

God's Perseverance With His Saints (Part Two)

Distinctly Different

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We live in the midst of a divided church, but the division is not along the lines that are most talked about. The real division is between those who regard the church in purely secular terms, such as in social programs, and those who still regard the church as being based upon and as testifying to spiritual priorities, such as true doctrine and righteousness.

The danger that confronts us is that worldliness takes hold and the concern for the truth and spiritual priorities vanishes in vague terms. Members of the church object to the secularism of the church, but in practice, we often are quite secular ourselves. Because it is so easy to let ourselves fall into worldliness, which is the definition of secularism, we must evaluate and critique our own spiritual condition. It is important that we ask God to help us examine ourselves, praying as David did. David's prayer is like something we would pray in preparation for Passover. David says in Psalm 139,

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

In other words, God, please search me for any sins that I am unaware of and help me to overcome them and live Your way of life.

Not only must we persevere in searching out and overcoming sin, but Christ recognized that Satan's influence would be constantly pushing us towards letting down. So Jesus asked the Father to intervene on our behalf by persevering with us as we resist and fight against secularism—worldliness.

In my previous sermon, we began looking at the section of Jesus Christ's prayer to His Father concerning His disciples and those who would become members of the church of God, the Body of Christ, in the future. And it shows that Christ was asking His Father to persevere with His saints.

Please turn with me to John 17, verse 11, please. (You will want to keep your finger in this area because this is a pivotal set of scriptures.) Now, Jesus prayed to His Father on the night of His last Passover with His disciples and just before He was arrested. And these are some of the things He felt were important enough to request of the Father to prepare them for the things they would have to bear and the work that they would have to do.

John 17:11-13 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition [Judas], that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

These verses begin Jesus' prayer regarding God's perseverance with His saints. Jesus asked for the continuation of the Father's protection of the disciples in the future danger that lay ahead of them. The last time we looked at Jesus' request for joy and holiness to be bestowed on the saints.

John 17:14-17 "I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

In John 17, immediately after speaking of our need for joy, Jesus goes on to speak of our need for holiness, adding in verse 17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." So Jesus reveals a necessary relationship between joy, holiness, and truth, which the psalmist also makes the connection between, and had made that connection hundreds of years earlier.

Psalm 43:3-4 O, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise you, Oh God, my God.

In other words, this psalm shows that God's truth leads us to His holy throne and therefore to God Himself, where we find our ultimate inner joy.

The prophet Zechariah also makes this connection between truth and holiness when he describes Jerusalem, the headquarters of Christ's kingship, as the city of truth and the holy mountain.

Zechariah 8:3 "Thus says the Lord, 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain.'

So God's truth is not to be taken lightly. We must treasure it and we must defend it, even with our lives! But this brings us to the third quality of the church, which is truth. Picking it up here in John 17, we are going to read verses 17 through 19.

John 17:17-19 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

The word truth here is translated from the Greek word *alitheia*, meaning "the manifested, unconcealed true essence of a matter." And does that not rightly describe God's Word?

Now, each of the previously presented qualities of the church I touched on in my previous sermon, namely joy and holiness, depend almost entirely upon how well we know this next quality of the church: God's truth. In other words, how well we know and practice the principles of God's written Word.

It is true that Jesus not did not begin at this point in His prayer for His disciples. In John 17, He began with joy and holiness. But when we ask, "How can I obtain and keep this joy?" or "How can I be holy?" we come to this point immediately because the answer is always through a study of the Bible and the application of its truth to daily life. Jesus indicates this in John 17:17 with regard to sanctification by saying, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." And so it is a striking thing, which becomes more real to us as we grow and mature spiritually, that nearly all that God does in the world today, He does by His Spirit through the effectiveness of His written Word.

God is the One who determines what is holy. He determines what He sanctifies. Our conversion is determined by the degree to which we understand and believe the truth of the teachings of the Word of God. The Word of God is powerful and the gospel is God's powerful method of saving all who believe in Him.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

The gospel's power exists in its words and what it produces in our minds. The gospel is Christ's words of life. John 6:63 says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." Those words lead us to the faith of Christ. And when we believe what Christ believes, we have His faith and we become sanctified, that is, set apart—set apart for God's use by the state of holiness that God puts us in.

