

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 4)

Fear and Self-Sacrifice

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Luke 13: 24-28.

Luke 13:24-28 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many I say unto you will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut to the door, and you begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us: and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are: Then shall you begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in your presence, and you have taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

Some of the Christian churches of this world have a doctrine titled "Eternal Security," and some, a few maybe, "Extreme Eternal Security." This essentially postulates that once one has accepted Jesus Christ's blood, salvation is assured. This doctrine almost makes Christian life seem as though it is a walk in the park.

This doctrine was one of the central themes of the Protestant Reformation, as theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin moved to reject doctrines that they considered *Catholic*. The central theme of this doctrine claims that the called individual has absolutely no part in the salvation process. That is the one they call "*Extreme Eternal Security*."

Belief in this teaching was one of the major reasons why Martin Luther's rejection of the book of James occurred. He called it "an epistle of straw," seeing it clearly rejected eternal security. James makes it clear that a person's works are important to his salvation, because he states that "faith without works is dead." Brethren, the conclusion is clear that dead faith will not lead to a resurrection to life.

We can learn from this that rejection of clearly-stated biblical truth is not limited to the man in the street. By that, I mean people considered great, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, got things wrong too. Even though it may have been pointed out to them by others, they rejected it in favor of what they had devised.

Did not Jesus—Christianity's Founder—say very clearly that the way to life is *difficult and narrow*? Why are there so many warnings and admonitions not to turn out of the way if a successful conclusion is virtually assured as soon as one begins? Is not Israel's pilgrimage through the wilderness a type for Christians to learn from?

I want you turn with me to Hebrews 3. We will review something here.

Hebrews 3:17-19 But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

One of the most shocking lessons that one can draw from Israel's journey through the wilderness is how few of the original group of somewhere around 2 to 3 million Israelites who left Egypt made it *alive* into the Promised Land. Not counting those who were twenty and under, whenever they left, only two (2) are actually named to have made it: Joshua and Caleb. It appears reasonable to assume that their wives and children also made it, but do you realize what the percentage of that is? It is one one-millionth of one percent. That is incredibly low, and for anyone who takes salvation seriously, this is nothing to inspire one to be passive about making it.

I am sure that this is God's point, because everything that He does is done with loving wisdom in order to produce the best and the most for His purpose. Sometimes a sobering shock such as this has its value. The lesson is clear. His purpose is not just to give people salvation. It becomes clear that His purpose is to produce the best and the most for His family kingdom, and the best and the most is produced by making those called to salvation have a part in overcoming the downward pull of human nature.

Satan has worked very hard to convince people of a concept that comes very close to God owing us salvation entirely on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. I am sure that those who believe in this doctrine of Eternal Salvation would not say that, but their lack of change reveals something of that nature is eroding the drive to produce fruit. What they claim is akin to saying that once God freed Israel from their slavery to Egypt, they did not have to walk across the wilderness to the Promised Land. That was their work, brethren—walking there in unity with those who were headed in that direction. And they could not even do that!

The word picture in this context in Hebrews 3, especially the tail end of the chapter, is one showing the corpses of uncountable numbers of people strewn helter-skelter across the landscape as far as one could see. To me, this shows that these fallen fellowshipped with the group. Remember Jesus' parable about the Sower and the Seed, about those that fell on the stone. They sprung up, and as soon as trouble came, they died. They passed from the picture. This shows me that those fallen fellowshipped with the group for awhile, thus making some amount of progress toward the Promised Land. They endured for a while, but it was not enough.

As their faith gradually eroded, a temptation or a trial arose, and they turned aside from the way, and died.

Now viewed as a whole, the book of Hebrews is a 13 chapter long stirred-to-action speech, urging Christians with powerful arguments to get moving toward the goal. It is essentially saying that nothing better in all of the history of mankind has ever been offered to a select group of people. The author is urging us to quit being fearfully passive, and to reach out, doing whatever is necessary to submit to God, strongly laying hold of salvation, and going on to perfection.

