

God Works In Mysterious Ways (Part One)

John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)
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I am going to revisit the sermons that I began at the Feast of Tabernacles. As far as I am concerned I did a terrible job there at the Feast. We are going to begin by looking at four verses, one right after the other. So if you will turn to Isaiah I will just expound these briefly. I am not going to go into depth, but just to give a good summary of what they are pointing out.

God says through His prophet:

Isaiah 55:6-7 “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

Looking over this chapter, I wondered when it was that the Isaiah said these things, when this person lived, and what was going on in the nation at the time. I finally came to the conclusion that what is in this chapter could have been written in an almost timeless location, since it, at first glance, appears to be addressed to Israelites in Jerusalem. However, after some thought, I concluded it does not really matter where the people addressed are. It is simply addressed to people who are under the burden of being separated from the fulfillment of the promises regarding the restoration of Israel, and the arrival of the Promised Seed.

It sounds like something that we are kind of going through as well. We are looking for the arrival of the Promised Seed. And we have some of the same feelings that these people undoubtedly had at that time. So it is timeless.

The pertinent question is, “Why are they in the condition of separation from God?” The reason is because the nation has sinned, and it has departed so badly from God, that where they are matters not in the big picture. They are

separated from Him because of sin. God is comfortingly, within the chapter, and mercifully appealing to them to repent of leaning on their own understanding. He is telling them that He is holding the way open for them. If they will only repent, He will forgive.

Now that does not come within those couple of verses I read. It is a much broader picture. I just wanted to let you know that these people were in a condition where they were separated from God.

Now let us turn to Proverbs 16. This is a very familiar scripture.

Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

This verse identifies a major cause of why the Israelites became separated from God. Rather than following the laws of God, which are indeed always right, they used their own reasoning which seemed right to them, but the failure was proof their way only *seemed* right. The problem, brethren, was that the Israelites took their own advice rather than God's.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

People demonstrate their maturity by how well they respond to sound advice. Obviously, the Israelites did not respond well to sound advice. Sound advice would always come from God, but mankind has a long history of rejecting God's sound advice in favor of his own foolishness, that he considers wise.

Proverbs 3:5 (Amplified Version) Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind, and do not rely on your own insight, or understanding.

Now these scriptures pretty much define what this sermon is about, but they also describe what mankind as a whole does not do. Mankind simply does not follow God's laws faithfully, even the Israelites, who had the counsel of God, before whom God sent many prophets. They never followed it for a very long period of time. They did it for a while as long as they had good

leadership from someone like a David; they would follow because a man of character was leading. But once they were on their own, they fell back into their own habits once again.

Brethren, we have a nature that is bent toward rejecting things associated with God. People will follow a man, but it seems almost impossible to get humans to follow God.

However, there is yet another scripture I am going to include within the mix here at the beginning of this message. I will give you four reasons, partly because of my experience during the recent Feast struggling with my sermons.

Let me put it this way: (1) my experience during the recent feast, struggling (that is my word) with my sermons, (2) because of a secondary principle taught by this scripture I will give you (I am looking a little bit further), (3) because many children raised in the church, who—unlike Timothy, the evangelist associated with the apostle Paul, who was raised in the church by a grandmother and a mother—wander into the world thinking that it is better. Why did they wander away? They do so leaning on their own counsel, and (4) because many of us cannot seem to understand a simple reason why we have so much trouble overcoming.

Let us turn to this scripture.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Now this sermon is not directly intended to be a childrearing sermon, though childrearing is indeed within the mix, because the truth that this scripture teaches is double edged. On the one hand, it has a positive aspect, and that positive aspect is that the proper training of a child early in life will endure throughout his life. God is honest. That is what *will* happen.

Because of this truth being placed within the book of Proverbs, the implication is that the way he *should* go is God's way taught verbally and exemplified by the parents. There are major benefits that accrue to the child as a result.

The secondary principle is negative, not positive but negative. It is that if the parents do not submit to this truth, the world will, under Satan and his fellow demons, move into the gap vacated by the parents, and *they* will do the early training, and their anti-God traits will settle in the child's heart; those traits will be the ones that endure and the fruits they produce will, indeed, accrue and endure. And they will be virtually impossible to overcome except through God's miraculous grace. So if we do not do the job, the demons will. The world will. And they, their traits, will become our children's traits. That is why they leave the church.

