

We Are Unique!

Trust

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 22-May-94; Sermon #130A

I am going to begin this sermon by asking you to cooperate with me in a little experiment that we are going to have right at the very beginning. Let us see how well you can follow directions and let us see whether or not you trust me. So, would you please shut your eyes for just a minute while I continue to speak? I will not leave you alone. You just keep your eyes shut there for just a minute.

Now with that little introduction, are you beginning to wonder, "Do you really trust me?" Am I going to do something that might do you a little bit of harm or make you feel a little bit of embarrassment? You cannot see too much yet, can you? You might be able to see just a shading of light. However, there is not anything that you can really distinguish. You cannot make things out very well, can you?

I am going to tell you something. (Do not open your eyes yet.) What if I told you that there is a rat, how about a mouse, up here on the stage with me? Would you believe me? Do you really believe that there is a mouse on the stage with me? Okay! You can open your eyes now. You can see that it is Minnie Mouse. Minnie is up here with me!

Now there is a point to this little game we played here, this illustration. That is, before your eyes were opened you could not see things very well, could you? You could hear things that were being said, but the only thing you could see was a minor bit of light. There was nothing of any outline you could see very clearly. Nothing was distinguished very clearly. And no matter how hard you may have tried, even though I would have described something in a great deal of detail, with your eyes closed, you could not make things out very clearly, could you?

Things could go into your mind, but a clear distinguishing of what I would be telling you would not be there. You may even have felt just a bit foolish about that—maybe even suspicious that I was going to do something uncomfortable—aware that you could no longer see. Maybe you were unsure about where I was going, a bit of distrust; perhaps even a little bit of fear, because you were not sure of me, and maybe, at the very least, you felt a little bit foolish.

That is the way this world is. That is the way you and I were in regard to spiritual things. We got bits and pieces of information set into our minds. Therefore, we were never able to really discern spiritual things, and, as a result, we did not know where we were going.

I want you to begin this sermon with me in John 3:13, three verses before the most famous verse in the Bible. I want you to think about this principle in regard to this verse. I want you to think of it in relation to your own life in the past.

John 3:13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

I wonder how many times did you read that out of the Bible, hear a preacher at your Protestant or Catholic Church quote that scripture, in reference to something? How many times did you read that before you were converted? Perhaps in Sunday school, the teacher went over it. Perhaps you were a little bit more zealous, you attended Bible Study in the church, and you heard it there. Yet I would bet, if I were a betting man, that if you could recall going over that scripture, prior to your conversion, you never questioned your own belief about going to heaven on the basis of that scripture. Jesus Himself said that, "No one has ascended to heaven."

Are you beginning to see something develop here? Before a person is converted, they can read the Bible. But, they do not really get the stated clear truth from what they read.

We are going to develop this principle as we go through the early parts of this sermon because I want to use this sermon to illustrate to you and me, that we are unique.

I want it to be impressed upon your minds—that there is a difference. God has made a difference in our minds—a difference that is so great that it sanctifies us. It sets us apart in a way that we are distinct from others who have not had this opportunity of God doing this on our minds. Now look at to whom this was said. It was said to Nicodemus.

John 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

It is very interesting that there is a definite article before the word 'teacher.' It is to emphasize the fact that this man was in a position, which was unusual for most Israelites, because he was a part of the Sanhedrin. I would guess that he was very likely a Sadducee; no, he was a Pharisee named Nicodemus. It says in verse 1, he was very definitely a leader of the people and he had set himself up along with other Pharisees to be the teachers of Israel. In addition, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. It was as though it went in one ear and out the other, even though Jesus gave him what

you and I consider to be very clear physical analogies that are illustrations of something spiritual.

This was highly educated man, a doctor of the law of God, and he did not get it. It almost seems in the way Jesus said what He said, as if there was a bit of sarcasm there. "You, the teacher of Israel, and yet you cannot understand this simple analogy and its spiritual application?"

Nicodemus obviously did not get it. Nicodemus was coming at Christ, in the same way, with the same inborn, inherent blindness that every unconverted person has. Until that blindness is miraculously removed, we have absolutely no opportunity to take advantage of truth in the way God intended it to be taken advantage of.

Now that does not mean a human being is often by himself incapable of perceiving spiritual truth. What we need for salvation requires more than just being able to perceive isolated bits of spiritual truths. This is one of the major reasons why there are so many denominations in the world.

