

No Failsafe Needed

God's Plan Moves Forward

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We are going to start the sermon this afternoon with several foundational scriptures so familiar to almost everyone who has even merely read the Bible that you probably know them without even turning there. However, we need to have them set in our mind before we go further. Please turn with me to the very first verse in the Book of Beginnings, Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

As we all know, God does not create chaos and confusion so something devastating happened during the time between what is recorded in Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. Now turn with me to what precipitated the cataclysmic events and what God has to say about it. First of all, we will be turning to Isaiah 14.

Isaiah 14:12-19 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened 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 also sit upon the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and who destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?’ All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, everyone in his own house, but you are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch, like the garment of those who are slain, thrust through with a sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a corpse trodden underfoot.”

Now let us go over to Ezekiel 28, referring to the same situation with a little bit different angle, and we will be reading again from verses 12 through 19.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, until iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they

might gaze at you. You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from their midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever.'"

Here then we can look at the source of the devastating shambles of the earth as we see in Genesis 1:1-2 but also God's clear statement of what happens when anyone presumptuously decides for themselves that the standards of righteousness are their own standards and defile His holy purpose within the creation as Satan did.

Now let us go back to the book of beginnings and once more we will pick it up after the re-creation.

Genesis 1:26-29 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps over the earth." So God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him; male and female, He created them. Then God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."

Genesis 2:7-9 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:15-18 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 3:1-7 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Throughout the last few years of his life, the Two Trees in the Garden of Eden seemed to be a hallmark reference of almost every message Herbert Armstrong gave during that time. They became such an obvious part of his work in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, that many of his detractors would condescendingly say, "There he goes again, talking about the Two Trees." But brethren, this was no mere feeble-minded redundancy of an old man, as Satan led some to mockingly say. Rather this was a God-inspired emphasis to us, that within these Two Trees was the key to understanding the very foundation of our eternal relationship with our Father. Everything that has happened over the last 6,000 years and beyond that, all the way back to before the creation of the earth, is part of a vital object lesson that God has been purposefully teaching all will be eventually fully in His image and the lesson's root are within those Two Trees.

Hopefully by the end of this message we will see how this also ties right into John Ritenbaugh's closing statement at the end of the sermon he gave on the Sabbath during the Feast of Tabernacles, when he said that "Faith, hope, and love are eternal qualities that will last forever." During that statement then, as well as witnessing the events of recent weeks as I prepared this sermon, which has been on my mind and in preparation for a long time, really made me appreciate even more deeply the awesome work that God is doing right now to the smallest detail in order to make sure His holy people appreciate His perfection and sovereignty—His sovereign authority over all things all the time.

We are going to take a bit of a turn here, and it may seem to be out of place for now, but I hope by the end of the message you will see that it has everything to do with why Herbert Armstrong spent so much time pointing God's holy people to those Two Trees.

There is a word used in the engineering design process in both equipment and standard operating procedures that is shorthand for an attempt by the engineers to consider all possible design failures and their ramifications and resolutions. The term is failsafe. As defined in part by Wikipedia, it says "A failsafe in engineering is a design feature or practice that in the event of a specific type of failure inherently responds in a way that will cause no or minimal harm to other equipment, the environment or to people." A system being failsafe means not that failure is impossible or improbable, but rather than the system's design prevents or mitigates unsafe consequences or the system's failure. That is, if and when a failsafe system fails, it is safe or at least no less safe than when it was operating correctly. Since many types of failure are possible, analysis is used to examine failure situations and recommend safety design and procedures.

A very simple example of a failsafe, brethren, is the hold down bar on a powered lawnmower. The only way to start and to keep the mower running is for the operator to keep the spring-loaded bar held tightly against the handle of the machine. The minute the operator lets go of the machine's handle, the bar springs up and the engine turns off. Supposedly the bar is installed in such a way that it makes it impossible for the operator to leave the machine running unattended or even reach the mower blades without releasing the bar and thus turning the machine off.

Simply put, and in the broad application of the principle, failsafe is mankind's attempt to foresee each possible option for success or failure and circumvent the undesirable consequences of faulty equipment or systems. However, with men this does not always work because of the inability to possibly anticipate every situation and the individual response of who is operating the machine.

I would like to now ask all of us a question to keep in the back of our minds for the remainder of this sermon. Does our great God need, or ever need, this kind of failsafe designed into His way of life? Before I go any farther, I will give you the answer. It is unequivocally no, He does not!

By its very definition and purpose, a failsafe implies failure due to equipment and/or circumstances. But God's way of life will never fail to produce exactly the results He intends because He is absolutely sovereign, and He Himself never fails, and can always be trusted. Within His sovereignty, He has permitted disruptions because of His freely-given gift to men and angels of the ability to choose in order to accomplish what He has purposed from the beginning. But even these disruptions are within His purpose, and should never be considered beyond His control to continue His perfect way of life for eternity in accord with His will.

Back in 1962 when I just 12 years old, the world had come the closest to the publicly known brush with nuclear war and possible destruction of all mankind. Fidel Castro, along with Che Guevara, had led a revolution in Cuba that replaced one brutal tyrant, Batista, with another, Castro, in 1959. But unlike the U.S. friendly Batista regime, Castro was a puppet for the Soviet Union that was moving to strike communism through South and Central America. In 1961, the CIA had supported a Cuban expatriate attempt to invade and retake Cuba from Castro. When President Kennedy recanted on a commitment of military support for the effort, the CIA-led invasion was routed at a bad pace. This was seen by the Soviets as a sign of weakness by the United States. In October of 1962 they began secretly installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles from off the coast of Florida.