This also is the answer to principle number four as well in that they are in our hearts, too. Because in many cases our parents in all probability did not carry through with their responsibility consistently and thoroughly all through life, and we are dogged by the influence to think like the world. It is just there. It is almost like it is absorbed within us in our hearts like a sponge.

Now in most cases the poor child training was largely the result of ignorance, sometimes laziness on the part of the parents. But we need to turn our attention to the source of what we are now. It ought to be clearly evident to all of us examining the Bible and man's own historical records, that in relation to God and therefore to all major issues of life, mankind has and is, to this day, relying on his own understanding. Is that clear? I mean, that is so evident, just simply by observing what is happening in the United States of America.

I struggled with the series of sermons that I prepared before the Feast, and then during the Feast, and then following the Feast. They were one of those items that never really felt right to me, and I was very unsettled mentally regarding all four of them. The whole series never felt organized to me. I never felt as though they were heading anywhere that was positive, that is, that really fit into my mind, and to the Feast as well. I never felt that they were helpful, and that was my major problem during this Feast of Tabernacles.

I just told Evelyn yesterday I think that was the most difficult Feast I have ever experienced in my life. But I persisted anyway. I completely reorganized the entire series twice while the Feast was underway. I was

busy, but I still did not do any good as far as I was concerned. It gradually came to my mind that what was happening was partially that my spiritual childhood under Herbert Armstrong was coming back to bite me and making me feel uncomfortable. It was creating conflict in my mind. I believe I had those feelings because it seemed to me as though my sermon series' overall subject really was not a subject fit for the Feast of Tabernacles as I had been taught under Herbert Armstrong. Well, there is nothing wrong with Herbert Armstrong's directive. I was the problem. His order was fitting for the times that, then, were in the life of the church.

Now the culture has changed since then because I began speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles in the 1970s giving sermonettes, but what he gave us was appropriate for the time, that is, in the way of a directive. And when I began receiving speaking assignments for the Feast, it was giving sermonettes. And as I was taught under Herbert Armstrong that a man's sermonette topic—I am distinguishing sermonettes from sermons here—had to be pertaining to a subject directly touching on the Feast of Tabernacles. Well, sermons had a much broader allowance.

I always managed to accomplish this well, as long as I was giving sermonettes, but when I began giving sermons at the Feast, it became exceedingly more difficult for me, and this was because sermons cover a great deal more ground, and staying directly on topic for an hour and a quarter was often very difficult for me. But I persisted anyway while there in Nashville, and went through them.

When we returned from this past Feast, I thought I would be finished with this subject the first Sabbath following the Feast of Tabernacles. But after giving that sermon, I was still dissatisfied until it finally filtered into my mind where my Feast subject fit into a much larger subject.

The result is, I feel much more comfortable with it now, because the subject does fit regarding mankind's overall problem with God. It was my comfort level regarding the subject that was the issue.

Perhaps you might remember a sermon series I gave that I titled, "What's So Bad About Babylon?" Well for me, my Feast sermon subject fit within one aspect of that series, but I did not make the connection then. But that sermon

series definitely was a Feast of Tabernacles subject level. Now for some reason my mind was blocked, but that simple connecting thought never entered my mind, and the result was I constantly felt troubled.

Now in this world each person's specific reason for not submitting to God may be slightly different from the person standing right next to them, but they all eventually add to the same singular vital issue that rejects submission to God. It is something that man by nature does not want to submit to.

So, turn with me to Luke 14. Here is the issue, especially for the unconverted, but on the other hand, it is going to dog us also until we overcome it.

Luke 14:25-26 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. . .

That is stringent, brethren! This is nothing to sneeze at.

Luke 14:27-28 . . . and whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?"

He is teaching, here, what together we, that is, Jesus and the baptism candidate, are going to aim for in our relationship with God. It is going to be undivided loyalty to God.

We do not want to give it! We fear what it might cost us. Anybody who seriously commits himself is taking on something, here, that we fear.

Is not loyalty achieved through mankind's vanity, the very issue that trapped Satan, and led to his disastrous violent departure from God and His purpose? Were Adam and Eve's sins ones of loyalty to their desire rather than to God's

desire for them? But to the natural man, God simply is not important enough to them to make submitting to Him and his way of life attractive enough for them to deliberately and voluntarily submit to His rule over them.

Now if the candidate does not do this, what is it that results? Well, as it did with Satan it makes God their enemy, or to them an enemy of God; however we want to put it.

