

To Test You

Preparing for a Position in the Kingdom

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Man, throughout early history, in whatever group or in whatever mindset that he was in, wanted those around him to conform to his way of thinking. There was a feeling of comfort, stability, organization, and security in this that let someone think or act out of the box, so to speak. The result and consequences might be being put in the stocks or even as horrible as being burned.

Early religious communities had a mode of action and set thinking of the society they were in. This required strict adherence to the policies of conduct set forth by the group. This thought to control and a desire to regulate righteousness carried over into politics as early as 1661 in England for the formation of the "Test Acts." To state this simply, the principle was that none but persons professing the established religion were eligible for public employment.

This religious control was adopted soon after the Reformation by legislature of Flatin I. The act of supremacy and uniformity was established with severe penalties for those who refused to conform to the political climate whether they were Catholics or nonconformists or anybody else. In Scotland, a religious test was imposed immediately after the Reformation, and by 1567 no one could be appointed to public office or be a notary public who did not profess and agree with the reformed religion. This act was a stipulation that all could receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and under Charles II the actual receiving of the communion in the Church of England was made a contingency to seeking the holding of public office.

In Ireland, this oath of allegiance was required of members of the House of Commons, bishops, barristers, and attorneys. This was a rebellion against the Catholic Church and its teachings. This Test Acts was a method that they chose to identify those who thought as they did. This was brought about Martin Luther, by his rebellion against the Catholic Church. And the test, in whatever form it took, related to the individuals' belief as they pertained to the Catholic Church and its teachings. Now questions might have been as follows: "Do you believe that only the priests can interpret the Bible?" "Do you think the Pope is infallible?" "Do you believe in the assumption of Mary; that she was taken up to heaven before she died?" "Do you believe in the selling of indulgences—where you can buy your sin a little bit there and get away with it?" "Do you believe in the transubstantiation—which is simply the literal turning of wine into blood and bread into flesh by the means of prayer?" Actually of the seven Catholic sacraments, Martin Luther kept only two—baptism and communion. So any popular practices that could be considered to reflect those Catholic sacraments could be questioned. The testing was the method used to bring those who would hold office into alignment with the government and the religion of the times.

There is another time coming, brethren, in the not too distance future, when this same sort of testing will come. But this time it will be on the whole world. Please turn over to Revelation 13.

Revelation 13:4-17 And they worshiped the dragon which gave power to the beast: and they worshiped to the beast, saying "Who is like unto the beast: who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth that spoke great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His

tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given to him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake like a dragon. And he exercised all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and he deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he has the power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image of the beast, which had the wound by the sword, and that lived. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast be killed. And he caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

You see, this will be a final attempt of Satan, through those he has entered and has influenced, to wrench the world's population away from any part of the truth and at the same time destroy the people of God. This will be Satan's test act. But it will not just keep one from holding office or buying and selling but if not obeyed, it could take one's life.

I mention all of this because we too in a very real sense are facing a test act of a different nature at this time. But the one who is conducting the test act is God the Father Himself, personally, and Jesus Christ. Just as the early tests acts of England, we too are being tested to hold office in the Kingdom of God. We also are being tested to show that we stand for the official state religion, if you will, and in that sense we are being tested to prove that we all have the same mind.

The majority of us have been in the church for a lot of years. Those who have come in lately or who are newer have heard many of the stories of the events that we all look forward too. Going to Petra, we are doing this type of thing. I can remember being called by the message of prophecy, as many were, telling of a place of safety that God had prepared for us. And I can remember as the years went by, that we had ministers stand up, and they would say that God has called many carpenters and many plumbers and many electricians, and I guess that is so that we could build the place of safety that God had prepared for us.

But nevertheless, those are the things we were raised on. We were all excited about prophecy and we were planning for it. I do not mean that in any kind of negative way. It was exciting to think about the future that God held for us and about being able to not have to go through the terrible tribulation that was on the horizon.

I can remember our children were so small when we came into the church that we thought, "They will never go to high school". How many have thought that? Now I am a great-grandfather and my youngest son is thirty-nine and we have been in the church for over thirty-seven years. It is hard to believe. And all this time we felt the end was near and just around the corner and all of a sudden, it finally occurred to me, that while we were waiting for the end of the age, while we were focusing on

every world event, saying this could be the trigger, this could be it, we were being taken through a series of events to test our faithfulness and perseverance to God. It was God's test act.