People split up according to what they are able to see clearly. In addition, these people split away from one group and they gather themselves together because they are in agreement with others who can see things in the same way that they can. Yet you and I, from our perspective, can look on these groups and say, "Hey, there they do not have it." They have some but they do not have it. Therefore, what God does in removing the blindness is more than to enable us to see isolated bits of spiritual truth that man, on his own, is able to see.

What Jesus is saying here is that no one has gone to heaven to experience its realities and receive instructions, and then return and give it to man. Christ is pointing to Himself as saying that He alone among all men has this experience and that He alone among all who ever lived is able to reveal it.

That is the important point in this sermon. We are dealing with revelation and it is revelation that makes us unique. Revelation is a miracle God works, so that we can eventually come to understand that we did not save ourselves. Moreover, we can come to understand that the efforts we make toward salvation are very puny indeed.

Deuteronomy 29:4 is a verse I hope you would inscribe in your memory banks so that we can understand and look at the Israelites in the right perspective.

Deuteronomy 29:4 Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and

eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.

God's freeing of these people from their bondage—His use of them in the journey to the Promised Land, His use of them in the Promised Land—was for an entirely different purpose at that time. The experiences that these people had are going to stand them in good stead. God did not use them for the purpose of abuse.

He used them because he was causing Moses and then others to reflect on their experiences in the wilderness. They could write those experiences under the inspiration of God, and you and I would have an accurate record that we could look back upon, understand the purpose of God, be humbled by it, and have the right perspective on our salvation.

Therefore, He never gave them the Spirit of God. No salvation was really offered to them, no forgiveness of sin, no Holy Spirit was given to them. They did not have access to Him. They were, in a sense, actors on the stage. God was moving them about so the record would be left for us.

Then, when they are resurrected they can look back on the record and hit themselves in the forehead and say, "Now I see." The scales will be removed at that time. The record is now written: He never gave them the Spirit of God. He never really revealed to them what he was doing with their lives.

They reacted to all those circumstances in a way that human beings would normally react without the miracle having been performed on them by God, and the opening up of their minds and the revelations of what this whole thing is all about.

I mentioned the scripture back in Hebrews the 11th chapter. This was a confirmation that Paul reflected upon there in the book of Hebrews—that God preached the gospel to these people, at least the gospel that was pertaining to them. They heard good news and yet because it was not mixed with faith, it did not do them any good.

So all through the wilderness trek and on to their death, neither they nor their relationship with God improved in any way. If anything, it deteriorated as they went along.

Now let us look at another Old Testament scripture because once they got into the land things really did not change. Now they are in the land and it is at least authentically under their control.

Judges 2:11-13 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LOORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LOORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LOORD to anger. They forsook the LOORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the LOORD was hot against Israel...

And it goes on. It is just a continuing saga.

I would tend to think that the context in which they experienced life would have helped. And you would think that somehow or another they would be able to make the relationships and learn from the history that was really so recent.

Have we Americans learned from our own history? Are we not repeating the mistakes of previous generations of Americans?

We just do not get it, do we? We do not learn. I do not know who it was, but I remember reading it in something that Harry Truman wrote. That is, those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. I think that someone earlier said it but I do not know who exactly it was at the time. So the story continues. It gets worse.

We are going over a very familiar thing here. Again, I want to enforce on our minds, I hope indelibly, that a miracle has occurred to us. And I want us to be thankful that this has occurred, to take advantage of it, and to not let it just muddle there in the back of our minds without doing anything about it.

Romans 3:9-11 What then? Are we better than they? [Now he is speaking from the standpoint of being a Jew: Are we Jews better than others?] Not at all, for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. [Let me say something backwards, correctly. In the light of just reading that again, I think what Paul says, "Are we any better? Are we Christians any better?"] As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God."

Oh, now, come on! That seems almost too astounding to agree with. But those are God's own words. God does not lie. There is nobody who ever lived, who ever sought after Him. Not even one person out of forty or fifty billion people who ever sought after

Him!

There is a logical answer to why—because nobody knows who to look for. Everybody comes up with his own image of God. That is what He speaks of. Nevertheless, everybody's image is wrong.