Baptism is serious business, and that is why we always go through it (Luke 14) before a candidate for baptism is baptized, before they make that commitment. And I go through this at the Feast of Tabernacles for those who want to be baptized. And we do it honestly and openly. We go through this so that they understand that what they are aiming for in a relationship with Jesus Christ is to be as totally loyal to Him as we possibly can be. That is where the bar is.

Now not everybody's standard is the same to God, and God is the one who ultimately sets the standard for these people to achieve to. And He carries through, through Jesus Christ, with the teaching that they are receiving, even as now. Not just always someone of notable achievement yet himself, but nonetheless a minister of His.

But let us get back to Babylon again. I want you to turn to James 4. I am turning to James partly because he was Jesus' flesh and blood brother, and I think that he wrote something that is very helpful for us to keep in mind, something that he said regarding this issue.

James 4:4-6 Adulterers and adulteresses! [That is what he called the people who were attending services!] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns zealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, "God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble."

I turned to this verse because I want you to understand what I mean by Babylon. What is so bad about Babylon? I believe that God nowhere

specifically designates Babylon by this title, but He certainly uses it strongly by inference as a code name for this world. Babylon—the world—is densely populated, indeed overwhelmed, by a mankind that has made itself an enemy of God.

And at the time of the end, its dominant powers are the harlot woman and the forming beast, but it had its beginning in the very first generations following the Flood. That is how old it is—following the Flood that executed all the violently sinning mankind. And those people were already in open rebellion against God. Can you begin to see why He is aiming for absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ? We do not want to be part of the enemy of God. Mankind's disbelief began right at the beginning with Adam and Eve, and it has continued uninterrupted since.

Now the organization of my Feast sermons was simple and clear, as I look back on it. It was to provide a foundation showing a number of justifications people give for rejecting God and His Word, while at the same time giving some biblical evidence showing that there is no honest justification for us or anybody else to do so.

Adam and Eve are the number one clear and indisputable example. They had no honest justification for their sins as God's simple interrogation of them in Genesis 3 clearly shows. God rejected them out of hand.

To this day Adam and Eve's progeny's justifications are simply lies, and lies never produce good results. And thus to this day life's conditions in Babylon continually worsen, and the people wonder what is wrong.

Now in one sense, because of this world's horrific condition, to be readily clear (to be blunt), it is that man's assumption that good results can be produced from [what we know to be] evil. That is an impossibility! And so mankind keeps right on sinning without repentance. We are a hard nut to crack!

Well, the major difficulty is that each and every person must—and I repeat, must!—come to understand this, believe this as his own, and take personal, individual responsibility for the acts of his life, and do those acts in agreement with God's laws.

Now, we are witnessing that to this very day. Precious few will do this. They will talk about God; they will say that they are followers of God; they sincerely believe that they are followers of God; but they are not.

Every person is individually accountable before God. Nobody escapes this responsibility. And the lies these people are producing, the wearying confusion, everybody else in the culture is forced to live with. And the justifications are in reality an attack against everybody else, and are producing constant bickering; the self-serving taking advantage of that in turn leads to the splitting of families, institutions, communities, and even nations.

Richard gave you a vivid description of the Harvey Weinstein incidents. And that is all over the Hollywood area as these people forced themselves on others. Is that being loyal to God? It is happening, brethren, in our nation's government. These people use the name of God very frequently in their speechifying. They feel, they believe, that they are Christian, but they are not, and they are living lives that are clearly apart from the law of God. And so they do not think of themselves as actually attacking other people, forcing their thoughts, their ways, their decision making on others.

I wonder how many wars between nations have been waged because of a spiritual, religious issue. And that issue is the avoidance of God and His truth, which lies at the bottom of the warfare.

Now, in the first sermon that I gave at the Feast, I used the term snafu. That term encapsulates Planet Earth's spiritual circumstance, and thus its immoral cultural condition that exists because of mankind's efforts to avoid submitting to God's sovereign rule.

Turn with me to a familiar scripture in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. . .

Incidentally, this verse threw me into a fit earlier in the church, until I was finally convinced that the apostle Paul meant what he said. It is written in the

past tense as though salvation is already accomplished. It is not, but that is the tense the apostle Paul decided to write it, and in the context in which he wrote it is absolutely correct. It is in the past tense.

Ephesians 2:9 . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Well, it became very clear to me as I prepared those sermons why God must—and again I repeat, must!—provide us with this gift. Without the gift He gives us, we will never, never, never, in reality, give ourselves over to Him in complete surrender to submission to His sovereign rule. It just will not happen! He has to kick-start us like he did Nicodemus who was not even aware that he could not really see the Kingdom of God. He could not grasp it. He could not understand it.

