

Intimacy With Christ (Part Three)

Improving Our Relationship with God

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Given 09-Nov-96; Sermon #263

We are going to begin the sermon this week in Matthew 6:33, a scripture that every one of us ought to know by heart. Nonetheless it is one that we refer to quite often because it is so important to our spiritual lives. Jesus said:

Matthew 6:33 Seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

I want to begin with this very familiar scripture as we begin this third sermon on preparing for growth, because I have found in my own personal experience, as well as observing the lives of many, many others, that knowing what needs to be done in order to overcome is not the problem in our lives. Knowing what needs to be done in order to have a better relationship with God is not the problem. It may be a problem for those who are very new in terms of conversion.

Maybe shortly after they were baptized, they may have had some problems wondering what they should do with their lives, but most of us have been in the church for very many years—decades in many cases—and I think that we know what needs to be done. The problem lies in actually carrying them through and doing them—consistently and thoroughly. It is a matter of prioritizing, a matter of making the right choices and disciplining ourselves to do it.

Now if we consider this verse, Matthew 6:33, as a conclusion to the context of the Sermon on the Mount to this point (it is obviously not the final thing that Jesus said in regard to this sermon, but it is a major conclusion to this point), we can see that Christ is giving us a broad outline of major elements in the life of a Christian.

Please turn back to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:1 and we will just skim through that. I know that you understand these

things. Beginning in verse 1 and going all the way through and including verse 12, we have the attitudes that will produce success toward the Kingdom of God. You might say this is the opening salvo in Jesus' preaching to those people who are going to be His disciples, and this is what we need perhaps more than anything else after conversion.

We first of all need to know what the attitudes are that are going to be acceptable to God, and begin to do everything in our lives to promote them in our life. Then after inserting the thing about salt and about being a light of the world—both of which touch upon being what we should be, that we should be the salt of the earth, something that is savory to God, and the light, meaning having to do with our witness to the world—then He makes very clear that we need to understand that the moral law is not done away. God, through Jesus Christ, is not doing away with the law, and we find all the way through much of the remainder of chapter 5 that Jesus is saying the law is going to be more binding on those people who sincerely and truly want to be whole as a Christian, because now it is binding not only in its letter, but also in its spirit. So that has a greater bearing on the conduct of our lives day in and day out than it ever had on the ancient Hebrew people.

Then He concludes chapter 5 by showing that we are expected by Him to go the extra mile—to go above and beyond. He concludes that by saying that we have to love our **enemies**. I mean, boy! That is going the extra mile. That is going above and beyond. But that is par for the course for a child of God. It is expected. We are responsible for doing that.

Now chapter 6 then begins by Him mentioning prayer, fasting, and other good works in relation to God and the public. Basically He is saying that we are to do these things privately as it were, in relation to God. Our spirituality is not something that is to be flaunted before men, and so we need to be consistent and careful in what we do, but not flaunting it before the public like the Pharisees did. Then again in chapter 6 He mentions being a good witness.

Beginning in verse 24 He tells us that there is an area that we are going to have trouble with. He makes it clear that:

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

In plain English it means that we have to be single minded. We cannot straddle the fence. That is totally unacceptable to Him. He is either going to be our Lord, or He is not going to be our Lord. He requires that we show that He is our Lord by giving our single-minded devotion to being His disciple.

Then verse 25 says "Therefore. . ." This word is a bridge into a little bit more specific instruction regarding what He means by being single-minded. Then verse 33 comes as a concluding statement that we are to seek first the Kingdom of God. Being single-minded means that our lives, as a witness before God, as an overcomer, as a person who is producing the fruit of God's Spirit, has to have a difference in it. Our lives are going to have to be **different** from our neighbor's.

Just in case you think that I might be overstating my case here, I want to make this very clear at the beginning of this sermon, and so I want you to turn to II Timothy 2. Paul puts this into a slightly different context. The metaphor in this case is drawn from soldiering, warfare. Jesus' illustration there in Matthew 6 is not drawn from that, but from the ordinary events of life, but the sense, the instruction, is the same.

II Timothy 2:4 No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; [He is single-minded, you see] that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier.

A little bit different application, but the same central theme. A soldier has to be single-minded in his patriotism, in his devotion to his nation. He cannot straddle the fence. He cannot be a part-time soldier, and a part-time something else. He cannot entangle himself in the affairs of this life.

Now go back to II Corinthians chapter 5:15. This verse gives us a very meaningful statement in regard to this.