While we were focused on the return of Jesus Christ, we were very carefully being put through a sequence of events to try, to test, to train, and to fit us with the mind of God. It is funny, in a sense, we can think of ancient Israel and we say, "Those people certainly needed to be tested. They were carnal." But when it comes to us, we think, "We have God's Spirit, we do not need to be tested. We really do not need that to happen to us." How foolish we have been on that one! Yet the size of the remaining church shows that we indeed needed to be tested. Out of approximately one hundred and forty thousand people in the church at one time, including children, what have we got left? Maybe twenty or thirty thousand total with all the groups combined. How many we felt were staunch and solid and sound members—members that had proved the Sabbath and the holy days and tithing—who then left the fellowship to go back to keeping Sunday, eating unclean food, or just wandered away from any form of religion. They missed the test. And I hope we understand that.

We must understand that testing, proving, is a pattern God always uses and we better get used to it. I would like to have you turn over to a very familiar scripture, we go through it often, but it is a good one for this.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3 All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you [or test you], to know what is in your heart [exceedingly important], whether you would keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled you, and He suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that He might make you to know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord does man live.

Deuteronomy 8:10-14 When you have eaten and are full, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He gives you. [And for us it should be for all the good things He gives us—the instruction, the favor, the kindness, the gentleness, the calling—all these things] Beware that you forget not the Lord your God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command you this day: Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwell therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart be lifted up, [and in this country it is easy to have it lifted up] and you forget the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. [and we have all been brought out of this world and we better not forget it].

Deuteronomy 8:16-20 Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that He might humble you, and that He might prove you [test you], to do good at your latter end; and you say in your heart, My power and the might of mine hand has gotten me this wealth. But you shall remember the Lord your God: for it is He that gives you the power to get wealth, [the brains, the skill, everything] that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto your fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if you shall at all forget the Lord your God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. [God is not fooling with

our testing.] As the nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, so shall you perish; because you would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God. [God is not fooling around here]

Now all of us can understand the need for qualified people in responsible positions. When we fly in the airplane to the Feast, we really hope the pilot knows what he is doing. No doubt about that. Jack Bulharowski, when he broke his leg, was really hoping the surgeon knew what he was doing when he operated on his shattered leg. And we want our leaders to have as much knowledge and understanding as possible that we might be led correctly. Looking at it from God's perspective, He has called us for specific offices and He is training us to fulfill those offices.

When we consider the infinite, intricate care that God has given to this world, that makes this world operate, it just staggers the mind. Can we possibly think that we are being worked with in a random, haphazard fashion? I hope we do not think that way!

When we are changed into spirit, could we perhaps think that God is going to scratch His head and say, "Hey, I am really glad to have you here! Well done, you good and faithful servant! Now I must think of something to do with you!" I do not think that is going to be the case. It is just not going to happen. Our Father and Jesus Christ, as it says in John 14:2, are preparing a place or an office for us, and at the same time, are preparing us for the place and the office. I think we had better get that through our heads. Others who have gone before us have been tested for the office that they were to fill. Turn over to Psalm 105.

Psalms 105:16-22 Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he broke the whole staff of bread. [This is the story of Joseph and the seven years of plenty and famine.] He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: [for a slave] whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: [he had iron chains on him] until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tested him. [He was tested all that time in prison. "I worship God, why am I in jail? What have I done wrong? I put away Potiphar's wife—I did not touch her! It is not fair!" And all this time Joseph stayed close to God.] The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all of his substance: [Joseph did not get off free. He was tested.]

Ezekiel 34:22-23 Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, he shall be their shepherd.

Jeremiah 30:4-9 And these are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace; Ask now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all the faces are turned to paleness? Alas! For the day is great, so that none is like it: it is even as the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off his neck, and I will burst his bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the law of their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

Now we all know the story of David. We know the many trials he went through—the tests that God put that man through. Mistakes he made, the suffering, the repentance. And yet David was prepared this whole time to end up in charge, being king over all of Israel. He was prepared for the office prepared for him.

Genesis 22, another one that you will be familiar with. You really have to understand here, that we are to be tested for the future that God has in store for us.