The book of Hebrews arguably contains the most powerful—even frightening—passages in all of the Bible, especially toward the end of Hebrews. With that thought in mind, let us move forward now in time to *our* time, to *our* day, considering briefly the times that *we* live in as we look into a section of a discourse that Jesus aimed directly at those of us living in the end-time generation.

As we go through Matthew 24, always keep at the forefront of our minds the Israelites and what they had to go through—the general atmosphere and environment. Matthew 24 describes some of the environment that we are living in, and is yet to come upon us.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved [alive]: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Matthew 24:12-13 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

We have not reached this point (verses 21 and 22) in the fulfillment of these prophecies, but the evidence from our culture strongly indicates that we are right on the cusp. Enough is happening for us to know that we are beyond this tribulation's beginning stages, and the times are becoming increasingly dangerous, and not just to one's physical life.

The English word that is translated "tribulation" comes from the Greek *thlipsis*. It means a *pressing pressure*. We might compare it to "stress," but we must add that what it really means is a *stressful* stress. In other words, it is not ordinary. It is something exceeding that which is ordinary. Those kind of things that would happen every day are very commonplace in the end-time, and in the end-time cumulatively it is a *stressful* stress—a greater than normal stress. In other words, it is a stress more intense than run-of-the-mill everyday stress. In this context, the ordinary everyday stress is very intense, even to the point that life itself may hang in the balance.

Because Jesus also mentions enduring in context with a spiritual love (verses 12 and 13), one must also consider *spiritual* stress due to distraction, luring one away from the Kingdom of God and God's purpose, and strong challenges to break from the love of God as part of the tribulation. This is already occurring through the easy availability of entertainment. Now it

comes right into our home by way of television, in addition to glittering eye-catching desire-producing attention for all the shopping for goods so easily available that it lures one into time-wasting spiritual lethargy.

All of this is taking place within an everyday framework of constant wearying, hearing of news events of fearful violence, terrible accidents, political corruption, economic corruption, natural disasters, disease, and maybe even economic problems that are eventually going to affect everyone of us. Constant bad news, with little hope of relief, is an intense wearying stress.

Much of the stress of these times is being generated by an information overload. Life has always been difficult for the great majority of people who have ever lived, but nobody in all of history has had to live virtually their entire life under the constant intense pressures of the end-time. We are living in a period of time unique in the history of man, according to Jeremiah 30: 7. Jeremiah said there that it is "the time of Jacob's trouble"—a time that has never been on the face of the earth. Jesus compared the time of the end to the time of Noah, but even here the intense pressures are greater than they were during Noah's day. Noah's time is just the best example of what it is going to be like, but it is going to be even worse.

We have to ask a question now. Has God given us any special instruction to follow as we approach this period? Yes He has. In a way they are short, and anybody ought to be able to understand them. However, in a way, we have not understood them because it was decided to emphasize something that is actually only a small part of the warning. I want us to go back to the book of Luke once again.

Luke 21:29-33 And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, you see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise you, when you see these things come to pass, know you that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. [We know that we are in that time.] Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.

Here in Luke's version of the same discourse which is there in Matthew 24, He warns us. What did He warn us? There is something in Matthew 24 that we tend to minimize.

Matthew 24:6 And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

If Jesus gave this in a sense of something that is of worldwide importance—worldwide impact—it could not apply very much to those people who were in Jesus' day, because the world to them was pretty much limited to the Mediterranean area. They did not have radio. They did not have television. They did not have telephones. I am saying that communication then compared to today was quite slow. I surely believe that what we are looking at here in Matthew 24 is primarily addressed to those who are living at the end-time when there's radio, television

and all kinds of means of rapid communication.

You cannot go through a day anymore without hearing of a war or some kind of armed fighting or conflict with people being killed somewhere on this earth, whether it is in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or in Iraq, in Spain, in Somalia, and in other places in Africa, or now even in the United States. It is happening all the time and you are aware of it. You may not pay a great deal of attention, but it registers on your mind that this has occurred. It adds to the intensity of the stress and keeps us a little bit on edge. But what Jesus said is that despite hearing all these things, the end is *not*.