So in John 17:17, it tells us that the only way this will ever happen to us is by embracing God's truth as recorded for us in the Bible. As far as the truth goes, the world lives by an illusion. And this is an inevitable problem for us unless we have a sure way of countering and overturning its influence.

Even in this post-truth era, the world lives by what it thinks is true. It lives by human values and standards, which are useless. Nevertheless, it esteems its version of truth very highly, more highly than anything God has to say. Jesus spoke of this in

Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men [speaking to the Pharisees], but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

What does this nation esteem highly today? Homosexuality. And you can go on all the way through the alphabet on the different perversions that it highly esteems and raises above even our own freedoms. That is how the world lives.

How can we live in that kind of a world? How can we allow it to pour its garbage into our ears and expose it to our eyes day and night and not be conformed to its image and squeezed into its mold? We must have a defense. The answer is we must know the truth. We must know the world and life the way God sees it, the way it really is. And we must know the truth so clearly and strongly that even while we are hearing these tempting lies, we can brand them as lies and know that they are wrong.

We are going to hear them, they are going to be pushed in our face, and they are going to be everywhere. How do we deal with them? By a full and complete knowledge of God's truth. The knowledge of the truth of God makes things real and without it, things are only an illusion. Nothing tells us that better than watching any of the major networks or any of the nationally approved media sites, whether being on the Internet or on television. CNN fake news, and you could go down the list, fake news, fake news, fake news. So do not trust any of it.

So this enables a person who is being saved to practice godliness and to progress toward the goal of becoming like God and Christ. The attainment of Christ-likeness happens by the process of sanctification and in a sense, it leads to greater and greater sanctification.

John 17:19 [Christ prays] "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Jesus Christ is confirming to God the Father, and reaffirming to His disciples, which includes us, that He sets Himself apart exclusively to the service of God. Sanctification is a classification of setting something apart, but it is also a process of always increasingly glorifying God, and the way to do that is by discovering what He desires of us and for us, in His Word.

The basic principle of sanctification is that we are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, as verse 1 tells us. But it is also a process of those who are being sanctified, as Hebrews 2:11 tells us.

Please turn over to I Thessalonians 4. The power for such sanctification comes from the Holy Spirit. And the significance of sanctification is expressed by Paul's statement of that fact.

I Thessalonians 4:3-5 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality [that is worldliness to the extreme as well]; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Sanctification is not for the purpose of selfish enjoyment or bragging. It is so we might represent Christ in this world. Jesus set Himself apart for us and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world and now He sends us into the world.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions [or you could say doctrines] which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

We will get to it later in the sermon, but work is the fourth characteristic or quality of the church that Christ mentions. That we are people "under orders" and we had better obey! Jesus is now "set apart" in heaven praying for us, that our witness will bear fruit as many repent for their of their sins and turn to Christ.

How can we be overcome by the world when we have the Word of God to enlighten us, enable us, and encourage us?

II Timothy 2:14-16 Remind them of these things, charge them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun idle profane and babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

Growth in holiness is through knowledge of God's Word, of God's truth. Therefore, the third quality of the church is truth, and that is what Jesus asked God the Father to give to us. And He has and He is constantly.

When we believe and submit to God's truth, we automatically and inescapably become distinctly different from the world. We need to be very practical at this point because the secular church is characterized by the world's wisdom, the world's theology, the world's agenda, and the world's methods, that is, the wisdom, theology, agenda, and methods. The true church is not to be like that. But what does this mean?

Practically, it means that the godly church must be distinctly, noticeably, and articulately different in each of these areas. And this will involve individuals because the church is made up of individuals, but it will also involve larger units—congregations, associations, and fellowship groups.

Now, we must be clear as to on what authority we base our beliefs. One evidence of the secularism of the large denominations is that biblical authority, the authority of the Scriptures, has been thrown out and the authority of consensus has come in. Things are done in mainstream Christianity today not because the Bible says that they should be done, but because 51% of the members say it should be done. They suppose that this is

what their standard is. But most of the time, in practice, mainstream churches operate exactly like the world does with its authority of consensus.

That is a wrong government for our church to have. If we are to be distinct from the world in this area of authority, we must do what we must do because the Bible says so, and we must guard and apply the biblical standard.