God shows that in the ritual of the Day of Atonement. It is so simply done. There are two goats. Both of them, by all appearances, are without blemish. God has to point out miraculously which goat is His and represents His Son. The other is a counterfeit that just looks like it might be the right one. That is the way it is, and why God can make an astounding statement like this. Everybody looks for a God in his own image, of his own image, I should say. But the scripture cannot be broken. Now, how are we to understand this?

Romans 10:1-2 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

It is that principle which, makes that statement in Romans 3 true—not according to knowledge—and that is the position from which everybody references God to. Nobody is approaching God with true knowledge until God Himself takes the initiative and begins to remove the blindness.

Romans 11:7-10 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded [hardened—the word there indicates what we call a callous on the skin. A callous develops.] Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always."

We find if we look further, it is not that God has actually put blinders on people's eyes, but rather that He has just allowed things to develop without His intervention. Therefore, people become blind, simply because God does not intervene in their lives.

Now, this "callous" that I mentioned, metaphorically, it means to make the heart dull and insensitive. And so by God's simply not intervening, the mind, which at birth would be

We Are Unique! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

open to receiving the truth of God, but since God does nothing, then society, through the parents first and then society at large, begins to impress upon the child things that are not true about God. And the callous begins to develop on the mind, until metaphorically, they are insensitive to the truth of God. That has happened to every single one of us since Adam and Eve.

We see the process very simply described in Genesis 3. It happens to us and it happens very quickly to us. This is why Mr. Armstrong, who used to warn especially the ministry, but I also heard him in sermons, say, "You better get to your children right away because there is somebody waiting out there who will not wait [meaning Satan] and begin to blind the children's eyes to the truths of God." And I heard Mr. Armstrong again say this in ministers' meetings. He said to the ministers, pointing to them with his fingers with a great deal of emphasis, he said, "You are your child's protector from Satan the Devil. And, if you do not do something, he [Satan] will."

All of us failed to some degree in doing that job because we do not move in and protect our children with the right kind of loving attitude, and the right kind of correction whenever it is needed in the right kind of positive teaching, all along the road. Satan does not wait since society is all around. They take over the religious and spiritual instruction of our children. And gradually, slowly but surely, the callous hardens on the mind and the child, you and me, those after us, become insensitive to God and so we do not know truth. We do not recognize it when it hits us—until God works the miracle that He works.

Paul goes so far in Romans 8:7 to say that the carnal mind is not only insensitive to God, it is actually at war against God. That is how bad it gets. Nevertheless, there is an enmity there against God.

This peculiarity in mankind has existed since the very beginning and we find Job making a comment in reply to, I believe it was Zophar. He is talking about the "evil."

Job 21:14 Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.

Now would you say this?

It is very likely that you never consciously would say this. Yet in our actions we do say it. We have the saying that actions speak louder than words. And so we ignore God.

We may be religious, but by and large we ignore the true God. We ignore him because by this time we are insensitive to Him.

Job 21:15 "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?"

That is pretty much the way it is. It is becoming worse and worse, is it not? Paul prophesied that as we approach the end, evil men shall grow worse and worse. It is going to become so obvious.

Jesus prophesied it is going to be just like the days of Noah when every imagination that was thought was only evil continually. Because you see God has allowed all stops to be pulled out of the way. And evil is picking up speed as it goes along, just like leavening in a piece of bread, until everything is going to be so totally leavened. It is going to be absolutely corrupt—so corrupt that if it was not for the mercy of God the best thing to do would be to just destroy the whole thing. But in order that His Name be glorified and His purpose goes through we know that He is not going to do that.

You see He has given you and me an opportunity to be spared from that, to do something with our lives by making choices based upon the revelation He gives to us. It puts us right in the middle where our responsibility, if I can put it this way, is merely to choose to follow what He says.

So the scales have been removed, the revelation has been made in order that we might be able to freely choose in a world that is still in shackles in bondage, because they are not free to choose. The real insensitivity to Him is still there. There is really nothing that they can do except to go in the direction that they see fit. Because the blinders are still on, they are staggering around metaphorically like a drunk, who is drunk with the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

So we see then here it is a general statement regarding all the wicked, and that includes all of us, until God begins to do what He does. This enmity towards God was known way back in the book of Job. It was not new with the Apostle Paul. He picks up the principle right out of Job. And he knew what he was saying was true because it has been recorded in God's word all the way back then.