What I have determined is that all of the things He mentions from verse 4 up until at least verse 12 is that none of them is absolutely a sign of the time of the end. I am not saying they will not happen at the time of the end. They most certainly *will* happen at the time of the end, but none of those things of and by themselves, or even collectively, is a time of the end. Those things can all occur at any time in history. Beginning at verse 12 things begin to get more serious for those of us who are living at the end-time.

None of these things of and by themselves that we see and hear of every day are necessarily signs of the time of the end. What He is saying in way of spiritual instruction to us, is to not allow ourselves to get caught up in them, because they can very easily become *false* signs that one can give far too much importance to.

Those things are happening, and they are happening at an increasing tempo, and they are happening at an increasing intensity as well. They are beginning to strike right in this land. Now what is Jesus' instruction? Reading from Luke 21, I want you to notice the first things He says in verse 34.

Luke 21:34-36 And take heed to *yourselves*, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Does Jesus say to watch world news? No He does not! It is going to come at us whether we want it or not, and we are going to be forced to hear about it. He says to watch out for yourself. "*Take heed to yourselves that you do not get caught up in all the distractions the culture around us has to offer.*" "Watch out for yourselves." It is here He names what is undoubtedly one of the greatest dangers to our salvation. He uses the word "overcharged." This is what an information overload does to you. This is what thinking on the wrong things or the wrong way about many things will do.

That word "overcharged" in some modern translations is changed to "burdened." "Do not let yourself become burdened or weighed down" is another way it is translated. Regardless of the way it is translated, it is showing a mind that is stressed with an overload of *busy-ness*.

Now is God against being busy? We are being created in God's image, and He is constantly busy. Jesus said, "My Father works, and I work," but He is very much against His children not taking control of their lives, thus allowing their attention to be focused on the wrong things; being *busy* with the wrong things. If we are not careful, the world lures us into becoming spiritually weak through a mental, physical, and spiritual overload by means of concentrated involvement *with it*.

Reflecting back on the book of Hebrews shows that those people then—those people to whom it was directly written at that time—were not undergoing a tremendous persecution, but they were drifting away because of distraction. This is why we are commanded to come out of the world, seeing that the demand for self-control to keep it from eroding our faith is so great.

Jesus is saying here, in an overall sense, that the world is an easily fallen-into trap. Its allure is so appealing to our nature. It is drawn to it like steel to a magnet. We are to be alert, and are to be *watching*—not watching world news, but watching out for ourselves. That is why it is linked with prayer. We are to take advantage of the benefit that we have of being able to go before God, but before we go before God we are to be taking care of ourselves, watching out so that we know what to pray about to Him.

It is not watching world news so that we can pray about world news; it is praying to Him about what is wrong and needs to be changed in *us*, and where we need to be strengthened. Love, brethren, is a key ingredient in this as we are going to see as we go along. That is what Jesus specifically mentioned, that in this wearying intense time, *love* would wax cold—love for God. Because the world is so attractive to human nature, it begins to flow away from us, and if that flows away, its love for the brethren says "goodbye" too, because the two go together like bread and butter.

In this context, "watch" means be alert, be aware, not focusing on world news, but to one's own spiritual position in relation to the world around and to the kingdom of God. This requires wide awake attention and focus upon the right goals.

I want you to recall from the sermon that I gave on March 20 the five steps leading to persecution. The first one was "identifying and stereotyping" the group. The second one was "marginalization" of the group. The third was "vilification." The fourth was "criminalization," and finally Step 5—"direct persecution." Steps 1, 2, and 3 are well established, and Step 4 has gotten underway. Step 5 has already had a test case in the persecution of the Branch Davidians. The point is obvious. We are now in a time to get ourselves in order for what might lie ahead for us.

Do you know, that with the Branch Davidians, eighty-some people, who were no threat to the security of the nation, were murdered by the government? Was there ever an apology from the government for what they did?

Preparation for what is coming begins with conviction regarding doctrines—what we have been taught.

Malachi 3:1-2 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come

to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming?

This comes right down to you and me right now. "Who shall continue?" That is what the word "abide" means. "Who shall continue?" In other words, who will live through it?

Malachi 3:2-3 But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand [indicating that they are alive, on their feet approaching God] when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap [something that purifies, cleans]: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, ?