So why do many of the churches of God try so hard to be like the mainstream Protestant churches? Of everything I have noticed about the greater churches of God, it is the Protestant influence going in, coming in and influencing people in the church. One of the major areas that that happens is the definition of love that they give, and other areas. The social areas, they are so socially oriented and they are told to go out into the world and get involved in social programs and things like that, and it goes on and on and on the way Protestantism is sneaking its way in and we know that Satan is the one that is doing that.

In the Worldwide Church of God, when things were becoming very liberal, they came out with a paper called Systematic Theology Project. (The initials were STP and one evangelist labeled it, Slowly Turning Protestant.) It is interesting because it was being done back then. It is always being done where Protestantism is being introduced into the greater churches of God. It has always been a problem for the church.

In other words, we must guard the truth. We must find out what the Word of God says and we have to study it, do our homework, and then we must ask on the basis of this Word, "What does God want for His church in this age?"

If we do not remain distinctly different from the world in doctrinal authority, we will eventually go the world's way entirely. We saw that with the Worldwide Church of God. There are historical and scriptural examples of this method of apostasy in the way of warnings that it had happened, does happen, and would happen. The apostle Paul consistently and constantly warns the churches of God of this. He warns the Roman church of God that apostasy through false doctrinal authority is happening.

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress

the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

Paul also warned the Galatian brethren of it.

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

Historically, the perversion of doctrine by false church leaders has always been pervasive in the congregations of God's church. And these tares who ascend to leadership roles are described in Scripture as deceived, prideful, and following their own desires.

Now please go back one letter to I Timothy 6. Paul cautioned the young pastor Timothy to beware of false ministers who cause apostasy through false doctrinal authority.

I Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, and evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

And I pass this caution on to you in this way. Do not listen to the worldly preachers. Be careful of reading them, about reading what they have to say on the Internet, because they will lead astray. There is truth in that and Satan makes sure of that, but we have to be very careful on how much of that we put into our minds.

Paul continues his training of Timothy in discernment of false teachings and recognition of false teachers in his second letter to Timothy.

II Timothy 2:17-18 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymemaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

Paul continues in the third chapter warning that the perversion of doctrinal authority by worldly ministers is an ever-present threat to God's people. Therefore, we must consistently remain distinctly different from the world.

II Timothy 3:1-7 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unfaithful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power. And from such people turn away. [How many times does Paul have to tell us that very thing?] For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Even if a person has spent their whole life studying the Scriptures, as has many in the Protestant church and the feminists in the seminaries. And sometimes we will get a letter from them and they will be telling us how they have studied it their whole lives and this is why we are wrong. that type of thing. It is because God has not opened their minds. So the amount of studying is not the issue. It is whether God is opening your mind to what you are studying or not.

II Timothy 3:8-9 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs [that is, Jannes and Jambres] also was.

Paul continues with a similar summarized caution to Timothy in the fourth chapter as well.

II Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; . . .

And how many people have splintered from the churches of God and are out there on their own and they are just picking the sermons they want, and the teachers they want, a la carte. Or I like this sermon, I do not like that one, so I will listen to his sermon on this, but somebody else's sermon on that. And that is why they are still floating out there because they have been destabilized. They have allowed themselves to become unstable.

II Timothy 4:4 . . . and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

That is how these people, every few years, keep getting deceived by the calendar issue. When will that ever stop? Every few years the same issue.

Paul could see the threat very clearly because he knew the attitudes of these false teachers who were sent by Satan. So Paul continued to warn the brethren directly, that they must remember that these deceptions by tares in the church were there and would continue to attack the church long into the future.

II Thessalonians 2:1-3 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

II Thessalonians 2:9-10 The coming of the lawless one is according to the work of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who

perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Ask yourself, do you love the truth? You know the truth but do you really love it? Is it something that you cannot do without? That is the way it should be.

II Thessalonians 2:11-12 And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure and unrighteousness.

The apostle James also gives a similar dire warning to us individually. He makes it personal.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? [That is his personalized question.] Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly [or we could say secular or worldly], sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Now, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

That indicates that without living a righteous life, it is impossible to have peace. It takes a righteous life to sow peace in your life. Thankfully, it sows somewhat in increments. We are not completely righteous, but we do the best that we can with God's help and He gives us peace accordingly.

These verses show why we must be distinctly different from the world. They demonstrate the realm of wisdom contrasted with that of selfish ambition. And the One from above leads to peace while the earthly one leads to disorder.

