

Grace, Faith, and Love

The Sin of Presumption in the Church

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It is a truth that each of the festivals, beginning with Passover and ending with the Last Great Day, portray a humanity, gradually step by step, being drawn into oneness with God. The world does not know that yet, but God is following a plan that, by human standards, is vast in scope, involving perhaps the billions and billions of people who have lived on the earth the entire time human life has been here as His plan unfolds.

Even for a person who knows and believes the purpose and the plan that is involved, meeting the challenges of one's patience during the plan's outworking is a difficult thing to deal with from time to time. We find ourselves with anxiety building because we want things to be over and done. Some feel hopeless managing the inexorable onslaught of time, the erosion of youthful strength as the relentless advance of age continues, and, with it, diminished capacities as we age.

Frustration with being unable to control evil adds to our impatience, as does fears of ignorance about what is *really* going on upon this earth. Who can we trust? The state of the church intensifies concerns because its scattered condition continues to exist, but perhaps the bulk of its people are found in hundreds of smaller groups following the spiritual conflict that dissolved it into so many different pieces. The story was a lot different in the beginning, was it not? Turn with me to Acts 2.

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all [every one of them] with one accord in one place.

There was absolute harmony within the group.

Acts 2:43-47 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

This is the way it all began. Jesus returned to heaven with the church in its very best spiritual condition. There was no conflict. There was no division. Its members were one with God and with each other. It was a beautiful spiritual way, but by Acts the 5th chapter the sin of Ananias and Sapphira had occurred, and revealed that it was no longer one.

The division is much more apparent as we get into chapter 6. There was a dispute over who was being served and who was not being served, and so they had to appoint deacons in order to do things more equitably.

There is a parallel one can make with the physical creation shown in Genesis 1 and 2. That particular circumstance—that creation—rose out of chaos, being formed by God into a beautiful harmonious creation consisting of two people who were at least physically one with God and with each other; and then sin occurred, and that harmonious situation began dissolving.

I think all of us are knowledgeable of the fact that Jesus Christ repeatedly and strongly appealed to the Father in His prayer recorded in John 17 that He act to make the small body of true believers to be at one with Him. What went wrong? Is it possible, that in one sense, nothing really went wrong, but rather, just as God expected in Eden, the human nature remaining in each converted son of God revealed itself in their daily conduct?

Was the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira really all that different from what they were before they were converted, and the people who were complaining in Acts the 6th chapter? No. Things were going right according to the course that God knew that they would occur.

In like manner, in regard to the church, in the book of Romans, which was probably written in the early 50s AD, the apostle Paul clearly reveals *his* struggle, using the term "the law of sin in his members made war against the law of his mind." The "law of his members" is what remained of the habits, the attitudes, and perspectives of his unconverted life that was dominated by the flesh. The "law of his mind" was the new dynamic within him as it came in him as a result of his conversion and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit.

Paul was reporting what we all know by this time, that there is no peace between these two in us either. Each—"the law of his mind" and "the law of his flesh"—is at war with one another, demanding choices be made between them, and the Christian finds himself a conflicted person with two diametrically opposed realities crying out for loyalty.

The Christian is being forced, either subtly or strongly, to choose between satisfying his desires. Both promise gratification and rewards, but the one's demand is usually immediate, even if the gratification is nothing more than the relief of the pressures of unlawful desires growing within him. The other's reward is usually long-range, requiring belief in a true vision, sacrifice, and faith to execute. Choosing between the two is something that we are confronted with each day.

The life of a Christian knows no escape from this reality. It is no wonder that Jesus cautions us to count the cost, because the loyalties demanded by these two are indeed at times very difficult to meet, and He tells us that we are to be loyal to Him.

We just heard a sermonette involving long-suffering and kindness, and we can be very thankful to God that Jesus Christ and the Father are this way, and they give us plenty of time to meet the challenges of these two realities. They are working all the time to assist us, and at the same time evaluating, judging where we need help to have strength to overcome so that we make the right choices. These choices are determining the state of the individual person's oneness with God and with the church.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would.