Our self-centered nature united with the carnality accrued during life as a result of contact with this world, is just that influential over our choices. Now, I do not mean that we are helpless before it. When God set out Adam and Eve at the very beginning, He prepared them to face Satan. They were equal to the task of defeating him in that issue. But they did not! He beat them!

Now what do you think about this that happened to two human beings who already saw God with their own eyes and had some form of a relationship with Him? They still sinned!

Are we convinced that this nature that we have as a result of living in this world full of sin that we are beyond being touchable? Do you understand why Jesus Christ set the bar so high? He is going to strive in conjunction with us that we be absolutely loyal, within the framework of our abilities, to Jesus Christ.

Satan sinned because of his pride! Do you think we do not have pride and that we cannot sin? Oh yes we can!

So, I want you to understand that we are not helpless before it, because God makes it very clear that He does not test us above what we are able.

Now where can we begin looking for help so that we would be much more likely to submit to God? Let us go to Matthew 22.

Matthew 22:35-36 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Look at this carefully! This is the great commandment in the law. We would use a superlative there, the greatest commandment! That was their way of stating that question. Jesus said to him the most important thing in our life,

Matthew 22:38-40 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

What became clearer and clearer to me while preparing those sermons was that once we have been called of God, given the gift of His Holy Spirit, the gift of faith to believe, the ability to repent, that the central issue in life becomes growing in love for God and His way as shown by keeping His commandments, because they define love.

Now in my first Feast sermon I gave a broad overview of major lies people spread from within their personal beliefs as to why they avoid the God-issue. I will give you a reiteration now. It is not in any order of importance, just simply listed as a reminder.

This is why the American public says they do not take advantage of having this ability to address God:

1. God is too distant from human life.
2. He keeps changing His mind; He has no plan.
3. He is not distinct regarding what He wants us to do.

4. The Father and Son are not really on the same page.
5. God plays favorites preferring one group over another.
6. The Bible is too hard to understand.
7. The Bible does not deal with modern, up to date, life.
8. The Bible has no story flow; it is written in a disconnected way.
9. God hides Himself.
10. There are those who simply do not care.

I am sure that there are many more, but they all blame God. Oh, it is not them! It is God that is the problem!

Now let us hone in on the reasons why all this chaotic disbelief exists. There are broad general reasons why. They do not answer every question, but they do move us in the right direction toward clarifying them for our fund of understanding. They supply us with a beginning, and at the same time add to the knowledge we have already begun to receive from Jesus Christ's education of us while preparing for us our future work under Him.

Now we can see we really have our work cut out for us.

The next series of verses pinpoint a practical way that opens the door for us to grow in love for God. It follows in many ways the same basic pattern a man and a woman generally follow before choosing to marry each other.

Turn to John 15. This took place on the evening before His crucifixion.

John 15:15-16 “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”

What is it that we want? What is it that we need?

John 15:17-19 “These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own.”

And they are all enemies of God! We just read that in James.

John 15:19-21 Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they would keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake [and here comes some of the information we need], because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

This is a major lesson for us!

John 15:22-23 “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also.”

What is the key in these six or seven verses toward coming to know God better and to grow in love for Him? *We have to come to know God.* He is telling us the reason the world does what it does, and that is they do not know Him! That seems so simple, but it is true! All these justifications, if they really knew Him, they would understand that He is not going to except a single one of them! They are rejecting Him without ever knowing Him!

And so what do they do? They follow their own advice, their own counsel, their own thinking, their own intellect, and never get to know Him. They reject Him right off, or stay put where they are in their knowledge of Him.

We cannot stop coming to know God better, brethren. That is deathly!

Now the Greek word translated *know* in verse 21 strongly tends to be used by various New Testament authors in situations in which they wanted to emphasize a clear, unambiguous perception of, not generalizations of. It indicates a level of knowing or perception that results from a relationship with, rather than merely being aware, and generalizations of knowing about.

This leads us back to thinking about two questions that arise as a result of Adam and Eve's sin when they faced Satan. What was the level of the depth of the relationship of Adam and Eve with their Creator before their meeting with Satan and sinning? They sinned even though they knew God their Creator personally, and He was a reality to them! Think about that! And despite that, they dismissed the relationship they had with their very Creator to carry out their desires.