Genesis 22: 1-12 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and get you into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of. [I am sure that all of us that have children have stopped to consider from time to time what it would be like to have to offer our son. No small test.] And Abraham rose up early in the morning, he saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, You wait here with the donkey; and I and the lad will go up yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on his son Isaac; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. [What thoughts were going through Abraham's mind? Isaac was probably oblivious to what was going on at that point.] And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here I am, And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide a lamb for the burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood on the altar, and he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar of wood. [That reads well. It reads like it was something simple. How old was Isaac? What was he, in his twenties? Was he strong? You bet he was. But a test for Isaac as well. To let his father stand there and tie him up and lay him on the altar. No small test.] And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called out of heaven, and said Abraham: and he said, Here I am. And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do you any thing unto him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.

At the Feast last year, I spoke and I said, "This is something that God has to know about each one of us. He has to be able to say, 'Now I know you.'" Individually. This is not a collective thing. Coming to church, keeping the Sabbath, paying tithes, keeping the holy days, does not get it. It should be done, of course. But that does not guarantee that we will be in the Kingdom of God. God has to know our heart, our mind, and what we are doing and thinking.

All the heroes in Hebrews 11 that God was so pleased with, were fully tested and proven. God's pattern of testing for office should not seem strange to us in that God the Father, put His own Son through the same process.

Please turn to Hebrews 4. Our Lord, our King, our Elder Brother, was tested for His job as well.

Hebrews 4: 14-15 Seeing then that we have a high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. [Let us consider what He went through and hang on to our calling and not give up or be faint.] For we have not a high priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are, and yet without sin. [There is the pathfinder, the pioneer, the One that went first.]

Jesus had to qualify to become our High Priest. In standing up for God's government, His government's religion, He qualified by being tested just as we are tested that He might know what we go through and that He might grow and understand it, regarding that, except that He went through it perfectly and we have not. He resisted sin and the temptation of Satan.

Now why are we being tested? In part, that we might fully understand what those we will be working with in the future have to go through. To understand all the problems of overcoming, whatever their pulls may be. And I tell you they are myriad. Their pulls will run the gamut, just like ours do. As it says in I Peter 2:21, we are to follow in His steps. But there is more to it than that. God wants to see growth and overcoming in us. Not just understanding what others go through.

I would like you to turn to Matthew 25. We will spend a little time there in the Parable of the Talents. I sort of found this exciting, had a good time with it.

Matthew 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who calls his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is not in the original, but it has been added to that and it was inserted correctly to give the proper meaning. The story is of a man who has great wealth going away for a long time. He calls his servants to him, and his servants were, in a very real sense, trusted partners with him. And he delivers his wealth to them. And in this delivering of talents, knowing what each of his servants is capable of, he gives them no more than each man can handle.

Matthew 25: 15 And unto one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one; every man according to his several [own] ability; and straightway he took his journey.

Now, in modern English, the word "talent" is used today for skills, mental power, or mental gifts that God has given to man, but in New Testament time a "talent" was a unit of exchange and the estimates of it range widely. A talent could be gold, or silver, or copper. It was a measure of weight, each with its own value. The word used, in verse 18, as "money" can also be translated "silver" which may mean that is what that talent was comprised of—silver. The talent was first in measure according to weight between fifty and eighty pounds. Then a unit of cordage. One common value assigned to it was six thousand denarii. Eighty pounds of silver at fifteen dollars an ounce would mean that a talent was worth about nineteen thousand dollars. In comparing to modern currency in terms of earning power, a talent being six thousand denarii, might require a laboring man twenty years to earn so much! As much perhaps as \$300,000. The instruction here is that the sums are vast. In other words what is being given is really important. It is not some little thing, indicating that the gifts were given to grow from were exceedingly important and valuable. And the principle "to whom much is given, much will be required" comes into practice here.

Matthew 25:16-18 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made upon them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained another two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

Now the sense of the two servants in verses 16-17, is that they immediately put forth effort to increase the value of what their master had given them. They were excited about their calling, excited about the opportunity. The sense of these two verses is not that the two servants put their talents into the hand of another or into stocks and bonds and sat back and watched the income come in. The sense of it is that they set up some sort of enterprise, or they were personally involved and actively working to make their master's wealth grow. They were excited about the opportunity given to them. The individual in verse 18 receives this vast sum of wealth and it would seem that he was either lazy or complacent or possibly, as defined in the five foolish virgins that did not bring any extra oil for their lamps, afraid to step up and meet the challenge, to overcome and to cause what he had been given to grow.