We can still do them, but God's command is that we resist them and overcome them.

Galatians 5:18-21 But if you be led of the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Let us define these "works of the flesh" just briefly as we go through this.

Adultery is the Greek word *maicheia*, and it means sexual activity with one other than one's spouse. These are things we cannot do.

Fornication is a much broader term regarding sexual sin. It includes many kinds of perverted sexual activity besides adultery.

Uncleanness is another term that usually refers to sexual things. This is interesting because it is so prevalent today. It is what we call being "dirty minded." We might call it a pornographic mind—a mind consistently in the gutter, thinking evil.

Lasciviousness is also a sexual term. It means sexual looseness, such as a kind a whore would use.

Witchcraft is sorcery. It is one who is involved in the Occult.

Variance means contentious, ever ready to fight; quarrelsome; a "chip-on-the-shoulder"; temperamental. This defines a prideful defensive person who is always thinking he is personally under attack.

Emulations is just another word for being jealous.

Wrath is outburst of anger.

Strife is selfish ambition.

Sedition is dissention.

Heresy is a wrong, but strongly-held opinion that produces party intrigue.

Reveling is partying, but it can even be understood and is used occasionally in Greek for orgy.

This listing is not intended by Paul or God to be exhaustive, but it gives a pretty good coverage of the kind of things human nature is capable of producing, and are buried within us, in many occasions, just waiting to get out. The intention of the list is to show in broad strokes that there is not a single one of the works of the flesh that produces, let alone even promotes, unity with God or with fellowman.

Having singleness of mind and unity of these activities is impossible. The list does reveal the ingrained inclination, attitudes, and possible conduct of the human nature that remains in every one of us. This does not mean that every human will commit all of them, but the inclination to do so resides in all of us.

When thousands of humans are joined in one body, all of them have the potential to commit some of these acts because of weaknesses uncontrolled, and these sins have the power to drive that body apart. What I am saying is that the burden of unity falls on each and every one of us. No single leader, no single group of leaders can achieve unity in the Church of God. Everybody has that responsibility to produce it within himself, first with God, and if that unity with God is worked on, then unity with fellowman becomes a great deal more likely.

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

This is a very simple stating of the second law of thermodynamics which teaches us that all material things tend toward disorganization and degeneration. We tend to think of this most readily in terms, let us say, of construction materials. You build a home, you build a factory, and you build whatever. They always have to be maintained because they run down. That is the nature of anything that is physical, but this not only includes construction materials, it also includes institutions, nations, and entire cultures. Do you know why? It is because they are made up of human beings, and human beings, just like these construction materials, are material.

Institutions, nations, and cultures develop through a period of organization, sacrifice, self-control and growth, and they reach a peak of prosperity and influence during the time their seeds of corruption are being sown, and then gradually decline into ineffective disorganization. You know from your knowledge of history that this is true. Nations rise. They are at the top for a while, and while they are at the top they are getting "soft," [that is the wording we would use] and then whoop!, the bottom falls out, and that culture disappears, only to be replaced by another. That is just a short summary of what happens to virtually all institutions.

You will notice right in these three verses—10 through 12—that the physical is contrasted to the spiritual God. The spiritual God does not degenerate and become disorganized. He remains the same. Malachi 3:6 says, "I am God. I change not." Hebrews 13:8 adds, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

What I am saying here is that it is a well-known fact that the church is a spiritual organization consisting of material human beings, but because of the existence of the spiritual reality within us, the church does not have to succumb to the natural degeneration of the material. It does not have to, but it does.

Why did the Worldwide Church of God degenerate as it did? I think the most obvious and right conclusion is that the church's members, to varying degrees, gave in to the persistent promptings of the flesh frequently enough over a long enough period of time that something had to be done by our Creator God, lest He lose all of us to our enemies; and thus He followed His already-established pattern as shown by what He did with Israel and with Judah. He did this to wake us up. We will pick up one example in Jeremiah 6.