Now let us go to John 8:43 where we continue to lay layer upon layer here, so that we really see and appreciate what miraculous thing has been done to us. Now we update this to Jesus' day.

John 8:43 "Why do you not understand My speech? [He says] Because you are not able to listen to My word."

They had ears to hear, but that is not what He meant. They heard the sound and the sound formed themselves into words and words that they comprehended to some degree, but they did not really relate to what He was saying. It just did not hit the right chord so that they could make the right use. And I can almost see Jesus saying in exasperation, "Why do you not understand?" Then He goes on to explain why.

John 8:44-45 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.

John 8:47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.

I could turn around what Jesus said and paraphrase it. Because what He said was, "You are unable to hear what I say." He is implying that the problem is inherent. And it was in this: It was as if He was speaking in one language and they were hearing in another language, so that what He said was totally incomprehensible to them.

If you are well aware of what is said in John 8 you will understand that the context had to do with freedom, with liberty. We are looking here in Chapter 8 at a people who were in bondage, they were in slavery and they did not even know it. That is why they said, "We have never been in bondage." They had a measure of liberty, a political liberty, a certain measure of it. Even then they were under the heels of the Romans. Even then they had a certain amount of freedom, and apparently they considered it enough for what they needed for their life.

Ordinarily, the Roman way was this: Once the nation was crushed, give the people quite a measure of liberty as long they behaved themselves.

You see, Jesus was speaking one thing, but they were comprehending it in an entirely different way. He was speaking within spiritual parameters and thinking about the Kingdom of God; they were hearing in political parameters, and thinking about the here and now. So it just did not jive.

They became this way in the same way that you and I did, in that they lived and operated in a world of lies. That is why Jesus mentioned Satan was a murderer and a liar from the very beginning. And all the ways of this world, which seem to be so right carnally, are really nothing but founded upon lies, distortions and falseness, and the truth of God to somebody reared in that kind of circumstance, situation, comes out to them as so much 'gobble-de-gook'. The mind simply does not relate.

Okay, you say, "John Ritenbaugh, you're talking about the unconverted world. What about Jesus' disciples? Surely, they got it." Did they? We are going to see they did not get it very well either. They got more than the world did. But even they, right in the presence of our Savior for three and a half years, even they could not put the pieces together properly.

And part of the reason they could not do it was the same reason why you and I do not function as well spiritually as we should, because there is a carry-over from the world. It takes quite a while for the thinking to be converted.

What we are going to look at here is something that is really a frequent occurrence in the New Testament.

Luke 18:31-34 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

There might be a number of reasons why that occurred. But, I have already mentioned one: we carry with us quite a measure of trash, baggage, refuse from out of the world and it takes a long time for it to be overcome. They may not have gotten it because they did not want to see what He was speaking about come to pass.

I think that you know what the normal Jewish concept of the Messiah is. The normal concept, even today, of the Jew is that the Messiah is going to be a man, and that this man is going to be used to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Right now the favorite candidate is Rabbi Schmearson from New York City. You'll see his name every once in a while put forward in a newspaper, that this group is proclaiming him being as

the Messiah. Unfortunately, the Messiah is around ninety years old, he is blind and the last I heard, he was on life support equipment.

It is the same kind of thinking that was in their minds. And they did not want to hear their friend Jesus—whom they admired and respected and were by this time worshipping, beginning to recognize who He was—they did not want to see Him put through pain. They did not want to see Him hurt, and they did not want to see Him killed, because their dreams, their hopes, and their concepts that they brought into the relationship with Christ did not permit that kind of a Messiah. Therefore, it was that they were at war with the truth they were receiving from Him. So, they were not sensitive to what He was saying. If they were really sensitive, though they might have been saddened, they would have agreed that this was what the word of God said had to be done. And they would have accepted this in a good manner.

So the mind fights, because that callous is in there. I think you know that time and time again, Jesus had to take His disciples aside and explain to them what it was He had just said to the public. There is really a vivid illustration of this in Luke chapter 24.

Luke 24:1-4 Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments.

Now, had He not told them quite a number of times that He was going to be in the grave three days and three nights?

Three days before, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had told them that this was going to occur. You see what I mean about the mind fighting against the truth of God?

They did not want to fight against the truth. Do we begin to see why Paul would say that there is an enmity there? We would have never gotten as far as we have gotten without the miracle that God has already worked.