Matthew 25: 19-23 After a long time the lord of those servants came, and he reckoned with them. [He knew he was coming for the accounting.] And so he that had received five talents came and brought the other five talents, saying, ["Look what I have done master! Wow! I have increased those five more talents. Are you not proud of me," and he said, "You bet I am, you bet I am."] Well done, you good and faithful servant you have been faithful over few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your lord. And also that he had that two talents came and said to the lord, you delivered me two talents, and ["Look! I really worked hard, and I developed two more talents. You have four now." And he said, "I am so proud of you, you have done a good job."] And the lord said unto him, well done you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter: into the joy of your lord.

The first servant who doubled the five talents is praised greatly for his faithfulness and diligence. And then he was given two things and I do not think I ever really noticed this before. He would be ruler over many things. In Luke 19 it talks about over cities, and towns, and things like this. And though we tend to think that the rulership aspect in these verses as being the chief reward, he was given something else that may have been much more important. The second thing, he was allowed to enter into the joy of his Lord. That means into the Kingdom of God, I am sure, and all that pertains to it. The second servant, who had caused what had been given to him to grow, received the same reward. Both servants had fulfilled their responsibilities and were welcomed into their Lord's joy. And given great responsibility because they were trustworthy, their heart was right, and they put forth the effort to do what their Lord asked them.

Matthew 25: 24-25 Then he came which had received the one talent and came and said Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping not were you have sown and gathering where you have not strewed; so I was afraid and I went and hid my talent. ["Look here it is! Just like you gave it to me, I did not do anything with it."]

Here we have a lazy servant: to cover his own weakness, carelessness, and laziness, for fear, he referred to his lord as being hard. Now the sense of the word "hard" as it is used elsewhere in the

Bible, it means that his lord was grasping by exploiting the labor of others and putting the servants into an undesirable position. Should he take the risk of increase the talent entrusted in him he would probably see little profit. Who knows what went through his mind. He could have thought if he failed, his master would have been furious. And too the servant could have been upset that he had only been given one when those others fellows were given five and two. "Was he not as good as they were? Why did I not get five?" And, in spite, he buried his talent. And now he returns it to his lord with no more or no less. Whatever the reason was, he was starting with a bad attitude. The Lord does not go for bad attitudes. It does not fly with Him. What this servant overlooked was his responsibility to his master and his obligation to discharge to his assigned duties. That is what he did not see. His failure demonstrates lack of love for his Lord. This may be the reason he masked that lack by blaming his master.

Matthew 25: 26-27 And his lord answered and said unto him, You wicked, slothful [lazy] servant, you know that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed. You ought to therefore should have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received my own with usury.

He comes and he condemns his foolish servant with the servant's own words, showing that he does not have any excuse. "If you knew I was hard and grasping, why did you not put the money out to where it would have been safe, earned interest, and still required no work on your part, if you are that lazy?"

Matthew 25:28-30 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten. For unto everyone that has shall be given, and he that has abundance: but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has. And cast you the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It is too late by that time because the report card is in! You cannot go back and do it again. So the talent is taken away from the servant who is now referred to as worthless and the relationship between the master and servant is severed and his talent is now given to the man who has ten.

Question: Did any of the servants consider the giving of the talents as a test? I do not think so. It does not appear so. Two considered it a great opportunity to be given such a wonderful chance and the responsibility that went with it. They were excited at the prospect of having their lord being pleased with the result of their effort upon his return! The third servant did not care for the wonderful chance that had been given to him and in truth, he did not care one way or another what the master might think. This brought him disaster and I am sure that in the end he wished he had given it much more consideration. This is how it is summed up in the *Expositor's Commentary*:

The parable insists that the watchfulness that must mark all of Jesus' disciples, does not lead to passivity but to doing one's duty; to growing; to husbanding and developing the resources God entrusts to us until after a long time the master returns and settles account.