Jeremiah 6:15-19 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, says the LORD. Thus says the LORD, Stand you [Jeremiah] in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, you nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.

If we would expand what I just read, we would find that the entire chapter is a warning by God, through Jeremiah, of a crisis building in Judah. This is directed at Judah, but because we are now the Israel of God we have to understand it as applying to us.

Were we warned time and again by Herbert Armstrong as he neared his death in the 1980s? Some of you were so young that you were just children at the time, so you probably do not remember. Others of you who are listening now are still so young in the faith that you never heard the warnings either, but the majority of us did hear them. Did we pay attention? The answer is "Yes," to some degree anyway, because that is why you are still with the Church of God. But what happened to the tens of thousands of others who just simply seemed to have dropped off the end of the Earth?

But even for those of us who listened, we are still scattered, are we not? That is exactly what God did to Judah not long after Jeremiah was done preaching. Yes, some of us did pay attention, and that is good, and it is my hope that a change has taken place in your heart and that you are resolved to watch over your relationship with God with greater intensity than ever before.

It is interesting to note (and I am taking you back in time a little bit) that much of the church misjudged the power that caused the scattering, blaming Satan rather than themselves or God. I am going to show you another verse in the book of Lamentations. What I am going to read to

you was given by God directly in relationship to Judah and Jerusalem. Again, we have to look at this to see if there are any lessons here for us. Were we scattered? Yes.

Lamentations 2:1-9 How has the LORD covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, [He is blaming what is happening on Himself. He put them in a fog.] and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger! The LORD has swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and has not pitied: he has thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he has brought them down to the ground: he has polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. He has cut off in his fierce anger all the horn [meaning a symbol of strength] of Israel: he has drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devours round about. He has bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire. The LORD was as an enemy: he has swallowed up Israel, he has swallowed up all her palaces: he has destroyed his strong holds, and has increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. And he has violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he has destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD has caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and has despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. The LORD has cast off his altar, he has abhorred his sanctuary, he has given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast. The LORD has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he has stretched out a line, he has not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together. Her gates are sunk into the ground; he has destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.

What a pitiful description! Do you understand what He is saying here? He is saying, "I have done it. I have done all of this destruction because I, as the Sovereign Creator, the Ruler, the Owner of this Earth, have done it for your good." Everything God does is in love. The Worldwide Church of God went through a horrible spanking, and we were part of it.

Now was Satan involved? Of course he was, but he was involved, as he was with Job, only as an agent of what God ordained, what God had assigned him to do. God actively rules His church, and is lovingly, keenly, and dynamically overseeing the development of His children. God's action in scattering the church is, on one hand, a painful chastening intended to produce a positive correction and attitude of conduct. On the other hand, it provides Him with an

environment to test us as to whether our loyalty is to Him, or whether we are merely summer soldiers who remain faithful only when things are going well and when we are surrounded by nice people with whom we have enjoyable social contact.

When we were in the Worldwide Church of God we were all in relatively large congregations. It was comparatively easy to get along, because if somebody rubbed one the wrong way, all one had to do was to move on and begin associating with somebody else. But now there are fewer options available to us, and God has hemmed us in just like He hemmed Judah into Babylon and restricted their ability to do a great deal of things.

Colossians 3:12 is interesting in light of what Clyde spoke on in his sermonette.

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Do you see that when God put us into smaller congregations He made us rub shoulders with one another in a way that was not readily available in the Worldwide Church of God? He put us into situations where we have to actively use the commands He has given us, to love one another, to put it into action, to put up with one another, and be long suffering, be willing to forgive, and be kind under duress when you might be receiving with the idea of retaliation.

Colossians 3:12-15 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body; and be you thankful.