II Corinthians 5:15 And that He died for all, that they which live [you and me] should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.

Now there is where our single-mindedness is to be focused, that we are single-minded in our devotion to Christ and to the work that He is performing in us, through us, by means of us. We are to surrender ourselves completely and totally to Him. We are not to entangle our lives in the world. We are **chosen** by Him, hand **picked** by Him, to be devoted to Him in order that when the Kingdom of God is set up on earth, *we are ready to assist Him*. Are you beginning to see more clearly why Jesus said to "Seek you first the kingdom of God," be single-minded in this direction?

Now Christ died most specifically for you and me, because He has called us and He has revealed Himself to us. He has revealed what God's purpose is. We are now a part of that purpose, and it is going to take devotion for that purpose to be completed in our lives. Our responsibility is to **yield** to Him.

With that thought in mind, we can reflect just briefly on our own lives in the church. In 1959 Evelyn and I were baptized, and I think that I have learned during that period of time about how easy it is for me to be deflected from directly pursuing after the goal of the Kingdom of God. It is easy for me, and the things that caused me to lose my focus have changed through the years. It is not always the same things anymore; but nonetheless I still find myself drifting from time to time because I am pursuing something else. Now I do not think for a moment, (if I can use myself for an example, and I think that this applies to all of us) that you set your minds to neglect "so great salvation." It is just something that happens. You do not set your will to say, "I'm not going to pay attention to this stuff anymore." So we just get caught up in doing something else.

This is what I said a little bit earlier, that it takes discipline to be consistent, to keep our vision focused in the right direction. The reason I want to come back to Matthew 6 is because Jesus tells us what is going to be **the major problem** causing us to lose our focus. Remember that verse that began "Therefore"? Here comes a little bit more detailed instruction.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you [Remember this is right on the heels of what He said that He wanted you to be single-minded.] take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not *the* life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Do you think that definite article "the" before life is in there for fun? "The life" I am sure refers to eternal life—and what did He point out is going to be that which causes most frequently our deflection away from pursuing the Kingdom of God single-mindedly? Making a living. Making a go of it. Just getting through this world. The common ordinary every day things of life. Nothing esoteric. It is just living life itself that we become wrapped up in. Let us read a little bit further.

Matthew 6:26-30 Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take you thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

It is interesting what He says is going to take, or infers what is going to take to do what He says here—faith.

Matthew 6:31-33 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles [the unconverted] seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

The common ordinary anxieties associated with feeling secure in this world are going to be the things that are going to most frequently deflect us away

from pursuing the Kingdom of God. Now I mentioned the possibility of you thinking that I am overstating my case. I want you to see again a couple of more times that Jesus brought this up. Turn to Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower and the seed. You know the parable, but in verse 22:

Matthew 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

So He added "the deceitfulness of riches" there, but again He said "the care of this world." The idea that is contained within this verse is a person whose life has too many commitments, and gradually, because of human nature that wants to pay attention to all of those things, the Kingdom of God gets choked out. Again it is not something that is intended that occur; it just happens if we are not careful and prioritize properly.

You may not feel that you are very rich, but wealth remember, is a relative element here. Compared to the rest of the world, we are very rich. We may not be rich in terms of many people that live in the United States, but even though we are not rich by maybe American standards, we still have sufficient wealth to do a great many things. So wealth demands—whatever it is, whatever the level is—something of you, that you manage it, that you administrate it, which means that it has to be taken care of. When you are taking care of it, what is happening to your time? And when you are taking care of it, what is happening to your attention? See, very deceitfully, even what we do have can deflect our focus away from what we should be giving our time and attention over to. That fits right in with what He said earlier about the cares of this life, because wealth has to be managed.

But there is another interesting aspect to this. Maybe you will find this rather shocking. This word changed during the century—this word that is translated "wealth," and it came to mean "pleasure." You can begin to understand why it gradually changed into pleasure, because wealth has a tendency to give a person pleasure, you see. This is the way they seek their pleasure. There is something very interesting to this, because in the spirit of that word, the deceitfulness of wealth can be applied to "shopping." Is that not what you do when you manage wealth? You shop, and when one is shopping, very frequently what one is doing is anticipating or looking forward to buying

with pleasure. Now wait a minute. Shopping requires time. We will get back to this in a little bit later. I just injected this because I want to get it in your mind until a little bit later.