He is saying that you cannot rest on the oars, you have been given a calling, you have been given an opportunity. You cannot just ignore it and sit on your bottom and do nothing.

Now what does this require of us? Turn over to Romans 12, please.

Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren..."

I am going to stop right there for a moment. He is talking here and says, "I have just given you eleven chapters of instruction." He says, "Based on these eleven chapters, I beseech you to do something." I am going to try and summarize these eleven chapters, so bear with me on this. This will not be a complete summary, but nevertheless, I am sure that you will get the idea.

The first eleven chapters precede this "therefore." Paul explains that the gospel, the good news, the coming of the Kingdom of God, is the power unto salvation. Man has rejected God and thus God has given him over to a reprobate mind, but God is longsuffering and His goodness leads us to repentance. But at the same time, be warned that He will render every man according to his deeds.

Now the Jews should hold the oracles of God and their unbelief does not make their faith of God without effect. The law is not made void through faith. The law is established. Indeed we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God but are justified by His grace and the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

Paul shows that Abraham and David were justified by faith and that we will be justified by faith and that we, being justified by faith now, have peace and a wonderful hope in God. And though we have trials, they produce patience, character, and experience in us. And now we have the love of God in our hearts and he wants us to remember that while we were yet sinners and could not have cared less about God, He gave His life for us.

Paul goes on to say that we have been shown tremendous grace—unmerited pardon—for all the background that God had to put up within us. And because of this we should not continue in sin; we are baptized with Him to death and raised to walk in a newness of life! Because of this we should not serve sin. To do so would make us slaves to a wrong way of life and that would lead to our death.

Paul then reminds us to think ahead. We should be married to another—to Him who raised us from the dead. And because of this we should bring forth good, righteous fruit unto God.

Then we should become the very children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ that we might be glorified together. We are to hang in there because the whole creation groans as we, the firstfruits of the Spirit, wait for the return of God and the setting up of His Kingdom. Do not you dare quit!

He then tells us that we were predestined to be conformed to His image and to the image of His Son and we will be glorified. That all things work together for those who love God and are called according to His purpose and that nothing can ever separate us from God. The nations of Israel have not been blessed in understanding as we have.

The Israel of God is comprised of all races and are the children of the promise. God is sovereign. He is the potter, we are the clay. He works with this world and with each one of us so that the riches of His glory might be made known to us and is shaping us for His purpose!

Paul tells us that Israel has a zeal for God but not according to knowledge but that if we believe on Him, we will not be ashamed. We are to be taught by the ministry. Israel will be provoked to jealousy but that God has not cast off His people, but what they have sought after has not been obtained, but that we, the elect and the chosen, have obtained it while the rest were blinded. God has concluded upon them an unbelief that He might have mercy upon all.

That is roughly the first eleven chapters. Now based on this, Paul tells us what we must do. He is telling the Roman brethren, "Therefore, based on this letter, do the following." But for us, God is saying, "Therefore, based on this letter and on all the teaching that we have been given over all these years, and all the studying we have done, and all the servants that have been given to us, by the mercies of God, make your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God." That is what is being said.

Israel had sacrifices to provide them an external purity, as we know about. The animal sacrificed gave his life once and could not do it again. Jesus Christ gave His life as a sacrifice once for us that we might be justified. And the point here is that it is now our time to give our life in return, but in this case on a daily basis for as long as we live.

When we think of being tested, we tend to think of the major trials. But it is the little daily tests or trials that we pass (I want to stress that— *that we pass*) that develop the steady godly character that God wants. Brethren, this requires daily sacrifice.

Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Because of God's great mercy and tender compassion given to us, we are to live holy lives. We are to sacrifice our lives, our lusts, our will, and our wrong desires. And just as the animal had no say as to what was to happen to its body, [in the sacrifice] the point here is that *our* body has no say! Our body with its pulls is not to have any say over the clear teachings of God. This is what the sacrifice is all about.

Mind and body are not separate as some in the world see it, but are to be presented as one unit to God for His use. Sacrifices were offerings to be offered without blemish and thus we, the whole man or the whole woman, is to be presented without blemish! We are to consider that we are to live no longer for ourselves but we now belong wholly to God.