As I had mentioned in a couple of recent sermons and sermonettes on the issue of Jesus' prayer on unity in John 17, that the focus of our unity has to begin with our personal unity with God Himself, because it is the love of God flowing through us which enables us to meet effectively these commands He gives us in these verses. He is the source of the love that enables us to do this. It flows from Him, and that is why that relationship must have the highest priority in our life. We are to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our soul, because from Him flows the enablement to do what He commands. That love of His is the crowing virtue of all virtues. It is the one that gives completeness and wholeness to His spiritual creation of Christ in us.

There are church of God people out there who I think do not realize what their words are doing to prevent further healing of the breaches that divide the various groups. Did you ever stop to think where all this disunity that we see in the world and in the church got started and continues? Let us review this in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 28, and string together a number of scriptures.

Ezekiel 28:14-15 You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Ezekiel 28:17-18 Your heart was lifted up [made proud] because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you.

I think that we can narrow the beginning of the disunity within the world and the church down to one major flaw that gave birth to all of the iniquities that are alluded to in verse 18. The source and the foundation of all disunity was and is in pride—the father of all sins. There was in this personage, Satan, an unbounded love of the self that would not permit him to love and serve the rest of God's family creation.

This anti-God characteristic condemns him forever as being a user of others for his own end. He does not serve; he uses. He does not serve; he manipulates. He does not serve; he captures and enslaves and imprisons, and he never stops to humbly consider that he has all this beauty because it was given to him by God. It was not inherent within him. God reminds you and me of this very thing. God wants us to keep I corinthian 4: 6-7 in mind.

I Corinthians 4:6-7 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?

All of us are operating on the gifts that God provides in His creative power, in His creative wisdom. I said at the beginning of this sermon that His plan and purpose is vast. God is molding together maybe 50 or 60 billion people over a period of 6,000 years into a huge massive working spiritual organism that is going to serve Him and everything else in creation when He is done. Every part of that massive creation is planned by Him.

"What do you have that you have not received?" We cannot say that we have developed it ourselves. No doubt we have worked on it. We may have done some minor developing, but if God had not given us the gift in the first place there would be nothing there to develop. So what do we have to brag about?

I Corinthians 4:7 And what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?

Satan totally ignored this, and he has turned it in totally upon himself to use to his end and not to God's glory. I tell you, he must be one awesome creature.

You all know what it says in Ephesians 2:1-3. I only refer to this because I want you to make the connection between Lucifer and the way things are going on Earth. In II Corinthians 4:4, it says this about this being.

II Corinthians 4:4 In whom the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

He has become the god of this world, and it is his spirit of disunity, his spirit of self-centeredness, that has gone out to the whole world and it is creating all of this disunity we see on Earth. Now it has reached a peak, at least in terms of description in Isaiah 14. We will briefly touch on that.

Isaiah 14:12-14 How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High [or as some have translated, "I will be the Most High."]

Satan's presumptuous pride knows no bounds. He is named by the Hebrew term, transliterated *He Helel* in verse 12. It means "bright one," but he is later named "Adversary" and/or "Destroyer," because that is what his pride accomplishes. His pride, as it invades human nature and gets into the hearts of men, creates adversarial relationships between peoples on earth, and they destroy their relationships, and they destroy the earth.

He desires to destroy God's purpose of bringing all of mankind into oneness with him. He destroys through cunning deception that produces attitudes, dispositions, and inclinations in humanity that, in turn, produces iniquity. We earlier saw a listing of those sins in Galatians 5—sins that commonly appear in human conduct.

One of the sins that he excels in is presumption. It is difficult to imagine that one who has actually seen God, our Creator—I mean literally, in real time, or "in the flesh" as we might say—would have enough presumption, being witness to God's power, being witness to much of what God created, being witness to God's character, to think "I can beat Him!" That is hard to imagine, but that is what presumption does to a person. It keeps elevating the person in his own eyes until the first thing you know the person feels he has complete and total right and privilege of doing things others would think unthinkable.