Here is now where it really comes home, because the Levites were a type of the church. Of course part of the Levites were priests, and I Peter 2:9 makes it clear that the church is "a kingdom of priests." So guess who he is talking about here? who is going to be purified at the end-time, at the time of His coming? Are we going to be able to stand? Those who are going to be purified is "us"—the church!

I am certain that being washed by fullers' soap, or being put through the fire like silver is, is not always going to be pleasant. He is going to take whatever steps are necessary to make sure that His church is acceptable to Him.

Malachi 3:3-5 ?that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah [a type of the church. We are spiritual Jews] and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you in judgment: and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, says the LORD of hosts.

Whenever anybody is purged, if we put this into a different metaphor, it means getting rid of the leaven. God shows that He will use persecution to purify His people through the testing of their loyalty. We know that our loyalty is being really tested all the time, but there is a time coming when it is going to be a great deal more intense conviction about what we believe. This becomes very important, because His purpose is to entrench these beliefs into our character.

If people are truly convicted regarding their beliefs, they will conduct themselves far differently than if they are unsure. It is right here that this point becomes important—a *super* importance really—because the dross of cowardly believers is going to be removed. That is what Malachi 3:3 is about. It will either be removed, or else. That is very sobering.

Since we are now on our pilgrimage, I think it very helpful to recall again Israel's record when they were on theirs. We are going to go back to Hebrews 3 and look at verses 14 and 15. There is a point there we need to bring up.

Hebrews 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

"He that endures unto the end, the same shall be saved." "If we hold the beginning of our confidence." He means the faith that we had at the beginning of our conversion—that faith that led us to believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and that it is by His blood that we are saved. It led us to repent, to change our minds in relation to God and the way that we were living, so that we were baptized and we made the new covenant with God, and we began to live that way on the strength of the conviction we had regarding the teachings we had at that time.

"For we are made partakers of Christ." He is talking about an end result now—"if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Just a few verses later is where He went into this thing about the corpses strewn all over the place. His point was these people did not hold their conviction to the end. When they left Egypt they were full of joy. When God divided the Red Sea they danced around and had a real celebration there in Exodus 15. But it seems like from that time on the great miracle began to recede into their minds, and they did not hold onto the joy and faith and conviction that they had then. And so Paul's admonition is:

Hebrews 3:15 While it is said, *Today* if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation.

Every day is important. Bill had something shocking happen to him just this past week or so. A friend of his—somebody he just talked to—the same basic age as Bill, dropped over dead while he was training, or right in that time vicinity, to run in the Boston Marathon. If he had plans of going into the Boston Marathon, running 26 miles, he did not think of himself being in bad shape at all. But boom! he fell over, and that was the end of it. This young fellow made a lot of money in his lifetime, and his family I guess is benefiting, but he really did not get to enjoy it very much. That is why Paul says *Today!* "Nobody is guaranteed to live tomorrow, and so every day is important, that we do not allow this world to suck us away from the faith, and with it the love that we had at the beginning. "If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

I know from my own experience that you are finding this difficult. Israel found it *very* difficult. It is hard to keep ourselves charged up and going in the right direction because there are so many things that will break into our resolve and pull it down. If we are not alert and really watching, it will pull us away, and it happens so gradually.

But suddenly we kind of wake up. "What is happening to me? I do not pray like I used to. I do not study like I used to. I am losing my interest. I look for excuses to not go to services." We quit training our children, or whatever. We lose the vision because the world is right in between the Kingdom of God, and it is more in focus. We do not *intend* that it happen that way. It just

happens because human nature is so drawn to it, and our attitudes disintegrate and we find ourselves getting grumpy, angry, out of sorts, and you name it.

Considering the sobering importance of belief, as these verses right here in Hebrews 3 and 4 show, the contrasting rampant disbelief reported in the Barna poll of people claiming to be Christians, combined with persecution of Christians rising on the horizon, there are things that we need to seriously consider.