Though the King James states that this should be our "reasonable service," based on our calling and the teaching we have received, it should be our "intelligent and deliberate service." It should not be something that we do once in a while. It should be our intelligent, daily, deliberate service to God. We are to consciously apply our mind to sacrificing and overcoming.

Verse one calls for decisive commitment. Verse two deals with the maintaining of that commitment:

Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and the perfect, will of God."

We are now told in order to accomplish this we must exercise vigilance.

As one commentator put it: "We are in this world for a witness and not for conformity to that which is passing away."

I Corinthians 7:31 and I John 2:17 stress and tell us that the world is passing away. It is going away. We had better have our act together. Because if we go back into the world, or if we slack off, the world that we may think is so wonderful is going to disappear out from under us, going back to the wailing and gnashing of teeth. Our pattern is Jesus Christ and He came to do His Father's will. Thus, that is our job description as well.

The word "transformed" here ("that you be transformed") comes from the word we know as "metamorphosis." Thus it could be stated, "be you metamorphosed." Be transfigured, or appear as a new person with new habits serving in a newness of the Spirit. It implies radical, thorough, and complete change. That is what God wants from us.

As to the renewing of our mind, this means much more than just controlling our thoughts and what we do. Growing in grace and knowledge, and going on to perfection, is what God is after. And the sense, in this renewing, is the combination of remembering what it was like—the enthusiasm of our first calling, our first love—and applying that love with excitement to every new thing that we study and learn and understand as the years go by. Not to slack off, and in a sense, not to lose that first love. This requires study, brethren. It requires effort. It requires being at church every week. It requires listening to the sermons; it requires following up on them. This is why you do this: So that you might prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God.

The word "prove" here means "tested," as you test metal. Hence it also means trying them. As one makes himself a living sacrifice and works to bring himself under control, he sees the benefit and the beauty and the purpose God intended for all His creation. And he also more clearly sees the result of the way of the world is going.

Another way to phrase this could be that you "investigate" the will of God to see what is good. We should be doing that. We should not be just coming to services. We should be meditating and thinking on God's law, on what it produces, on all of the things that mankind is doing the wrong way so that we can see and understand. And we have a much greater calling than this. We are going to be used in the Kingdom of God. Not just sitting around heaven all day. That is why we have to understand. That is why God says, "Go on to perfection." Learn to apply and use God's Word, to consider it, and to see what the world would be like if everyone followed it.

What would it be like if the world *all* followed one commandment? One single commandment. What would the world be like? What changes would that make? God wants us to understand so that we can teach others in the future.

The idea of sacrifice is throughout the Bible. I would like to have you turn over to Colossians 3: Colossians 3 is sort of a neat chapter. This portion spells out what needs to be done from our calling and overcoming aspects to the taking on of a new nature of God that we might be prepared to be changed into the spirit of the family of God.

Colossians 3:1 If then you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

He said because of our calling, our goals and interests and outlook on life have all been changed. It certainly should be. Church is not a good luck charm; it is not a rabbit's foot. You have to do something. We are to keep on seeking the higher things throughout all of our lives and not to let down in that seeking.

Colossians 3:2 Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

What is going to happen to the earth? It is going to pass away. He said to aim your life practically toward the Kingdom of God. This is not some ethereal thing that just sort of floats around. It is a practical calling, making that your goal. This does not mean that we become hermits and that we sneak into our house and never open the doors. We will now see everything in a more proper perspective and will no longer live as this world lives, as if this world is all that mattered. Put another way, we should now see things against the backdrop of eternity. What an awesome thought. Our vision should be so far ahead of this world and the things of this world that we should see it with a whole new perspective.

Colossians 3:3 For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Galatians 2:20 states, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

If we are dead in Christ, then all He views as being wrong, we should view as being wrong. Things that He views as being proper and right to help us establish ourselves in the Kingdom of God, we should view them that way as well in importance and indeed we are hid with Him and that hiding is secure and we are saved.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, [Did you get that? "When Christ who is our life." This is the only chance we have. He is our life and we are to obey Him and follow Him.]

As it says in Revelation 14, 144,000 followed Christ wherever He went. That is what we want to do as well.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, you shall also appear with Him in glory.

To increase our motivation, to fulfill our calling in seeking the things above, Paul reminds us that when Christ appeared in all His dazzling glory and splendor, as hard as it is for us to believe in our old, tired bodies, we will be right there with Him in glory as well, and in splendor. In a sense, Paul reminds us that we have accepted citizenship in the Kingdom of God and that we have to live our life accordingly from now on.