Now the overall sense of both of these things—the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth or riches—is that of a person giving himself over to them, so that he has no time to care for the more important eternal things in his relationship with God. Let us go from here to where this is again uttered by Jesus, but this time in an end-time context, and you will recognize this immediately.

Luke 21:34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day [the time of His coming] come upon you unawares.

Interesting wording there. The focus of attention is so much on the cares of this life, overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, so deflected away that the day of Christ's return "comes upon you unawares." Quite a warning.

Luke 21:35-36 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

So here it is. It is tied directly to the subject of these past three sermons. Now the cause for concern here is that it might keep [us] from **standing** at Christ's return. Just hold that in your mind for just a second, and we will go back to the word "overcharged," as it says in the *King James*. It literally means "made heavy." "Lest your hearts be made heavy." A single word would be "burdened." "Lest your hearts be burdened." It is something that we carry about with us. "With surfeiting." And surfeiting means "excessive eating or drinking."

You can begin to see where the metaphor is being drawn from in the comparison made to a spiritual area. He is comparing overeating and overdrinking with burdening a person with weight so that they lose their

mobility—their ability to act or react, especially in terms of fighting a battle. We will tie this together in just a bit. His concern here is that the cares of this life, surfeiting, will cause a person to lose his mobility and his effectiveness. This is directly related to the word "standing." This has two aspects to it. First of all, the word "standing" is indicative of Christ's approval, His approbation, and the picture is actually drawn from a person standing before the judgment bar, as it were, and receiving his sentence.

If this means approbation, if this means approval from Christ because the person is standing, then it means, as we would say today, they are "standing tall,"—they are proud. Now the contrast to that would be, to be **cringing** in fear you see, and hiding your face, you see, like a criminal does. You have seen the pictures on television of the criminal coming out of the jail with his coat over his head and his head bowed down because he does not want to show his face. But this person who is standing before Christ has Christ's approval because he did not burden himself with the cares of this world and the surfeiting. We are going to go back to Ephesians 6 and tie this together with something Paul said about taking on the whole armor of God.

Ephesians 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Now "withstand" and "standing" is going to require all the armor of God. "Withstand" indicates the ability to resist—resist sin, resist putting too much of a focus on the cares of this world, resist overburdening oneself so that you lose your spiritual mobility and effectiveness. "And having done all, to stand."

Picture a war, with arrows, with shields, with swords and with knives. What would happen to a soldier who lost his footing? He is chopped liver, buddy. He is dead meat. He is defenseless. In order to fight off Satan and the demons, you have got to have mobility. You cannot be burdened down with the cares of this life. You have to be able to juke about, to dodge, to put the shield up, to perceive spiritually. If we are burdened because our focus has been on the wrong direction, the chances of us losing the battle are very greatly increased.

Here are some other translations of that last phrase in verse 13 of Ephesians chapter 6.

The Knox Translation: "And be found still on your feet when the task is over." Victorious, you see. Unbowed. Standing tall.

The Goodspeed Translation: "And when it is all over, to hold your ground." You did not retreat.

This is the one I like, from the *Weymouth Translation:* "And having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field."

The cares of this world, devotion to wealth, and overindulgence in the physical things of life weaken us so that we cannot resist, we cannot overcome, we cannot produce fruit, because they will limit the time we can spend working on our relationship with God. It is that simple.

The relationship with God is the **key**, because He is the one that has all the goodies. He is the dispenser of His Spirit. He is the giver of gifts. He is the one who forgives. He is the one who empowers. He is the one who strengthens. Can you have a good relationship and receive gifts from somebody you do not know? As Richard said in his sermon last week, can you trust somebody you do not know? And without faith, it is impossible to please God. The way you come to trust Him, the way I come to trust Him, the way we come to have faith in Him, is to have a relationship with Him. These things are all tied together.

Now brethren, how much time are you wasting? I told you when I began this series in that first sermon after the Feast, that I am going to lay something on you that is **heavy**—that you are not going to like it. But it might very well be that it makes the difference between the Kingdom of God and the grave, the Kingdom of God and the lake of fire, because yours truly knows very well that I have wasted an awful lot of time, and it bothers me. I hope that it begins to bother you, because that is the purpose.