I once heard somebody being interviewed on television. The moderator said, "What makes people run for president?" The answer was, "Well, the first thing you have to do is have a massive ego to think that you are worthy of the job." But that is the way those people think. They think they are up to the challenges of that job, and they eventually get to the place where they think nobody else can do it. I think the man was right.

Satan not only got himself and one-third of the angels to attack God, if I read the scriptures right, he is going to try again, which lets you know his presumption has not yet been deflated. We have to consider him in everything that pertains to life and salvation, because he is there. He is a reality. He is not a figment of men's imagination. He is a reality, and he is constantly affecting and manipulating people to do what he can to destroy them individually, or destroy God's purpose.

I brought up this subject because I think we are seeing elements of this in the greater Church of God. I think you will be able to relate to what I am going to tell you right now. There are elements of presumption out there that frighten me. If there is not a change of the kind of things these people are saying or doing, these things are either going to lead to their destruction, or they are going to increase divisiveness within the church, and I hate to see that happen. You will be able to relate to these without me even giving you a name.

There is one man out there who is loudly proclaiming rash prophecy, claiming that he and his wife, whom he appointed, are the Two Witnesses. He said that he has asked God to give him proof of his claim by executing three fellow ministers, which he then named in his prophecy.

So I ask you, what kind of a Christian mind would suggest such a thing: "God, prove who I am by putting those men to death"? I guess he chose those three because they are prominent enough, and he believes they are expendable because they have sinned in some way that offends his sensibility. This kind of sign would surely draw attention to himself. Is that not correct? His request was self-centered. That is how you can prove where these things are coming from and how close the enemy is in working division within the church. A little bit of sarcasm here. You can imagine how much unity this is going to produce in the church.

There is another man out there who is claiming that he will choose and teach the Two Witnesses. He also commands his members to sell their worldly goods, like their home, to raise cash to contribute to his organization so that he can do the work. That is not such a good logical request, is it? And I have not witnessed this, but someone told me he has told people that they will not need the money anyway. How does he know that? Who is he tuned into that is putting these kinds of things in his mind?

There is another leader out there who has virtually isolated his group from much in the way of contact with anybody in the other greater Church of God groups that spun off from this scripturally corrupted Worldwide Church of God. He claims that anybody who is not with him is a Laodicean. See, there is a judgment for you. It is essentially saying that if you are with him you are guaranteed to go to the Place of Safety, you are guaranteed to be a Philadelphian, and everybody else is Laodicean.

That is a pretty careless judgment—a judgment that belongs to God, not to him. It seems a

Laodicean has become an epithet of the worse order, even though they are truly Christians and still have contact with God through Jesus Christ and have the opportunity to repent; but so much for loving and helping that fellow Christian toward the Kingdom of God.

What that group is doing sounds just like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan who crossed to the other side of road to avoid helping the injured person in need. This same group seems to me to have elevated Herbert Armstrong to at least an iconic-godlike position, as if he was the perfect example in all things, and that they only have captured the essence of his being and are walking in his steps. It is Christ's steps we are to walk in.

Then there is another group that seems to take every opportunity to tell everyone in their group that they are the only ones preaching the Gospel, and they are the true Philadelphians. Now how does he know this of a certainty? Did God whisper in his ear? I do not know. These things bother me.

There is another group claiming that they are the corporate successor of the Worldwide Church of God. This puts a small twist on things, but in reality it is simply another way of saying that they are the true church and nobody else is.

When you begin putting all these claims together, it could make one who is not part of their groups feel as though they were some sort of a spiritual leper, and all those others outside their groups are unclean. So I ask: Why do these people feel so strongly moved to blast out their claims by bragging about themselves?

Let us ask a serious question. Do the claims of these modern-day leaders reflect the example of Jesus Christ? Is He not to be our example in all things? Is not the way He did things revealed in the Bible, the way we should be doing things in following Him and pattern ourselves after what He did? Where does God fit into their picture?