If we are to be distinctly different from the world in this area of doctrinal authority, we must do what we do because God says so in His inspired written Word. This is true because in reality, history does not allow us to stand very long in an uncertain position. If you are confused, you do not know what to do, Satan will help you out. So we have to look in the right place for the answers. And that is God's inspired Word.

When the whole proclivity of society and the culture is contrary to biblical standards, you cannot say, "This is backed up in the area of psychology or science or social relations" because it is not. These things that are being written in all those areas are contrary to biblical truth. There is some truth in some of them, just enough to be deceiving or to lead us astray.

The things that are being written in all those areas are contrary to biblical truth. So the church must always completely rely on the divine revelation. Has God spoken to God's people in His Book? If so, then we must be clear and say as Paul said in Romans 3:4, "Let God be true and every man a liar." What that tells me is, we cannot believe a word we hear on the news and other things in education of the world and elsewhere. We can believe parts of it, but it is just enough to be deceiving.

Now, we must be clear as to what our beliefs are and we need to be distinctly different in our beliefs and teachings, because where it is witnessed and taught those who hunger for the truth of the Word of God will come to it.

In contrast to mainstream Christianity, we must articulate the great biblical truths and reject the theology of our culture. We have to speak of God's perseverance with His saints—that God is able to keep, and does keep, those whom He calls and draws to Himself. All the great biblical truths and all the supporting doctrines that go with them need to be clearly preached.

Colossians 1:3-6 [This is speaking of the brethren's faith in Christ.]
We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus
and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid
up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the
truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the

world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.

Ever since they had heard the gospel, it had been producing abundant appropriate fruit among them, and the same thing had characterized it wherever it had been promoted. That is, wherever God's truth had been promoted.

In contrast, mainstream Christianity has set its agenda. It is the world's agenda. I am not speaking specifically of Agenda 21, which many of you know of. I am speaking of the whole worldview. We must determine that our priorities are not going to be the world's priorities, but the priorities of the Word of God. This does not mean that we will neglect addressing social sins. That is part of the priority of the Christian life. But it does mean that we will not reject properly keeping the Sabbath and the annual holy days. It does mean that the church will not reject the obeying of the Ten Commandments. It does mean that we will not reject feeding the flock and preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

And we must be clear as to what our lifestyle should be. We need to be distinctly different in how we live our lives. We have lived in a culture that, although it is not Christian, has nevertheless held on in part to the remnants of an earlier Christianity, often called Judeo-Christian ethics today. This is disappearing so fast it is almost nonexistent. Laws are being changed and this is going to continue until the return of Christ. Then He will eradicate the world's perverse laws and reestablish and enforce God's laws under God's government.

As degenerate lifestyles continue to be promoted through social reengineering in the media and progressively grow in popularity, Christians are intimidated increasingly to not live a distinctly different righteous lifestyle. The pressure for the youth especially is tremendous, and we need to keep that in mind because they are up against a tremendous onslaught which only God can protect them from. And thankfully as our children, they also are sanctified because we are sanctified. Do not underestimate that! It is powerful, but we must obey. We must openly resolve to not go with the trends of our times, the increasing secularization. Rather, we must openly want to be known as God's people in all areas of life.

One of the priorities we must have concerns our time. For many people, especially men and boys sports, take an enormous amount of time out of our day by means of television and by our own participation. It is what many people do on weekends. Although in itself, it is not necessarily wrong, but it must be done in balance like anything else. In addition, the amount of time the average American spends watching TV, tablets, and phones is inconceivable.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly [that is, cautiously], not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The challenge of this age is to diligently sharpen our spiritual knowledge and understanding, and to resist the foolish distractions of the world. And as I said earlier in the sermon, the distractions are flying at us so fast, we can barely keep them away, so to speak. We almost need to learn karate or just do whatever, if it would do any good. The challenge of this age is to diligently sharpen our spiritual knowledge.

Most of the world's social activities: shopping, weddings, and receptions, parties, school and church fundraisers, school sports, and so on are scheduled on Saturday—God's Sabbath. So that is an automatic way, in a sense, that we are witnessing to the world—by keeping the Sabbath and not going through that.