Let me ask you something. If one of your hopes is that you will escape the worst of the wrath that is surely building all around the world by being taken to a place of safety, I hope that it is. If so, that is a reasonable hope, because God Himself has tendered that possibility. But there is a question. Do you think God is going to fulfill that hope if one is only occasionally and haphazardly seeking Him, while at the same time persistently refusing to believe and submit to certain teachings of the scriptures? Are you willing to take the gamble that He will just overlook the omission?

We need to have the correct doctrinal base now more than ever before, because today is a time of preparation. It is a time of training for what lies ahead. The purpose of training is to produce instinctive response. I say *instinctive*. Bill said *conditioned* in his sermonette. God wants that, but it is an instinctive or conditioned response to the way of God until right choices and right responses are first nature. That is the purpose for why athletes go through all that intense training. That is the reason behind the hard rigorous training pianists and singers and anybody else goes through to develop the gift or skills they have been given. They do this so that every response comes automatically without even having to think. They have done it so often, that bang! bang! bang! they just do it.

God is putting us through the hoops, and it is going to get more intense. A great deal of the intense pressure is going to come from the world in resisting it.

I want to go to Daniel 11: 31 to just touch on something briefly. This is in the midst of the longest single prophecy in the Bible. Its prelude begins all the way back in Daniel 10: 1, but as we get to Daniel 11: 31, we are getting close to the time of the end.

Daniel 11: 31-35 And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that makes desolate. [Does not that fit into Matthew 24 and Luke 21?] And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries [That is the Beast.]: But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. [Will any of us be called upon to do this? Just know that this is part of the Bible and it may be God's will that some of us have to go through this.] And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge [Malachi 3 again] and to make them white [the

righteousness of the saints], even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.

Brethren, we have been warned that this is coming. Always there is the possibility that God will not require that of us, and that He will take some—all of us maybe—to the place of safety. But we need to take advantage of the time given us to take the opportunity to stand firm in the days of training—meaning right now—and during this time when we are dealing with smaller tests of life, that when the truly immediately dangerous conditions arise, we will stand firm.

I Corinthians 10 was written just before the Days of Unleavened Bread. Here is another warning.

I Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

So now we are in a time of self-examination. The warning from this verse is that we must not presume at this time, while there is still time for us to get in shape, that just because God has not come down on us like a ton of bricks, that everything is fine with our character and attitude.

Why do you think that Paul wrote this verse in this context that lists, just prior to this verse, three or four of Israel's outstanding sins? Is it possible that they too thought that they were standing when they were not? Were they presuming something? I think the answer to that is yes, that there was in them a careless presumption shown by their lack of faith in works. The belief that God was so merciful that He would accept any old attitude and behavior, and just overlook it. But now let us think this thing through. That would not be showing love on God's part, because they would not be prepared for the kingdom of God. Without that preparation they would not fit into the culture around them, and they would be absolutely miserable in the Kingdom of God.

This presumption that Paul is talking about is the same flaw in the Laodicean's thinking, which is revealed when he says, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." But everything was not all right. Their self-satisfaction reveals that their judgment is way off reality. The reality was God vomited them out. But they felt very good about themselves. We are beginning to see what the sin of a Laodicean is. It is presumption, self-satisfaction that everything is okay.

The Laodicean is deceived by his lack of faith in the knowledge of God into thinking, as Ezekiel 8:12 says, "The Lord sees not. The Lord has forsaken the earth." In other words what that verse is saying is that God does not care. But brethren, God's not caring has never occurred, not even for one second since Adam and Eve. He does care. We must never overlook the Ecclesiastes 8:11 principle that says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

The presumption is that everything is okay with the way they are acting. There is a flaw in human nature that persuades men to think that if God does not immediately punish, He must approve. But brethren, do we ever stop to think that God's non-punishment may very well be the trial that He has imposed on us to see whether or not we will pass it and make the change

ourselves?

As persecution draws closer, there is an aspect of life that we must concern ourselves with. It is fear. It is the fear of the wrong things.

Exodus 14:10-14 And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them: and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore have you dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear you not, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.

Deuteronomy 7:17-19 If you shall say in your heart, These nations are more than I: how can I dispossess them? You shall not be afraid of them: but shall well remember what the LORD your God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt: The great temptations which your eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the LORD your God brought you out: so shall the LORD your God do unto all the people of whom you are afraid.