Matthew 11:25-30 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Hang onto those last four verses.

Matthew 12:15-16 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and charged them that they should not make him known

Hang onto that. Did Jesus blast His name all over the place? Did He brag about Himself? How many times did He tell people, "Don't tell anybody that I did this"?

Matthew 12:17-21 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, [Now here comes an Old Testament description of what Jesus would be like in His public persona.] Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

I want us to note two points before I make a further explanation. The first is drawn from John 1:18 and confirms something we read in Matthew 11.

John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

That is parallel to Matthew 11:27 which says, "Neither knows any man the Father, save the Son." What I am getting at here is this: Who is it that is prepared and adequate and knows what the Father wants and what pleases the Father?

John 8:29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

Therefore, in word and deed, Jesus always reflected the Father's desires as to how to bring glory to Him.

Let us put all of this together. There are two different occasions within those two chapters—Matthew 11 and Matthew 12—where the public persona of Jesus Christ is described. In both places He is described as "meek and lowly of heart." When we add these other factors that He alone really knows the Father, and the Father reveals Himself to the Son, and the Son reflects it in what He does, Jesus therefore knows the conduct that reflects the Father in His public ministry.

We saw it was prophesied that he would not strive, that you would not hear His voice in the street. Jesus was not quarrelsome. He was not somebody given to arguing with people out in a public area. He was not one who was always puffing Himself up and bragging about His accomplishments. He is described as "meek." In other places in God's word it says that the meek are going to inherit the earth.

He is also described as possessing humility, and humility is the foundational attitude enabling the Father to create His begotten sons into the image of Jesus Christ. This is because a humble person will yield to the Father's word. I think we can be assured that Jesus would reflect exactly

what the Father desired in His presentation of His Gospel.

We put these all together and I think it gives us valuable insight into Jesus' personality, especially, in this case, His public persona. Meekness is emphasized, and therefore Jesus would be what we would call "retiring" in appearance. He was not given to outward show in order to attract attention to Himself.

Meekness in no way indicates weakness, but rather a word study will show you that a meek person is one of strength who has the power, but is very restrained in the use of it. Therefore, Jesus was outwardly reserved, almost to the point of being withdrawn. He was not one to presumptuously push Himself forward, taking center stage and drawing attention to Himself at the expense of others. Now He was no shrinking violet. He was always ready to help, especially those he perceived as weak.

Let me carry this one step further. We are going to go to John 3 and see two great servants of God interacting with one another.

John 3:26 And they came unto John [the Baptist], and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him.

These men were concerned about John, that he was losing disciples to Jesus.

John 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

John the Baptist's faith, wisdom, and humility really came to the fore here in his understanding of this truth. Neither Jesus nor John perceived themselves as rivals for men's attention. There was no spirit of competition between them. Each saw himself as having been assigned a place in God's eternal plan, and that he had no right to lay claim to a place or an honor given to another by God. Each, by faith, allowed the Father to determine the course of their operation, and the success and the failure as men, the unconverted, might perceive their operation. These two men lived by faith. They were not competing.

I feel that what has happened out there in the greater church of God today is that these men feel they are competing with one another. That is what Satan's adversarial attitude does. Instead of cooperating, they compete in order to get for themselves. Things come out of their mouths that, I think if they understood, maybe they would not say those things.

What John the Baptist said here fits right into what Paul said in I Corinthians 4: 6-7: "What do you have that you have not been given?" John was content to be diminished and to see Jesus growing, because that glorified God. There is another aspect to this in I Peter 2: 23—a confirming thing to what I already said.

I Peter 2:23 Who, when he [Christ] was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him

that judges righteously:

There it is, right there. By faith, Jesus Christ, like John the Baptist, accepted what God was doing in His life, whether it was increasing or diminishing. Did not Jesus say, "Your will be done, and not mine"? Neither of these men presumptuously pushed themselves out in front, beyond what God was guiding them to do.