I grew up in the church so I know how tough it is to not be able to play the sports or go to the activities with the young people that I was growing up with. But it only steeled me. It did not hurt me at all. Except, for those of you who want to differ with me, which I am sure you can come up with many things. But I will talk about as far as staying in the church and knowing what was right and wrong and being willing to sacrifice those things. When a child is sacrificing those things and they stay true to God, then it just steels them all the more for adulthood.

So we have to teach our children, and do not be afraid to let your children face up to these persecutions because they are going to have to someday and

it can get pretty bad for children in school, especially in middle school times. I assure you it gets very bad.

Is attending these secular activities more important than having our children and ourselves in church, worshipping our Creator? After a lifetime, wise King Solomon came to a true conclusion about the purpose of life in Ecclesiastes 12.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

Please turn over to Joshua 24, verse 14. Even if it means not getting ahead as much as we would like, even if it means not being as popular as we would like, even if it means that our children are not going to be as popular as we would like them to be, our highest priority must be to fear and worship God.

Joshua 24:14-15 [You are very familiar with verse 14.] "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth [there it is, truth, it keeps coming up everywhere, it must be important], and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell."

Before I finish that last statement, do you realize that the activities and the idols of the world are exactly that. What they are doing. What is important to them. "American Idol." They recognize what idolatry is, but they want it because it feels good sensually to them or whatever the case may be.

Joshua 24:15 "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Each and every one of us in God's church must be able to say that, and mean it, and it be true.

One the most pressing areas in which we must be distinctly different is sexual morality, particularly in our conception of marriage and the way we conduct our marriages. It is not easy to have a Christian marriage today. Everything in the world works against it. The great and overriding concern today is for self-satisfaction. Sadly, in most marriages, there is often a dissatisfaction which emphasizes any flaws and incompatibilities within it. Often spouses wish things could be different.

But the question is, why are we in the marriage? Are we in it primarily for self-satisfaction? Sadly, that is why most marriages begin in this world. Or are we there because we believe God has brought us together with our spouse to establish a Christian home in which His truth can be raised high, Christian values demonstrated, and children raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Obviously, it is not for self-satisfaction that we get married or should get married.

We must make clear distinction between marriages that are Christian marriages and marriages that are worldly marriages. Because, being Christians, we are held to a much higher standard. We are held to the standard above the sun. The world is held to the standards below the sun. There is a huge, tremendous difference. A Christian marriage is different. It is a spiritual union which represents the relationship between Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:28-32 So husbands ought to love their own wife as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

When we stand to make our vows, our intention and determination must be that it is for life—until death do us part—because that is what God wants. He *hates* divorce.

Mark 10:6-9 "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not men separate."

This must be our mindset. Nevertheless, God in His mercy realizes that there are failures and that we have many of them, so He gives reasons for allowing divorce.

We must be distinctly different in our use of money and other material things. How do we use our money? All of us have money we could use in the work of God. Do we use it for that? Are we faithful in that area? Some of you do not even tithe even though you have an increase from your labor. Parents, especially, fail in this area of teaching their children to tithe. If a child makes money from working, he or she should tithe. It does not give an age in the Bible, and that is the best way to have your child do it through adulthood, if it becomes habit early on.

There is a great misconception in the church that people who are not baptized do not have to tithe. Tithing is required by God for everyone who receives an increase from his or her labors. Do you dare to rob God? is the question. Some young adults still have the mentality of a child when it comes to applying God's laws, statutes, and precepts. Sometimes they do not tithe or give offerings on holidays or keep the Sabbath by not seeking their own pleasure on it. Some sell things on the Internet or play sports or go swimming at the beach on the Sabbath, neglecting worshipping God by not attending church services. Listening to a sermon while you are driving for hours and hours and hours and hours traveling somewhere instead of going to church services does not count as keeping the Sabbath. Some adults are infamous for giving themselves an exemption from obeying God in these areas and others because they think living at home means that they do not have to act like an adult Christian.

Also, many professional college students are still immature children when it comes to taking personal responsibility for their lives. You know, sadly, they

found that men are not ready for marriage until age 35 in the UK and 45 in the United States. That is how immature they have become. It leaves you speechless.

In addition, Christians are to glorify God with their bodies. This means the way we care for the body, the way we dress the body, the places we take the body, the deeds we do in the body. It is dangerous for Christians to use their bodies for sin. Remember what happened to Samson and David.