Are you are beginning to see something else about it? That is, He does not stop working—because even though there is an initial removing of the blindness, it has to be a work in progress in which God is constantly removing blindness. The miracle continues right up until the day that God allows us to die or He sends His Son and we

are changed. In other words, the removing of the blindness is not a one-time thing. It is a process that continues to unfold.

Luke 24:10-11 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.

Three and a half years with Immanuel; three and a half years with God in the flesh, day in, day and night, day in and day out; in the night, sitting around fires, cooking their meals, talking, walking, interacting with, receiving instructions on a personal basis; and His resurrection, regardless of how many times He said it, seemed to them as idle tales.

It was too astounding—perhaps that is the reason. "Oh! This can't be!"

Now wait a minute! Had He not just resurrected Lazarus just a short time before? They already had a witness that it could be done. It happened right in front of their eyes! And their words seemed like idle tales.

You do not think that there is not a miracle taking place in you? It is, very much. Let us drop down a little bit further.

Luke 24:13-16 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself [the resurrected Christ] drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

He engaged them in conversation and He engaged them in such a way that they were required to report to Him all those things that had occurred in the last several days.

Luke 24:21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel...

There we have it right there, they thought the Messiah was to be a man. But now their hopes were dashed. And they were in the depths of discouragement. You see that the blinders had not been removed yet. The Messiah was going to be God, the Messiah

was going to be the immortal, immutable, the All Powerful, Almighty Creator—who is a spirit being, not a human being.

Luke 24:21-22 "...And indeed besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened [Then they reported on what occurred earlier that day]. And certain women of our company arrived at the tomb early and astonished us."

You see they did not believe.

Luke 24:28-30 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened.

Now the scripture does not indicate that God in any way actually, forcefully closed their eyes. Rather something now occurs. Maybe it was in the way that He did something, something with which they were familiar. Maybe it was a little idiosyncrasy that He had with which He broke bread. I do not know how He did it but they were eating there and He took their loaf of bread and broke it in such a way. Bang! The lights went on and they recognized Who it was that they were talking to.

Luke 24:31-32 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

Then He went back and they went back.

My eye just caught something in verse 25 and it would be good to look back now:

Luke 24:25 [While Jesus was walking with them] Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

That word 'fool' means someone who is inconsiderate.

Tear that word apart. It means somebody who is not considering the knowledge, the truth that they already had, the teaching that He had given to them. They were not considering the events of the day in the right context. They were inconsiderate. Is not that said in such a way that He expected them to be able to come to the right conclusion as to Who it was that was walking beside them and expounding the scriptures? Yes, I think it does.

He also called them, "slow of heart." It means someone who is backward, someone who is not easily persuaded. That child-like mind was not yet all that developed in these men.

So what do they do? They easily gave in to doubtfulness. It actually came to the place where He had to miraculously make Himself known to them. Let us go a little bit further because the story continues to develop.

Luke 24:36-37 Now as they said these things [the "they" being two men on the road to Emmaus], Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.

At least we will say this: The disciples were consistent. Every one of them reacted the same way. You and I are in good company. They just acted like human beings who did not believe the truth.

You can see that there is a difference between the desire to believe it and the actual believing of it so that it becomes a part of our lives. The Jews have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. "Not according to true knowledge" is what the implication is here.

You and I are operating from a mind that has a natural bent away from God. It is something that is inherent within us (inherent in the sense that we have been pre-programmed with it by the time God begins to work His miracle), pre-programmed away from God, so that there is a consistent attitude of wanting to go its own way in disbelief.

So I think that you can begin to see where this leads: and that is (we have to recognize this), that it exists within us, and that there is a sincere desire within us to do what is right. Yet conscious effort has to be made to choose the right. That is what builds good

character.

God works us into a position where we are free to make the choice in a way that others who do not have the truth revealed to them are not free. He has removed the scales but it is not a one-time thing and it is not all done at once. But rather it is something that progresses, each one of us at a different rate, at the rate with which we are capable of using it. However, He always puts us in a position where we have to consciously make a choice. Otherwise, we are not living by faith. Otherwise, the character is not going to be built.

We can see that God brings us to a place where the mind is opened to the truth—it is receptive to the truth—but we have to use the truth in order to make sure that we follow the direction that He wants us to go in.