There was a very interesting thing that took place in the apostle Paul's life, and we are going to look at it in Philippians 1. Paul was in prison when he wrote this book. Just remember that.

Philippians 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Just a little aside is this. In this day and age of six billion people on earth, with all of this electronic mass communication, and all the general knowledge of Christianity's truth, for that person to claim that he is the only one preaching the gospel is really hard for me to believe. But that is what this person said. I wonder if this man knows what he is saying.

Interestingly, the apostle Paul was in prison. Meanwhile, outside the prison there were men (if you understand the whole story here, or at least more of it) who were preaching the gospel. Paul admitted that these men were preaching the gospel, and therefore I think we have to assume (and I think that we assume correctly) that the men he is speaking about here in verses 15, 16 and 17 were members of the Roman congregation of the church of God.

Some of these men were preaching the gospel with the idea of making Paul stay in prison and making his bonds more difficult than they already were. Paul knew that. Some were doing it in pretense; others were doing it joyfully in truth, and he rejoiced in that. You talk about a forgiving person. He said, "Ah, so what? If Christ is preached, good!" Do you know what he did there? He just turned the judgment over to God and let Him worry about it.

I want you to see that there is nothing new under the sun, and we are witnessing in this day and age where men in the church of God are competing against one another by puffing themselves up before others, trying to make people think they are the one sole representative of God, and that their group is the true church. I will let you judge the attitude. That is up to you. I will go no further in the judgment. I am only telling you that I do not think God judges this very kindly, because what these men are doing is just like they were doing to Paul. They were creating a division that was eventually going to boomerang on them.

Now what did Jesus do by way of contrast? You know what He did. We will read one little example of it. This is the first of the many signs, when He changed the water into wine. It says there:

John 2:11 This beginning of miracles [or signs] did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

Jesus just quietly operated and did the job that God gave to Him.

Now at the end of this sermon it may seem like somewhat of a deviation, but it is not. It fits into this. I just want to go through very quickly why we are keeping Pentecost on this day, the 15th, rather than on the 8th. They are wrong, and I think it points to a weakness that exists within the church of God today. I think that some of this weakness is a result of the very problems we had when the Worldwide Church of God was blown apart by God and that continues to this day. It has not been repaired yet, and what we are seeing with these groups competing with one another are the continuing affects of that very same weakness.

Exodus 23:16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field:

Everybody is overlooking that word "sown"—"which you have sown." God is requiring in this verse that the offerings that are made to Him have to come as a result of the works of His children's hands—from beginning to end; from the plowing of the field to the planting of the seed, to watching over it as it grows, and then the harvesting of it. It is a complete process, and that word "sown" is there in order to point out from God—"from beginning to end." "Whatever you offer to Me has to be part of you sowing and you reaping."

This is the beginning of the deviation that results in the miscounting of Pentecost that they are involved in. Do not forget that. God clearly states that the firstfruits must be made from what they, the Israelites, have sown.

Before we go to the next scripture can you think of any other similar case in the Bible where God gave instruction as to what He wanted to be offered? The one man did exactly as God said because he believed Him. The other one also made an offering, but he did not follow the instructions God gave him. Is that not clear? Cain and Abel. What does it say in the book of Hebrews? Abel believed; Cain did not. The one did exactly as God said; the other decided to offer whatever he wanted to offer.

Now was Cain a non-religious man? No. He comes to represent, to symbolize in the Bible, a person who may well indeed be religious, and has a religious bent maybe even toward the true God, but he is always doing things on his terms and not on God's terms. This seems like such a little thing, but it is not little at all. That one word "sown" makes all the difference in the world.

Let us pick up a principle in Leviticus 22. Again, it involves offerings made to God.

Leviticus 22:25 Neither from a stranger's hand shall you offer the bread [or the food] of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.

A stranger is a alien. A stranger in the biblical symbolism is an unconverted person. A stranger in biblical symbolism might also be called a Gentile, but it indicates the unconverted as opposed to the Israelite who was a covenant-maker with God, or the converted person who is a son of God.