In these latter days, we see a shameless increase in sexual sins. We dare not just close our eyes to it. Sexual immorality is a sin which some professing Christians are involved in. Now, speaking of the greater churches of God, the biblical warnings of sexual immorality are directed at the church, not just people of the world. The attitude of the world is, everybody's doing it so why be different? It is sad when Christians think they can violate God's moral code and get away with it. Sexual sins are sins against Christ, who purchased our bodies, against the Spirit which dwells in our bodies, and against ourselves.

I Corinthians 6:18-19 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

Single people need to read and consider Proverbs 5, Proverbs 6:20-35, and Proverbs 7. These are plain chapters that warn against sexual license.

Are such church attendees living distinctly different from the world? Can anyone who thinks and looks and acts exactly like the world really be a true Christian? Can a true Christian be distinguished from the world?

What more does being sanctified, being set apart, require that we do? Well, Jeremiah told Judah that they needed to develop the proper attitude toward their afflictions. They were to search out and examine their ways and turn back to the Lord.

Lamentations 3:38-41 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed? Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.

Now, since all have sinned, everyone suffers from affliction because of their sins, some more than others. How should afflictions be viewed? We are not going to turn to Jeremiah, but Jeremiah wrote seven principles about the nature of Israel's affliction which help answer that question. I am going to give you those and I will give you the scripture reference following each one.

1. Affliction should be endured with hope in God's salvation. That it is ultimate restoration. Lamentations 3:25-30.
2. Affliction is only temporary and is tempered by God's mercy, compassion, and love. Lamentations 3:31-32.
3. God does not delight in affliction. Lamentations 3:33.
4. If affliction comes because of injustice, God sees it and does not approve of it. He may allow it, but He does not approve of that type of thing. Lamentations 3:34 and 36
5. Affliction is always in relationship to God's sovereignty. Lamentations 3:37-38
6. Affliction ultimately came because of Judas sins. Lamentations 3:39. In this way, I will add the comment, we also suffer from this nation's sins. We suffer from our own sins. We suffer from the sins of other members of the church. Sin is never isolated, it always affects others.
7. Affliction should accomplish the greater good of turning God's people back to Him. Lamentations 3:40

Now, there may be others, but these were taken directly from Jeremiah's sermon, so to speak, to Judah. Jeremiah was able to place his and Israel's affliction in proper perspective by remembering how it related to God's character and His covenant.

Judah's afflictions were not true acts of an impulsive God who delighted in inflicting pain on a helpless people. Rather, the afflictions came from a compassionate God who was being faithful to His covenant. He did not enjoy making others suffer, but He allowed the afflictions as temporary means to force Judah back to Himself. So Jeremiah exhorted the people, "Let us examine our ways. Let us return to the Lord."

In this case, affliction by God was designed as a corrective measure to restore His disobedient people and it was designed to force the people to return to the Lord. But affliction brought about by God is not always a scolding or punishment. Often, afflictions are given to us to help fine tune us for God's service, to encourage us to examine ourselves in preparation for Passover. It is why we seem to have more problems and more injuries and more aches and pains before Passover—to get our attention.

I Corinthians 11:28-30 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

Paul says that the adversities which had fallen upon the church of Corinth may be due to nothing else than the fact that they approached the keeping of the Passover while they were divided among themselves. And that seems to be an ongoing thing with the church of God—division. I am not saying everyone is divided. I am saying there is always an undercurrent of negativity that is trying to divide us and we know where that initially comes from. It comes from Satan, but people allow it into their minds. So one of the main reasons here for that unworthy manner, possibly, from the context, was that they were divided among themselves.

But these adversities were not sent to destroy them, but to discipline them and to take them back to the right way. Over one book to II Corinthians 13 and we are going to read verses 5 and 6. I believe we read this earlier, either in the sermon or at least this issue was covered.

II Corinthians 13:5-6 Examine yourselves as to whether you were in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

So even the Corinthians with all of their sins and the problems that they had, and even the division, they had not yet been disqualified, thankfully.

Throughout his letters to the Corinthians, Paul subjected himself and his ministry to scrutiny and now he handed the lens to the Corinthians with the challenge that they consider their own conduct. Paul was emphasizing sanctification. Did they demonstrate that they were in the faith and that Christ was in them by their obeying His will. To stand the test was to do what was right, to fail was to be disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline.