In verses 5-8 Paul lays out what our living sacrifices entail. He has three imperatives (or three things). One is that we have to put to death. The second is that we have to rid ourselves. The third one we are not to lie. We are not to lie to God or each other and, probably most of all, we are not to lie to ourselves. Because that is when we really get in trouble, when we fool ourselves.

Colossians 3:5-8 Put to death [that is exactly what it means. It means to put to death] your members which are upon the earth; fornication, [sexual sins, pornography, pornography on television, pornography in the movies, pornography in the motels—put it to death! Do not watch it. Do not have it in your house nor any part of it.] uncleanness, [this means purity and it concerns moral thoughts that they should be clean], inordinate affection, [uncontrolled desire] evil concupiscence [or wrong desires or greed with no concern for others], and covetousness, which is idolatry. For which things' sake the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience: In the which you also walked some time, when you lived in them. But now you also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Paul is saying here that we are not simply to suppress or control wrong attitudes or sinful acts; we are expected to wipe them out completely. This is part of being a daily sacrifice. You are a living sacrifice. You are to exterminate the old way of living. The way that this is written, it indicates that we must be truly vigorous and this must be done with a sense of urgency. It is something that we cannot put off. In verses 6 & 7, it is brought out that these things incur the wrath of God and He said, be not deceived, the wrath will come. And in verse 8, Paul tells us that we are to rid ourselves completely of the things that are offensive in God's sight, such as anger, which is sudden uncontrolled outbursts, and wrath, which is just hatred, angry all the time—hate-filled thoughts. This is only one part of the sacrifice required of us. Now comes the hard part: The part of changing our natures.

Colossians 3:9-10 Lie not to one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; [it just literally means, stop lying. As I said, do not lie to yourself because that is a terrible situation, or to anyone else.] And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him:

In verses 9 and 10, special emphasis is given, it was emphasized specially, that we have to put off the old man and now we must put on the new man. The image is of taking off our old wretched nature, pictured as well-worn, dirty, offensive clothing, and utterly destroying it. And then a new creature is pictured as a person putting on a spotless garment, a new suit, a new dress of clothing. And the contrast is going from filthy dirty to spotless beauty. Even in all of this, we have our human nature. But that is what God wants.

The new self is being described as renewed by knowledge, by study. One problem with John Ritenbaugh, and he will not shudder at this, is so many in the church let John Ritenbaugh do the studying for them. I do not mean this in any sort of wrong way. They just sort of trust the ministry to do the studying.

God expects **you** to study as well. And so many times, when you decide to study, it may not be on the topic that a minister studies on or that a minister speaks on, but you will find something and say, "That applies to me! It applies to me!"

The fathers should teach their children and encourage them in the truth. It is part of your responsibility. So he says here, we are to be renewed by knowledge, by study, by the sermons, and take in more and more of the truth, and as we do this we take on the image of Jesus Christ and the old, dirty clothes begin to fall away.

Colossians 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

This says all nationalities can be in the family of God. God is not a respecter of persons and the reason is that Jesus Christ is the glue, the unity that binds us all together. We are all brothers, we are all sisters, in the family of God.

Now the virtues of a new life we must cultivate comes next.

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, [new clothes if you will] as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

Because of this calling we must in a sense put on new garments that reflect the nature of Jesus Christ and we must be urgent about it. Not saying, "I will do it later." We must now learn to exhibit compassion, kindness, goodness, humility, gentleness, which are the opposite of self-esteem and arrogance, and patience. Possessing these in the church and later in the world will eliminate much of the friction that we have today. All of these manifest God's love and character in us as we exhibit these toward our brethren and our fellow man. We will bear with those things that we dislike and will forgive others freely as God has forgiven us.

Colossians 3:13-14 Forbearing one another, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. And above all things [this is the final piece of clothing, the final article of new righteous clothing, and the most important, Godly love] put on charity which is the bond of perfectness.

Mr. Armstrong used to always say that true outgoing concern for our fellow man is what God is after. And you know that this love is not a wishy-washy love.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule your hearts, to the which you are called in one body; and be you thankful.