It becomes very clear that the stranger—the unconverted—is not part of God's family. That person is not part of God's religion. That person is not worshipping the true God, even though he might be very religious, much like Cain. God said, "You shall not offer the bread of your God of any of these because their corruption is in them." Their corruption, brethren, is their idolatry—their unconversion. They are not under the blood of Jesus Christ. They have not been cleaned up. They are not pure and justified in the eyes of God. God will not accept their offerings.

You add this to Exodus 23:16, and now you have two factors: (1) The offering has to be made from something the Israelite had sown in the ground, and (2) anything that has been tainted by the Gentile is not acceptable before God.

Let us add something else to this. Here we have to go to Joshua 5. I will not go through all this because most of this is written down for your admonition. In Joshua 5, there is not one single indication that any offering was ever made. There is no mention of anything pertaining to offerings on, we will say, the First Day of Unleavened Bread—no altar, no sheep, nothing, not one single indication. Why? I have already told you why. They had nothing to offer.

Now here is what these groups are doing. They are saying that when Israel came into the land it was in the springtime. It was barley harvest time, and there was barley growing all over the place. That far what they are saying is true. So the harvest of the Canaanites became the Israelites' harvest because God gave the harvest to them.

Yes, it is true that Israel could eat of that harvest, but Israel could not offer that harvest to God because it was not acceptable. Yes, they could eat of it. They did not have to wait for the Wave Sheaf offering to be made because there was nothing to offer. So what do you do when you have nothing acceptable to God to offer? You do not offer. This whole thing is that simple.

Now, if there was no offering it absolutely destroys their conclusion that an offering was made here and, therefore, you can count the Wave Sheaf from the First Day of Unleavened Bread. There is no such authority there. This is impossible, because no offering was made.

For additional proof I want you to turn to Deuteronomy 12. I tell you, this thing blows everything completely out of the water. Remember, Deuteronomy is just before they went across the Jordan River. They were not in the land yet, so this is instruction for going into the land.

Deuteronomy 12:4-7 You shall not do so unto the LORD your God. But unto the place which the LORD your God shall [future tense] choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come: and there you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and

the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: and there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand unto, you and your households, wherein the LORD your God has blessed you.

Do you know what He is doing there? He told the Israelites, "When you go into the land I am giving you, you may not make a sacrifice anywhere until I tell you where you can do it." There is one thing more added.

Deuteronomy 12:8-11 You shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God gives you. But when you go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; there shall you bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow unto the LORD:

He is saying, "This is when you can begin making offerings and sacrifices again." Two qualifications: (1) "You cannot do it until I set up the Tabernacle in the place where I tell you that you can set it up," and (2) There has to be peace in the land. In other words, the conquering of the land is done. Do you understand that? God forbade them to make any offerings anywhere within Israel until the Tabernacle was set up. That took 7 years. That law was in force in Joshua 5.

There is a verse in Joshua 11 where Joshua is reported to have done everything Moses told him to do, and he did it.

Joshua 11:15 As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

Joshua obeyed Moses by not making any offering, and no Wave Sheaf. Moses said no Wave Sheaf—none of that until the Tabernacle is set up. The Tabernacle was not set up until Joshua 18. There was one exception, and that is something God commanded them to do in Deuteronomy 11. That is when they had the blessings and cursings from Mount Ebal and from Mount Gerizim.

Why can they not see this? It is so plain. It is so clear, but there is a blindness there. I do not know whether God has caused them to be blind to it, or whether they are blind because of the things that are happening that are keeping us apart—things keeping us from treating one

another civilly, honestly, and loving one another in those other groups, and getting together like we do within our own. I do not know, but I hope that some day they will come to see that they are wrong in what they are doing.

We are not going to celebrate Pentecost in this kind of situation until 2021, so there is a long time for that to be accomplished.