Now, Paul pointed out to the Galatians that pride must be laid aside if a believer is to be a burden-bearer. If we are to bear one another's burdens, we must rid ourselves of pride. Pride in the form of conceit is an attitude that breeds intolerance of the error of others and causes one to think he is above failure and above others.

Galatians 6:1-5 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

The remedy for self-conceit is found in verse 4, everyone is told to examine or test his own actions and attitudes. True attitudes are manifested in actions, out of the heart the mouth speaks. This means that rather than comparing himself with others, he should step back and take an objective look at himself and his accomplishments.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

We test ourselves by carrying our own load. This does not contradict Galatians 6:2, because the reference there is to heavy, crushing loads, more than a person could carry without help.

In Galatians 6:5, a different Greek word is used, *phortion*, and it is used to designate the pack usually carried by a marching soldier. It is the burden Jesus assigns to His followers. There are certain Christian responsibilities or burdens each believer must bear which cannot be shared with others. And Jesus assured His disciples that such burdens were light, because whatever He puts on us, He promises to give us the strength to bear up under it.

Now we arrive at the fourth quality or characteristic of the church, which is work.

John 17:18-19 "As You [Father] sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

The church faces a serious obstacle. Secularism shows up in the church in our great indifference. But indifference to what? The answer is: to practically anything and everything worthwhile. Let me spell it out.

Many are indifferent to the state of the work of the church. The number of those who would commit themselves to a lifetime of work for the sake of Christ or who would support such persons is dwindling.

There is indifference to the needs of our fellow saints. People do not want to listen to the hurts in the hearts and lives of other Christians. We do not want to be bothered. We do not want to hear these things because they are demanding, they require a response, and we are not prepared to make it. That is, make the response. We do not want to get involved. (I am speaking generally for the greater churches of God, which includes us.)

There is indifference to the leadership vacuum in the churches of God. There is work to be done. But the hardest thing in Christian work is to find people who recognize the need and who will step into it and do what is necessary by the grace of God faithfully, if necessary, year after year and at great personal hardship. We do not have much of this commitment. Speaking broadly, part of the problem is that ministers cannot do it all. Besides if they are trying to do it all, several things, including the preaching of the Word, will be buried by the wayside.

If people in the church are indifferent to obvious need, and the ministers respond in their place, then the whole church suffers. Each one of us has a gift. Each one must be willing to use it to the glory of God.

What causes this apathy, this lack of discipline, or not caring enough in the church today? If these things are true of us, what should be done? The answer to that question comes from the words of Jesus Christ to the church at Laodicea. It was a Christian church that He said was "increased in riches," like the Christian church in the Western world today.

Revelation 3:17-19 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, blind, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich, and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

God counsels us to buy from Him gold refined in fire. In Psalm 19:10 David uses the imagery of gold, that is, precious metals to refer to the Word of God. In Psalm 12 he also uses silver to refer to it. He does so because the Word of God is precious, of great spiritual value.

Psalm 12:6-7 The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever.

So what Christ is admonishing us to do here is to master the Word of God by effort. That is the meaning of the word "buy," by effort, by hard work, so that this which is the most precious thing on earth—the Word of God—might be ours in a personal way.

God's counsel is that we acquire "white clothes" to cover our shameful spiritual nakedness. Clothes refer to righteousness, and it is plural in this case. It is righteousnesses. As holy people, we should be clothed with acts of personal righteousness. We should be zealous for good works. We must put "salve" on our eyes to see so we can see. We must newly desire the healing of God's Spirit so we can see His truth and walk in it.

This part of Jesus Christ's prayer concerns the work of the church. It includes the witness of its individual members, the saints, the sanctified, the set apart from the world. It must be a distinctly different work—one of inner joy and holiness and truth. The Word gives us joy and love and power to live a holy life. It also gives us what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world.

John 17:18-19 [once again] "As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Christians are not of the world, but we are *in* the world to witness for Christ. We keep our lives clean through the application of His Word. And Christ has sent us into the world to represent Him. That is a tremendous responsibility for us.