I am not here to make you feel good all the time. I am here to jog you, so that you feel guilty, because guilt is good. Do you remember David Maas' article ["Guilt: Our Spiritual Pain"]? That is what brings us to repentance, and

repentance pleases God, and repentance makes God respond to it, and that makes God give us gifts. So all the goodies begin to come, and we begin to feel that we are not living up to what we should. So like I said, we know better. The problem is not that we do not know. The problem is getting ourselves to discipline ourselves, and consistently do what needs to be done. We do not plan to ignore God, but in the practical areas of life, we just do it. The problem is increased because we do not just use our time and energies providing for what we need, but it seems as though human nature pushes us to reach out and grab for much more than we need. So we just fritter away our opportunities.

Now I think that we understand that I am not talking about things, that we are sinning—that it does not come listed under the Ten Commandments as being sin per se, that we are wasting our time on. In fact, during that period of time, there are times that we spend doing these other things, we may be actively producing. But as I asked in another sermon, is what we are producing the kind of fruit needed for the Kingdom of God? So we may be a very productive person, carnally, and that is not to say that that is evil. It is just to say that our energy may be being dissipated in the wrong direction.

So the lesson of "Seek you first the Kingdom of God," following being single-minded, is that we have to prioritize. "Seek you **FIRST**." There is Job No. 1, as Ford used to say. Job No. 1 for us is "making the right use of time," for that is what life is. So without doing this, what we know of God is of little value, maybe even no value, because we are frittering away our opportunity.

Now let me read again that verse in Philippians 3:10 from *The Amplified Version*. Paul writes:

"For my determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and clearly, and that I in the same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection, and that I may so share in His sufferings, as to be continually transformed in spirit into His likeness, even to His death."

What an awesome amplification of that verse! It is right on! There is our goal! He could not have spelled it out more clearly, and more encouragingly. What a powerfully clear statement of how he was spending his life pursuing after this "knowing Jesus Christ." I think it is interesting that this is the apostle who was accused or quoted as being the one who says that works are of no avail. I think that is so humorous, and yet this verse follows right in the context of Philippians 2:12 where he said to "work out your own salvation"—and here is the statement of what he was doing with his life. Perhaps the most significant part of this is, "That I may share in His suffering." That probably requires a whole sermon in itself. Just how do you think Jesus Christ suffered? It was not just on the cross. He suffered resisting human nature, disciplining Himself, denying Himself.

Now if our faith is going to be exercised, we are going to have to simplify our lives. Remember that verse in Ecclesiastes 7:29? I will give you two alternate translations of it because I think that they are pretty rich.

The Revised English Bible: "This alone have I found, that God, when He made man, made him straight forward; but men invent endless subtleties of their own."

God gave us a wonderfully creative mind. We just do not use it in the right way.

I told you that this was my favorite translation of this verse from *Today's English Version:* "God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated." That is rich. It is so clear.

It was in 1982 that Mr. Armstrong urged us to simplify our lives. Now I have not done very much. In fact I think my life is very more complicated than it was in 1982, so I do not think that I have made a great deal of headway here. I say that because I want you to understand that I am preaching to myself, and I think that of all of us in the Church of the Great God, that Evelyn and I have taken this more seriously than anybody, that we need to do something about our lives to simplify them.

Romans 13:10-14 Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that, knowing the time, that now it

is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. [That is just as true for us as it was for them.] The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. [That we might stand in the evil day!] Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness [surfeiting], not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ. [How can we do that unless we know Him? We are to live our lives **unto Him.**], and make not provision for the flesh [the cares of this life], to fulfill the lusts thereof.

If that was important to the apostle Paul **then**, think how important it is for us **today!** Are we living in the **time of the end**, or not? Now even if we have taken steps in the past to simplify our lives, the chances are very great that we forgot and we relaxed our discipline. But time is running out.

Paul used again here in this context a very interesting military metaphor. I am going to give you the translation from *The Phillips*, and you will be able to see it very clearly. "Let us **arm** ourselves for the fight of the day." One day at a time. Now we need to redeem the time because the battles are intensifying, and I think that that is clear considering what has happened in the church, especially over these past ten years.

Let us look at a couple of spiritual sins a little bit more closely, by turning to James 4. I want to look at these because they are sins that tend to burn up a great deal of time.

James 4:1-4 From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not. You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts. You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Everything in this world works against God's purpose. It works against simplifying our lives. John probably made the briefest and most comprehensive statement about the world in I John 2:15-17, showing what an enemy of us that it is. We live in a cluttered, complicated system. That is what the world is—*kosmos*. It is a cluttered, complicated system that mankind has created, with the help of Satan. God did not make it this way. He made it simple, but we have proceeded to make it very complicated.