II Corinthians 4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

We all know what it says in Revelation 12:9, that the dragon has deceived the whole world. But has the impact of that really sunk in? This doubtful resistance that is in every one of us does not go away easily. It remains in conversion. It is still there; it still needs to be fought against; it still needs to be overcome. And if we do not exercise ourselves to be aware and chose to go the right way, it will continue to very strongly exert its influence. Much can be done to lessen its influence.

What can be done, of course, is to continue to work to develop a relationship with God through study and prayer. As we continue to exercise His way, the influence of Satan the Devil begins to slip away. There is a kind of "bad" side to that, in that as soon as his influence starts to slip away, he tries harder to make sure that it does not leave us entirely. In other words, he steps up the intensity of his pressure on us as well.

But do not be disheartened—because remember: I Corinthians 10:13 is still in the book. God only gives us what we can handle and He provides a way of escape. God is always there protecting us, making sure that Satan does not increase the pressure to the place that we are unable to bear it. You can be sure that as you go along and Satan steps up the pressure—you are going to be equal to the occasion. Do you have faith in that? You better have faith, because the intensity of the pressure is going to get greater and greater.

I mentioned up in Chicago that the world has been hit with a flood of deception. Evelyn and I are wondering whether in reality this is not the flood that is being talked about there in Revelation 12. The flood that Satan spewed out of his mouth—the flood—and chased after the woman—the flood of deception, a flood of pressure, I should say, spiritual pressure. You connect this to II Thessalonians 2 and you begin to find that there is an apostasy taking place and people are being washed away from the truth. Moreover, it is only those who love the truth—those who do not believe the lie that is flooding out from Satan—who are going to be spared in the end. Again, God puts us in the middle where we have to make the choice.

The pressure is intensifying and it is going to get worse because we are only seeing the beginning edges of the flood. And you know that Revelation 12 continues to prophesy that it's going to get greater and greater, so that when the false prophet comes on the scene and he does signs and wonders that are so great, maybe even the elect might be deceived. What it really means is that if it is possible for you to be deceived you will be deceived. So deception is flooding the world.

We have to be prepared for that. If we are not prepared, we are going to get swept away by this flood of deception that is coming on us.

Why does God allow Satan to blind this world? It is because God is working out His purpose of reproducing Himself through the creation of godly character by means of faith—faith working together with free moral agency. And until God frees us from our blindness to the truth, we are not really free to be able to exercise our free moral agency. Because we do not know where God is, we do not know what God's true purpose is, we do not know the way that is going to lead us to the completion of that purpose. And so He begins to open these things up, and then we have to exercise the free moral agency by faith!

And God in His wisdom decided that the best thing to do was to allow Satan to do his dirty work, and God would take advantage of that dirty work, and actually make it work for His betterment and ours. But something even greater could be created out of the mess that He allows Satan to create. We may not exactly like it but that is the parameter within which we have to work.

God could see that in reality the cards are greatly stacked against mankind, because mankind has to deal with his own nature, which even by all itself has somewhat of a pull towards self-centeredness. In addition to that, there is an alluring and distracting world and then there are evil and invisible spirit beings tugging away. In addition to that, God's plan involves the passage of a great amount of time—time that is far greater than the

life of any human being.

A witness has to be made to each person of sufficient dimension so that each and every person is made to prove, that given the right of free choice, all men would inevitably make the wrong choice. Now, has God proved it to you? This is important to salvation. I think that God wants to make sure that each one of us comes to the place where we distrust human nature. He wants us to pause before we make decisions about things that involve morality, ethics, spirituality, relationships with other people, relationships with government, and decisions that involve relationships with Him.

Now we have done this in order that, eventually, virtually everybody will be led to the inevitable conclusion that God was right all along and that there is only one way that will work, and that is His.

In very simple terminology, this is what God shows occurred in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, exercising their free moral agency under the influence of Satan, decided there was a better way that this could be worked out. They made the wrong choice. And every human being who has ever lived after them has made choices that are similar in nature to what Adam and Eve did.

Until we come to the place where we are willing to admit to God and ask for His forgiveness—not for only for what we have done, but for what we are—we are not even yet ready mentally to begin the journey, because, until we get there, we are not in a position where we are going to really consciously make the choices to go the right way.