Israel is shown in the wilderness account here to fear many things, but most of the time it was other people, hunger, and thirst, being especially well documented. This is not something that is strange. It is something that is natural, and it will be natural to you and me to fear what is going on around us—to fear those who have the power, the authority to hurt us or to take our lives. And so it is natural that there should be a fear. But nonetheless, it has to be dealt with and it has to be overcome.

Fear has been called the most self-centered of all emotions because fear is generated by a perceived high degree of threat to what we believe is our well-being. What we believe is what we have been instructed in, accepted, and practiced. The solution to fear is to get rid of, to eliminate what we perceive is threatening us. It is right here the crux of the problem exists, because the perceived threat to our well-being forces choices regarding what to do. Our choice in these circumstances may very well involve sin, and with that choice we run the risk of exposing the depth of our divided loyalty. Fear is a powerful producer of conduct, for good or bad, depending upon whom or what is feared and how the thrust is directed.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: A good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise

endures for ever.

Psalm 112:1 Praise you the LORD. Blessed is the man that fears the LORD, that delights greatly in his commandments.

Here the right One is feared, and this fear is directed positively toward the Kingdom of God and the glorifying of God. On the other hand, the fear of the wrong things will produce very bad results for the Christian—perhaps not immediately, but eventually, always. We should realize this. The fear of the wrong thing can never produce good things for the Christian, except temporarily. In the long run, it is always going to produce bad things.

The fear of the wrong things, and then submission to the wrong things, may reduce the pressure. It gets us off the hook, but only for a while. The chances are very great that the wrong choice that led to us submitting to the wrong thing is actually going to make, in the long run, the pressure and the pain become more intense.

There is a specific, powerful, and motivating negative fear that inhabits every one of us. It must be confronted and overcome in this time of preparation because it destroys trust and it inhibits our preparation for the Kingdom of God. It specifically inhibits growth of trusting God. It is the fear of sacrifice—the fear of denying the self its pound of flesh.

We will go back to the book of Luke again, and I will remind you what Jesus warned us of, and this is something that when we counsel somebody for baptism I never fail to bring it up.

Luke 14:25-27 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

What was Jesus' sacrifice on? Just a little hint there. We are going to go now to the book of Mark, in chapter 8. Mark puts it a little bit different way.

Mark 8:34-38 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; [How about that? It cannot get any plainer than that.] but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul [or his life]? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

This fear of sacrifice is a fear that we face every day in any number of what we might call small challenges to our beliefs and self-control. Brethren, it is the everyday challenges that prepare us for the huge life-threatening ones that are coming.

Did you notice that in both passages Jesus mentions "*bearing* our cross," "taking up *His* cross," "*Denying* one's self"?

We are going to look at two more scriptures, both of these from the apostle Paul. He brings this charge of Jesus to bearing our cross and denying ourselves, and he makes it immediate and daily.

Romans 8:13 For if you live after the flesh [that is, to allow the flesh what it is demanding], you shall die: [Again, that is pretty clear.] but if you through the Spirit [that is, drawing upon the strength, the power of God, the relationship we have with God, asking God, by His spirit, to give us the power to somehow or another see this through, screw up our courage, as it were, and do what we need to do in order to deny ourselves so that we can practice for the time that we might actually be faced with something that is really immediately serious and intense] ?do mortify [kill] the deeds of the body, you shall live.

Paul is talking here about little everyday things that we have the opportunity presented to us to control ourselves, and not give in to what the flesh is demanding of us—things that we know from the knowledge we have been given, from the beliefs that are accruing to us, are not good for us.

The chapter begins with a command:

Colossians 3:1-2 If you then be risen with Christ [That fits us to a tee! We have come up out of the water from our symbolic death and burial.], seek those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

This is being approached a little bit more broadly at this point, but He is saying, "Set your mind, your heart, your purpose on the Kingdom of God."

Colossians 3:5-8 Mortify [put to death] therefore your members [your hands, your eyes, your ears, your tongue, your sexual organs, you name it] which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God comes on 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.