We like to think that seeing God would solve our problems. I think that is one reason why God has withheld our seeing of Him, because it would do more harm than good at this time. We have to prove ourselves to God without ever seeing Him, and then God knows that our belief in Him is a reality. It is not based on something that we can sense with our eyes. It is based on a knowledge of what He is in His Person, because He has acted that way toward us. And we know, and we know that we know it, because we experienced it.

Now, we should know from what we have gained from our experiences with God, and we have I Corinthians 10:13 to confirm this perception. God did not send them—Adam and Eve—into that confrontation unprepared, and in over their heads as it were. In God's judgment they were equal to the task. And they still failed.

They failed God's evaluation, if I can put it that way.

A second question, then, is, since we know that they failed a fair test, what then, brethren, is the general strength of the pull toward self-satisfaction of the God-created human being? I think that you will have to admit that it is pretty strong in its seeking of self-satisfaction.

And one additional element we know for sure while thinking about this, is that human nature's pull towards self-satisfaction was, and is, capable of being amplified depending upon the intensity of one's desire for self-satisfaction, and I think that is what happened to Adam and Eve. Their desire for self-satisfaction amplified what God created within them, and it can happen to anybody.

This is one reason that addictions are so hard, almost impossible, to get rid of, because that addiction amplifies the desire for self-satisfaction, and makes it almost impossible to overcome.

If it was easy overcome, there would be no addicts, no people hooked on smoking, no people hooked on alcohol, no people hooked on drugs, because they could toss it off. Even though they know it is destroying them, they cannot get away from it.

If there is nothing else you get out of this sermon, please get that out of this sermon. Our desire for self-satisfaction can overpower our feelings even of love for God.

Richard gave us examples of these starlets—these movie stars, and so forth. They could not resist Harvey Weinstein, because their desire to be in the movie was greater. And so, self-satisfaction won out, beginning, brethren, with Adam and Eve. It leads to these people making excuses; justifications that they come up with, to satisfy themselves that they were really just too weak to meet the task.

Now, it is apparent that Eve really desired to eat of that tree; even when Satan raised the issue, “Has God indeed said. . . ?” She did it anyway.

I am not trying to put you down or anything, I am just trying to warn us how powerful this human nature that we have within us is since it has been educated in this world from the time that we were babies.

We wonder why it is so hard. That is why it is so hard. It got *ingrained* within us when we were very young, and the traits are still there, and that is why Jesus said all sin comes out of the heart. It is the heart that needs to be

cleansed. And the only way it can be cleansed is within a relationship with God, and we have to really put ourselves into it, and resist to the greatest extent that we are able.

So then, the conclusion regarding Eve is this: That human nature is strong enough to even overcome a relationship with the Creator if there is not enough love within the relationship to hold one at bay from sinning. There is the key!

We have to be working on the relationship with God so that we can love Him. And we can love Him because we really know Him. And we know that we know Him, and that He is of such character, and such love toward us, that He will do anything in our behalf, even give up His Son, the only One in all the universe who is like Him, exactly. He gave Him up for you and me.

Are we willing to do the same in return to Him and give up ourselves in order to meet the standard that He desires us to have? That is the issue. Like I said earlier, once we are converted, learning to love God becomes the issue in life. We cannot do that apart from Him. We have to do it with Him.

Now, Adam and Eve sinned because, even though they knew the Creator to some extent, there was not enough love within the relationship on their part to encourage them to resist sinning. Brethren, the testimony given in Genesis 3 reveals that they simply did not resist strongly enough.

Let us go to another familiar scripture in the book of Romans, chapter 5, because I want us to see what God has already gifted all of us with.

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ [there is a wonderful gift—peace!], through whom also we have access [access!] by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God [another gift!]. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [endurance]; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint [here is the reason we have all these got gifts], because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We have been equipped with the love of God. Jesus did not say in John 14: 15, if you **know** Me, keep the commandments. He said, “If you **love** Me, keep the commandments.” We have that love, and we are *required* to keep the commandments. It is the love of God combined with the faith that God gives us that puts one on the right side of winning these battles in our course to the Kingdom of God. What we have difficulty remembering is that the love of God is an *action*—it is conduct that is in agreement with God's counsel on our activity.

Satan has striven hard to get us to accept his lie that love is merely a feeling in agreement with our carnal desires. And Adam and Eve were not converted. It appears that the love of God was not shed abroad in their hearts. Just seeing Him was not enough. They needed additional gifts! And one they did not have was a love for God.