Matthew 13:10-11 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven..."

A big thing right there: "It has been given to you." It is not something that they discovered. It was something in which God took the initiative and gave them even as He has given you and me—the same thing. He gave it. He did not have to. He was not forced to. But out of His mercy and out of His desire to see you share life with Him in the Kingdom of God, He gave it—the ability to see the mystery.

Matthew 13:11-13 ... now to them it has not been given. "For whoever has, to him more will be given, [It is not all given at once. It is given as we are able to use and as we make use, He keeps adding to it.] and he will have abundance [actually more than we need at that particular stage in our

We Are Unique! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

growth]; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [Connect this to John 8:43-47.]

Matthew 13:14-16 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.

God works this miracle, but it does not end there because we have our part to play. Could Israel have ever gotten out of Egypt if they had chosen not to walk out? The answer to that, of course, is no. No matter how much God does that is miraculous on His part, we can frustrate the whole process.

We have such power given to us because God restrains Himself that we can actually frustrate all the power of the universe which is in the mind and in the hand of God—by simply refusing to take advantage of what He makes available to us. Now we do not like to think of ourselves as doing this.

My concern, of course, is that we do not do it. My concern is that we take advantage of this unique and miraculous occurrence taking place in our lives, because God, for whatever is in His mind, initiated it personally for you.

He brought you into contact with Him through the Church of God —almost everybody here through Herbert W. Armstrong. Some of you did not come directly through Mr. Armstrong but came through your parents. God in His wisdom, for whatever it is, has always put a man between Himself and those with whom He is dealing. Sometimes, it was the man Jesus Christ. Sometimes, it was a prophet. Sometimes, it was an apostle. Always, there is a man in there.

Yet there are people who think that they can go off on their own and somehow be independent of other humans. God's word says that is impossible. He always works through the chain that He has established. He is consistent in that. It is a good principle to remember. The apostles learned it from the man Jesus Christ, they in turn passed it on to others, who in turn passed it on to others, and others to others until it came down

We Are Unique! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to Herbert W. Armstrong, and he passed it on to us.

There are people out there, I warn you, who are doing everything they possibly can to destroy the name, the reputation—the work—that was built through Herbert W. Armstrong. This is not to say the man was perfect, but the work was done—through him.

Just remember that, as you get literature from others who have separated themselves away, and tried to destroy you through false doctrine that God did not put into his church through Mr. Armstrong.

You might think that we are doing something here with Pentecost that did not come through Mr. Armstrong. Yes, it did—because this is the way he counted Pentecost from 1936 on. Whether the wave sheaf fell 'in' or 'out', he counted it from the weekly Sabbath within. There are people who are coming at you with calendars, who are coming at you with sacred names, things that have a show (apparently they call it wisdom), but God did not establish them in his church with Mr. Armstrong. You better remember that. If it were that important to the end time church, he would have established it through Mr. Armstrong.

What kind of God is it who establishes his church at the end and then leads you astray by not giving you the right calendar by which to work? That is ridiculous—to conceive of a God who would do something like that.

Beware of what is happening. Be on your guard. You can see, I can see, not because of Mr. Armstrong, but because God allowed us to see that this was the man through whom He was working. Now you can see what is happening to the Church of God, as they depart from the doctrines that God established through Mr. Armstrong. I will let you judge that yourself.

Satan is doing his work well. He is flooding the Church of God with heresy, and apostasy has occurred.

We have what we have because God in His mercy, by His spirit, worked on our spirit to enable us to be put into a position by which we can choose. Therefore, now the choice is ours. A miracle has occurred. The truth is being given to us. God is continuing to work with us. And I know you understand, that the Exodus story and the story of Israel in the wilderness concerns the continuing process of development. What you need to learn from the story in the wilderness is that despite what Israel did, God continued to supply their needs. He is a faithful God and He will bring his people into the Land.

We Are Unique! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Our responsibility is to take advantage of what He has done to us in freeing us, in making us unique, and that while we go through the wilderness, we continue to make the right choices, not the wrong choices that Israel made, but the right choices of following the truth of God.

And even as He faithfully brought those very erring people into the land, He will bring His people into the land. Only this time it will be a spiritual inheritance that we have. But make sure you understand, that you recognize, that you honor God, by making use, in the right way, of your unique position in knowing and understanding truth.