Jesus Christ is the model for every true witness. He was in the world, but He was not of the world. He was sent into the world on a mission by his Father. So also saints are sent into the world on a mission by the Son to make the Father known. Are all the saints supposed to go out and openly preach everywhere? Of course not, that is not what I am talking about. Jesus' prayer for the disciples was not limited to the immediate apostles. This passage is like the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Each Christian should view himself as a witness whose responsibility is to communicate God's truth to others.

So how do we communicate the truth to others without standing on a street corner and spouting off? John 17:18, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." This verse talks about the work of the church. And the first thing it tells us is where that work is to be conducted. We are sent into the world. What is that work? It is our witness. What is our witness? It is how we live our lives.

What does it mean to be sent into the world as a Christian? It does not mean to be like the world, to be involved socially with it. In Luke 11:48 Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being witnesses for the way their ancestors lived their lives. The Pharisees condoned their ancestors actions and did the same things.

Notice how the various translations word Luke 11:48:

The New King James version says, "In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds [that is, the work] of your fathers.

The NIV translation, "So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did."

The NLT, "But in fact, you stand as witnesses who agree with what your ancestors did."

The NASB, "Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers."

So contrary to true Christians, the Pharisees were witnesses of and approved of secularism and the traditions of men.

The qualities of or characteristics of the church make the church different in every way. It does not mean that we are to abandon Christian fellowship or our other basic Christian orientations. All it means is that we are to know non-Christians, work with them, and live our lives in such a way that we begin to influence them positively and favorably toward Jesus Christ, rather than they are infecting us with their worldliness. And it may be only one person that you come in contact with in a week. But that one person should see a person who is pure in righteousness and living the right way of life. And that includes our children. Are the children behaved? Have you *neglected* what God says and you spare the rod? Or have you *done* what God says and your children behave in restaurants and grocery stores? I will let you answer that question.

We witness to the world as individuals and as a church by the way we live our lives, not by standing on a street corner preaching or pushing God's truth down their throats. We also make God's Word as widely available as possible through various forms of media. However, if we are living worldly lives, if we are not living according to God's truth, what we teach and preach will be overshadowed by our bad witness. It will negate it. In other words, we must practice what we preach.

How can Christians change the world? Well, Jesus Christ gave the answer in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13-14, "You are the salt of the world." "You are the light of the world." Salt does a great deal of good, but it does no good at all if it has lost its saltiness. It is only when it is salty that it is effective.

So we are those in whom the Spirit of God has worked to call us to faith in Jesus Christ, we really must be Christ's people. And it should be evident that by God's grace, we are not what we were previously. Our values should not be the same values as the pop culture. Our commitments should not be the same commitments as society. Our doctrine should not be the same doctrine as the worldly churches. Rather, there must be a new element in us, and because of us, in the world.

We are also light. If salt speaks of what we *are*, light speaks of what we *do*. The purpose of light is to shine, to shine out. Jesus said no one lights a candle and puts it under a basket. It is to be set up on a hill where all will see it. Christians should be reflecting a better way, a more beautiful way, by living God's way of life.

We are to be lighthouses in a dark world. Being a lighthouse will not change the rocky contours of the coast. The sin is still there. The dangers of destruction still threaten people. But by God's grace, the light can be a beacon that will bring the ships into harbor, in a matter of speaking.

That is what it means to be set apart to God, to be sanctified. We are to be a beacon. And because we are living by God's standards, people are blessed and have a reason to rejoice. As a result, the church will be blessed by God and thanked by those who have found our Savior Jesus Christ through its witness.

Let us wrap this up. John 17:18-19 talk about the quality of the ones who are to conduct His work, which means our character as Christians. The point here is that we are to be as Christ in the world. Jesus compares His disciples to Himself, both in having been sent into the world by the Father and of his being sanctified or set apart totally to do that work. We are to be like the One whom we represent.

In contrast to mainstream Christianity, which is always trying to sell a product, true Christians are offering—free of charge—a product which is spiritually excellent, and our efforts may be done well. But if we are not living it, the world will see nothing but hypocrisy.

We must reflect Jesus Christ's example of how to live God's way of life. Jesus is our Pattern in every case. As His life is characterized by joy, so is our life to be characterized by joy. As He is sanctified, so are we sanctified. And as He is characterized by truth, so are we sanctified by truth.

We must be distinctly different in our beliefs and actions because where it is witnessed and taught, those who are called and hunger for the truth of the Word of God will be drawn to it as God calls them.