Now, this ought to begin helping clarify why the unconverted sin. They have neither the faith nor the love to truly know God, and thus insufficient to resist sinning. It ought to be clear, brethren, that the reasons the unconverted act toward and say what they do about God and His Word is because they neither love nor even really know Him. They are somewhat knowledgeable regarding things *about* God. But we, because we have God's Spirit, do not have that justification. Did you hear what I said? *That justification should not be in our vocabulary.*

And so, what is the answer for us? When we are between a rock and a hard place, we choose to do right. That is what we do.

If we are going to be loyal to God through thick and thin, that is what we do. It might hurt physically; it might hurt financially; it might cost us our job; it might cost us things in relations with other people, even a mate.

Let us have a review of what we ended my previous sermon on, the first Sabbath back from the Feast, because we need to give this conclusion consideration, because it needs to be given serious attention if we are going to grow in love for God and thus submit to Him.

The phrase that we will look at is one of those things that we have a habit of just overlooking. However, David Grabbe used it in his sermonette on the 21st, and I used it in my sermon on the 14th. And I want to make sure that we understand this clearly. That is, what a battle that we are facing here.

Now why? Because it helps show not only why the unconverted do and say what they do, but more importantly, why they cannot be saved. And it might just show us why we have a spiritual weakness hindering our growth in love. And, not only that, but far more seriously, why we might lose our salvation through careless neglect. We may not have observed a reality within the context we will read anywhere near as seriously as we should.

So, when we look seriously at this teaching by Paul, it nails two realities to the wall—and nails them very solidly to the wall. These are familiar scriptures, and we are just going to turn a couple of pages to Romans 8. I just want to go through this again so that it is fresh in mind, so that we know, and know that we know, what we battle with human nature and carnality.

Romans 8:5-7 For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Unfortunately, sometimes we overlook verses 5 and 6. We focus on verse 7, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that, except that it may cause us to overlook something vital in verses 5 and 6.

Now these verses tell us something vital to understanding the subject we are involved in here and now. And this gives us a major reason why so much biblical understanding exists.

Paul writes that the unconverted set their minds on things of the flesh. The word “set” means “to fix in a certain place.” Fix in this case does not mean to repair, but fix in this case means to be firmly attached, thus suggesting immovability. When “set” is applied to one's mind, it takes on the force of

being focused or zoned in on a certain object, goal, or task. It includes setting on such things as one's will, one's thoughts, emotions, values, assumptions, hopes, dreams, desires, and purposes, whether immediate or distant. It all comes out of the heart.

A conclusion, then, is inescapable—it is that the mind is fixed on what gets one's attention, and thus gets one's time and energy.

Let us go back to Eve because it is so easy to see during that sin what her mind was fixed on. It was fixed on eating the fruit of the tree. She could not be turned aside. Adam was fixed on Eve, and so he did not stop her, because he wanted to be pleased by Eve. That is what he desired. And it overpowered the truth that God had instructed them in to not sin, to not eat of the tree especially.

And so the problem, as the verse explains, is that those living according to the flesh have their minds set on, and therefore constantly thinking about, the things of this fallen world in disregard of God's will.

I am going to read Romans 8:5 to you from *The Amplified Bible*. Listen to how clear this is:

Romans 8:5 (Amplified Version) “For those who are, according to the flesh, and are controlled by its unholy desires, . . .”

Was that unholy for Eve to think about eating the fruit of that tree? Yes, it was! Her mind was fixed on it, on its unholy desires.

Romans 8:5 “. . . set their minds on and pursue [she went after it!] those things which gratify the flesh. But those who are according to the Spirit, are controlled by the desires of the Spirit, set their minds on and seek those things which gratify the Holy Spirit.”

Now, this translation is not suggesting in its use of the words, “controlled by,” that our free moral agency has taken from us. But rather, the spiritually-minded person controls himself by choosing the spiritual means of the way of God.

Ultimately, the overall reason the carnal mind cannot please God is because that mind is so self-centered it has neither time for Him nor His purpose; neither can they set their minds for very long on loving fellow man, either.

Here is a conclusion: Carnality is fixed on pleasing itself. That is the issue.

And if we are fixed on pleasing ourselves, our mind is not fixed on pleasing God. It is that simple. And it is not fixed on God because all too often we do not know Him well enough! It all comes back to simple statements that are in God's Word.

Now the battle is not that simple. It is difficult, because of the strength of that nature, and the pressure that this world is able to put on us.