Now the word "peace" is seen by some meaning peace among the brethren, peace among man, and peace with Christ and certainly that is true. But when the word "rule" is added to it, it means that peace administers all inner conflicts. Albert Barnes used the term "of the games." There was a man that settled to the games and made all of the decisions on what would take place in the Olympic Games and in the games of that age. All decisions came through him. So what he is saying here is that peace administers all conflicts as well as disputes with our brethren and fellow man in a real sense and we should do nothing to each other or to somebody outside the church that would violate that peace.

All these things prepare our mind for the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is going to be peace and love and joy and happiness. And that is what God wants from us. We are being told to be thankful and this is not an afterthought because being grateful is associated with peace. Showing thankfulness to God and men truly promotes peace and harmony. How can somebody hate you when you thank him and when you care for him and you tell him that you appreciate all he has done for you? What is really being done is saying that we should be thankful, appreciating all that we have been called to. This calling and all that we have been given is so great.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

We should put our heart into it most certainly in song service because in church, that is where we sing. Some sing around the house and that is good. Paul goes on to say that we should work to encourage and teach each other with wisdom being filled with God's Word. Now that does not mean that someone cannot tell a minister something. "You know, I think this is right, what do you think? I just learned this, how exciting!"

It says that we should make use of every type of good wisdom and be able to teach and admonish each other in sound logic. Some of that wisdom may be how to fix their car, to help the brethren, how to help in the house—things like that. In all this we are to be truly thankful for the opportunity that we have been given. We should be grateful for the tremendous, unmerited pardon that has been shown to each one of us. I know I do not begin to appreciate.

David Maas sort of describes this test act that we are in, in a sermon abstract:

In his third installment of his Hebrew series, John Ritenbaugh again stresses that without continuous maintenance and attention, it is difficult to maintain a spiritual mind in a carnal physical body. We, like Jesus Christ, were made a little while lower than angels to be made perfect through testing or suffering. Christ has metaphorically blazed a trail showing us a pattern for qualifying through intense suffering and resisting temptation for our ultimate responsibility as future kings and priests or bridge builders reconnecting men and God. As Christ endured the suffering and temptation successfully, we are exhorted to hold fast activating the hope to endure to the end.

Good statement.

Our calling parallels the talents given to those servants the master left in charge of his good things. We have been given the good knowledge of the truth of God that the world does not have and we are to grow from it. We are expected to produce growth in love toward God, in godly love toward all the brethren, and self-control in faithfulness and daily study, and skill in using that truth.

Herein lies our test: We are to be self-governed according to all of God's Word in a world that does not want to be governed at all. So many groups feel that the ministry has to rule over the brethren. That is not the case. You have to rule over yourself. That is what your calling is all about.

This is our test act at this time to prove that we will be fit for the office of kings and priests in the Kingdom of God. Although the world that we live in with all of its different thoughts on how to live and worship does not begin to understand, they too will have God's test act given to them. This is something that is going to take place. God is going to see that the whole world goes through what you and I are going through.

Hebrews 8:8-12 For finding fault with them, he said, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, [they failed the test] and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is

the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

The beautiful thing about God, He does not remember our sin. God truly loves His people. He loves, frankly, all the people in the world. And we will see that they all conform to their religion, even if they start out as being rebellious. Not just so that they might hold physical offices or spiritual offices, but so that they might inherit eternal life and become part of the very family of God. I would like to have you turn to Zechariah 14:16

Zechariah 14:16-21 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall no rain fall. [God is going to make them conform to this test act] And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, they will have not rain and there shall be a plague, wherewith the Lord God will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be [engraved] holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see therein: and in that day there shall be nor more merchants in the house of the Lords of hosts.

It will be a time when the world is healed and all nations will have had to go through the test act.

Let us who have been given talents by God to be developed, tests to go through as we are being tested at this time, do what it says here.

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not much in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out [exhibit, carry out, your salvation that you have been given. You are special in this whole world] with fear and trembling. For it is God which [energizes you] works in you, [who is preparing you for an office and a position] both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

We should be putting forth our effort. Brethren, if we do this we will be able to participate in the event pictured in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: [give honor to God] for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. [which is what our testament, our sacrifice, has produced] And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These things are the true sayings of God."