What we fear to do, brethren, is to suffer the pangs of self-denial. We fear putting to death our flesh that is demanding its satisfaction. But the truth of the matter is that we are dealing with the most troublesome aspect of our humanity. It is pride demanding its due. That is what we do not want to face, because in submitting to God we are denying what pride is demanding, that we stand up for ourselves.

Do you understand that it is pride within us that wants to be God? It loves being praised and being coddled. It quickly puffs up with angry judgment over the real or perceived wrongs of others while being oblivious to its own. It is almost like a living, breathing something, a form from within us unlike that of any other creature. It can be fed, or it can be starved. When fed, it grows. When it is starved, it diminishes, and dies daily.

Pride starves and diminishes when we choose to submit to God's word in obedience. But brethren, it is going to put up a strong defense of itself through the fear of being denied. It wants satisfaction. "You shall be as gods." God made the Serpent say exactly what was happening there. Pride in Adam and Eve exalted itself over God, and made them god by changing the standard in order to satisfy themselves when they saw that the fruit was attractive. And so they did not deny their flesh.

Whether the challenges arise in what we permit ourselves to eat or to drink, or how much we permit ourselves to eat, or the controlling of the tongue, or directing the temper, whether we choose to be kind or be sarcastic, cynical, or hopeful and encouraging, the test to control our fear of humbling ourselves exists. That is where the battle is being waged. It is being waged right there.

There is an answer, a solution, to these fears of self-denial.

I John 4:18 There is no fear in love [It is so important what Jesus said about love waxing cold, because as love dissipates, fear grows and gets stronger and stronger, and the desire to protect ourselves becomes more and more intense.]; but perfect love casts out fear; [There is the solution.] because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.

Why is love able to cast out fear? The answer to that is actually rather simple, but doing it is not always easy because it takes time and experience, especially with God. The answer lies in what love does to us, because love too is a powerful motivator. But fear drives people apart, and as it is doing this, it intensifies suspicion, duplicity, hatred and aggression. These in turn intensify the fear, thus making peace and unity all that much harder to attain.

Fear is an intense self-consciousness, and fear is actually a form of punishment, and is self-defeating. If we would see John's comments regarding love in its larger context of the whole book, we would see that the context involves the Day of Judgment; thus fear is a punishment because it is convicting us that our relationship with God and man is not good. This can, and does create a guilty conscience, and that sort of conscience punishes through anxiety. Thus fear is self-concern and inward in its thrust, but love works in exactly the opposite

direction because the essence of love is sacrifice—self-denial and self-surrender.

Pride must be diminished; that is, put down by making the sacrifice through love. Love's focus, love's concern is *always* away from the self. It is outgoing in its thrust, and thus it works to eliminate the peace-and-harmony-destroying excessive self-consciousness. This love is a conscious act based on trust of God's word, based upon what one believes, not on what one feels. Love focuses on trusting what God counsels. Love focuses on God's sovereign oversight and what He will always act or react in the way that is most beneficial to all in the governance of His creation.

If we would follow John's thought further, we would find that love does not operate on its own. The Bible makes clear that godly love is more than an emotion. It is primarily an outgoing action, but united with an emotion of concern for the well-being of God and man. It is inextricably united with faith—a confident trust in God that enables the Christian to keep the commandments and overcome the world. It is this God-given combination that enables one to challenge his fears and overcome them even in face of a giant threat on the well-being to the self.

It is time to make sure that we are really convicted about what we believe about God, because that is the wellspring of love. It is what we *believe* about God. If we believe what this book says about God, it empowers us to love. If we have that love, we will deny ourselves in order to obey and submit to God regardless of the price that it takes of us.

Everything in the relationship, everything in God's purpose, begins with belief, and belief empowers us to do the right thing. If we are wishy-washy in our belief, we have no chance. We will always try to straddle the fence rather than do the right thing, because doing the right thing might be costly to our pride.

Brethren, I am convinced that much of the time doctrinal truths are rejected by men because of this fear—the fear of having to pay the price; the fear of sacrificing.

There is more to this fear, and maybe we will get into a bit more of it the next time. I do not know. I have not determined that yet, but that is plenty for today.

I hope the remainder of your day is very profitable spiritually to you.