The whole nation and the world was on edge for 13 days of stumbling into a nuclear nightmare. As Richard Reeves wrote in his book *Profile of Power* about President Kennedy, his generals did not trust Kennedy, and Kennedy did not trust his generals. They wanted to invade, and quite frankly Kennedy did not know what to do.

I remember as a boy of 12, my parent's fears were obvious as we watched the nightly news for the next week. But only by the grace of God, and I am certain for no other reason, the situation was resolved and men went back to the business of simple minded thinking that we were actually in control. That same year, 1962, a novel was published which to this day is one of the best reads for getting a feel of the terror that lay beneath the Cold War era and mankind's foolishness in general for taking to ourselves what only belongs to God in determination of good and evil.

The novel was called *Failsafe* which was made into an extraordinarily good movie two years later. Both the book and the movie perfectly portrayed the sense of terror engendered by the Cold War and the ever-present threat of global self-destruction. *Failsafe* was also another sobering example of the untenable situations that both men and angels face when taking to ourselves something that never has been or ever will be a right of any other than our Father in heaven. For all eternity, He is only One who has the right to determine what is good and what is evil.

Failsafe dealt with what happened when a group of U.S. B-52 bombers erroneously received a go order because of a malfunction in the failsafe system that was designed to prevent such an event from ever happening. There were multiple layers to the problem that caused the failsafe system to malfunction, including a virulent lack of trust not only between the Soviet Union and the United States, but within the countries themselves among the military and civilian leadership. The bottom line, by the end of the book and the end of the movie, the President of the United States, a "Kennedy like" type of figure, found himself forced to make a good faith deal with the Soviet Premier,

specifically named Khrushchev in the book. When one of the bombers gets through the Soviet defense systems, drops its hydrogen payload, and incinerates Moscow, the President's only means for averting global nuclear war is by sending another B-52 to do the same to New York City killing 9 million of his own people.

To this day, both the book and the movie are a terrifying but perfect example of what happens when anyone but God takes to themselves the right to the knowledge of good and evil and right and wrong.

Only our Father can know perfectly what will produce and continue to produce life for eternity. And that will never change, brethren. Neither men nor angels will ever have the right that only belongs to our Father in heaven. The entire creation will always be living according to faith, hope, and love in perfect accord with our Father's direction. This is the only way, a way that never requires a failsafe, because God never fails. And, neither will all those who walk according to His love. We will never be faced with any one of the unconscionable decisions that have become part and parcel to those who take it to themselves in this world, something that was never theirs in the first place. And, we should not be standing with them if God is the One that we are following.

How well are we truly living this way of life now as those who have already been set apart and made holy to God? Do we really trust God's sovereign control of things? Or are we still putting ourselves in opposition to the perfect will of our Father? "Judgment has started with the household of God," as Peter said. And as John said during his sermons on Ecclesiastes, "Everything matters." If we are not being faithful at this time, in this place, will our Father be able to trust us to be faithful to His will for eternity? Please turn with me to Matthew 6. We will be reading through verses so familiar with almost anyone who has ever picked up a Bible. These are Jesus Christ's instructions.

Matthew 6:5-10 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. "But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

If we are to hallow God's name, we are to be faithfully doing His will now, just as faithful angels who determined to remain faithful to Him when Satan determined that he had a better way. They truly believe, as we must, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Do we really believe this, or we merely going through motions like a hypocrite? Talking the talk, but neglecting to walk the walk in faith, hope, and love that we are expected to do for eternity and which we should have already started as God's holy people set apart from this world.

The Word who was God in the flesh, though divested of His rights, privileges, and glory, was still God with us. And He only looked to the Father's will above His own. Please turn with me to Matthew 26. Remember, this is coming from God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 26:37-39 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is

exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Matthew 26:42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

How distressed are we in the times in which we live, and yet how faithful are we in submitting to our Father's will and staying out of His way as He determines the kings and kingdoms that He raises and lowers? Brethren, unlike the rest of the world, we are under judgment now to faithfully walk according to the law of God that never fails.

As we wrap up this message, please turn with me to I John 4.

I John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

And now down to verse 16, and we are reading all the way through I John 5:4.

I John 4:16-21 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

I John 5:1-4 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also love him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

This is the love that never fails. This is the love that will abide forever, and should be the marching orders for our lives now as it will be for faithful men and angels throughout eternity. It is the Father's will to be done now and forever.

Brethren, we are talking about this today in a world that continues to take to itself of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, reaping its deadly consequences while thinking they truly have a true failsafe system in place. But, we are set apart to know better. Judgment has begun with us, and we need to understand that our Father's way is the only way, and that will never change for eternity. Failure to live His way of life is not an option for Him, or those whom He has called to Him. The solutions of men are but foolishness to God, but we have been set apart from them now.

Brethren, our job right now, and for eternity, is not to eat for ourselves from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, nor follow the failsafe plans of angels or men. It is our job now to follow this very simple formula that John Ritenbaugh gave in a sermon over 30 years ago. In keeping with I John 4 and 5, by trusting God and His commandments that never fail forever, I would like to

read you that simple formula which says, "If you keep the law of God, motivated by the love of God, you will receive the life of God."