10 On the south side shall be the standard of the camp
of Reuben according to their armies: and the captain of the children
of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur.

With Reuben on the south side were Simeon and Gad.

Numbers 2:18 On the west side shall be the standard of the camp
of Ephraim according to their armies: and the captain of the sons of
Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud.

With Ephraim on the west side were Manasseh and Benjamin.

Numbers 2:25 The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the
north side by their armies: and the captain of the children of Dan
shall be Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.

With Dan was Asher and Naphtali.

Numbers 3:38 But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward
the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward,
shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the
sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger
that comes near shall be put to death.

Just hold that in your mind a little bit. The priests were camped right in front
of the tabernacle door, and the only door into the tabernacle was on the east
side.

Numbers 1:47-54 But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers
were not numbered among them. For the LORD had spoken unto
Moses, saying, Only you shall not number the tribe of Levi, neither

take the sum of them among the children of Israel: But you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof, and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle sets forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched [set up], the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that comes near shall be put to death. And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.

They did everything according to the rules. It was formally done.

Let us consider this arrangement. When Israel camped in the wilderness, three tribes camped on each side of the tabernacle, and they were far away. That is, they were a distance *away from* the tabernacle. There were three on each side. That accounts for twelve tribes. But there were actually thirteen tribes. The tribe of Joseph was divided into two—Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. The thirteenth tribe was the Levites—the tribe that did not camp with the twelve. The Levites camped by themselves, closer to the tabernacle, and they encircled it.

So all the Jews were on this side, all the Reubenites were on that side, all the Ephraimites were on that side, and all the Danites were on the other side, but the Levites camped inside those other twelve, and circled the entire tabernacle. Then inside, closer—in fact right in front of the door of the tabernacle—all of the sons of Aaron (the descendants of Aaron, the priests) camped right in front of the door.

Remember that both the priests and the Levites were instructed to kill anybody who made an unauthorized attempt at entry. What God did was establish three walls of defense to protect against any unauthorized attempt to enter. The first wall was the outer ring around the entire tabernacle,

consisting of the twelve tribes, that could at least prevent an unauthorized intrusion from Gentiles (because everything inside was Israelites.)

The second wall consisted of the Levites, and they could defend against illegal intrusion by any Gentile who might slip through, and also against any illegal intrusion by any Israelite who came from the other twelve tribes. And then there was an inner wall of priests massed right in front of the door to prevent anyone except a priest from entering. Taken together they were like the cherubim guarding Eden. Together, what they were doing, was guarding the way to the Tree of Life which you and I are allowed access to.

Were there any people who resented this arrangement? Oh yes, there were people who resented this arrangement. Look at Numbers 16:1-4.

Numbers 16:1-4 Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? And when Moses heard it he fell upon his face.

Do you know why he did that? He did that because he knew who was being challenged here. It was God, not Moses. It was God who established that formal arrangement. They thought this arrangement was unfairly stacked in favor of Moses and Aaron's family and the priesthood. Thus they sought to destroy and change the formal arrangement established by God through Moses and Aaron. In this case the formal arrangement was *not* negotiable. God judged it as outright rebellion aimed at forcing a change, and they paid with their lives.

Now because of the work of Jesus Christ, and of God, summoning us to appear, we have authorized and unlimited access. We are not a stranger. We are somebody that God recognizes as covered by the blood of Jesus Christ,

and God sees us in the position similar to that of a priest under the Old Covenant. But even in the case of the priests, there were conditions. Even though the priests had the correct family lineage, they had to be sanctified, consecrated to their work. There is very much teaching within the length of that brief sentence.

But again, the common approach of many deceived people in this world is, "God will just have to accept us in His presence just as we are." Well, this word-picture shows that "Oh no, He does not," and "Oh no, He will not." Even for us there are rules and there are conditions for getting there, rules of dress and decorum while we are there, and rules that have to be followed that will enable us to come back once again. There is no doubt that God is gracious, and He is patient, but we must still change to meet His requirements.

We are going to examine one condition of priestly service. It is something simple, and yet from time to time it becomes controversial in our life. I will not go into the conditions like repentance, because if we are humble, repentant, and knowledgeable of God, it will be shown in our conduct, in our dress and demeanor. This is because of a simple principle, that what is on the outside of a person *should be* a reflection of what is on the inside. ***Should*** be.

Do you remember that Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Now what comes out of the mouth on the *outside* of the person is because of what is in the heart. That is Matthew 12:34. Jesus also said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, and blasphemy."

This is really in a way ironic, but it is true that, at the same time the action one sees on the outside *strengthens*, it reinforces what is on the inside. Now what is on the outside *can* help to bring about change on the inside.

The Christian world around us practices "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" principle. That is why they virtually ignore God's law. For example, they will not keep the Sabbath even though they clearly see that Jesus kept the Sabbath. Are we not supposed to follow in His steps? Sure we

are. What could be harder than that? But why do they not keep the Sabbath? It is because they reason that any day will do because God is only concerned about what is in their heart.

Do you see the simple fallacy in that reasoning? The ironic thing is that it is their *heart* that is dictating to them to break the law. If their heart were truly in harmony with God they would behave as Jesus did. They would walk as Jesus walked. Instead, they devise complicated arguments about the law being done away. Brethren, no law of God is *ever* done away. Is that not what Jesus said? "Think not that I came to destroy the law." No law of God is ever done away. That is truly dangerous thinking that leads people into sin.

There are times that laws cannot be literally done, but they are not done away, and that is why these people are sloppily informal in their worship service, their dress and decorum. They say that God is not concerned about what is on the outside of the person. Oh yes He is! He is concerned about the whole person, about the witness that the person is making of Him, of His way of life, His family, and His name. You can be sure that Jesus was neither sloppy nor immodest. Nor was He worshipping the dictates of the fashion industry. In John 8:29 He said: "He that sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that please Him." God is pleased when we dress in a manner that honors His name.