I mentioned in that previous sermon one of the things that has a very great impact on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and that is advertising. Let us spread it out: marketing. Let us spread it out, because the source is in business. You will find in Ezekiel 28 that one of the problems that are listed there with Satan is "merchandising." "The multitude of your merchandise..." He says in regard to Satan.

Now what is the purpose of advertising? It is to make a product known so that the public will purchase it. But they employ the arts of advertising to create in us a sense of discontentment with what we are, or what we have, or the way that we live, and it is this discontentment that they have become so skilled at producing that motivates us to buy. It starts the wheels turning. "I don't like the way I am. I don't like the way I'm dressed. I don't like the automobile that I'm driving. I think that I need something else, and I am going to begin to look into purchasing this thing." **And it hammers at us, and hammers, and hammers, and hammers.** You can hardly go two or three minutes on the radio without getting hammered with an advertisement. On television, you get hammered about every five to seven minutes, not only with audio, but also with beautiful visual representations of what it is that is driving us to discontentment. Should I say it? **Desires.** Should I say it? **Lust.**

How do we defend ourselves against this? How do we stand, without being swept off our feet, and submitting to the god of advertising? Now see, the problem comes in when we are not just buying what we need, but *more* than we need. That is one part of the problem. In terms of this sermon, the real problem comes in the time *spent* shopping for what we think we need. Think about it. Do we not go from one dealer to another dealer, to another dealer, to another dealer looking for the best deal? I am not saying that this is evil. It is what we do, because we have gotten it into our minds that we **need**

something. You see, each one of us is responsible to evaluate whether or not we really need it; whether or not we really need to spend the **time** looking for this thing. And it never ends.

Perhaps the main word of the system that is being used in the United States, this capitalistic system, is "**more**,"—that what we have is never enough. Accumulate, consume, get, buy, acquire, build up, move up, keep up. Competition forces us to go ever faster, raise our expectation, increase our speed with which we do things. Quotas. Every salesman knows this. Quotas are **never** enough, because you meet a quota, and next year it has to be higher; or if it is not next year, it is the year after that. We are **driven**. I mean it. Driven to win. **Win!** Always win! And when there is only such much to go around, what does that produce? Just what James 4 says, fightings and war.

Do you think war is not going on in American business? Do you think that these big companies are not gobbling up smaller companies? Our city Charlotte has the third largest bank in the United States, Nation's Bank, and they just keep gobbling up, gobbling up smaller institutions, one right after another. They have just gobbled up a huge bank in Saint Louis. It is their goal—they are going to be the nation's first nationwide bank. They have already advanced across half of the United States. So they keep gobbling up the little fish. It is war.

Have you ever heard of hostile takeovers? It is happening all the time. Why do they do this? Because American capitalism will not work successfully unless new markets are constantly being created. Now sometimes a new market is created when a really new product is researched and developed and put on the market. But most of the time they create a new market simply by tweaking the design, changing the knobs around; and in fashion, move the cuffs up and down. You know what I mean. Widen the collars, or what else. Planned obsolescence plays a part as well, so they build things to wear out in order to keep the business market moving. And so we always feel this urgency, this sense we need something new.

My wife and I had a really vivid example of this one time when we were going to move into a house. We were going to rent this house, and so we

were going through the house, looking at it before it was empty. The former tenant was still there. Evelyn wanted to look at the closet to see how large it was. It turned out to be a pretty large closet. Well the man of the house had filled that thing with suits—suits, blazers, sports jackets, and those things. And she started counting. There were twenty-five suits in that closet! That is one for almost every day of the month. What do you need twenty-five suits for? I do not know. He thought he did. When I thought of this in preparing this sermon, what struck me was how much time that it took for him to shop for those twenty-five suits. This man was a minister. I will not go any further.

I was telling a person this week about a businessman that I read about one time, that in order to simplify things he decided that he did not want to keep his mind cluttered up all the time, worrying about what he was going to wear. So every suit that he had was either black, charcoal, or navy blue. Every pair of socks that he owned was black. Every pair of shoes that he owned was black. That was why he said he did it. He did not want to clutter his mind up trying to make decisions everyday day about what he was going to be wearing. He was well-dressed, but he freed up a little bit of his mind so that he could concentrate, focus on what he wanted to do. It is just a thought. Well let us carry this a little bit further.

I Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Now here is a series of verses that maybe deserves an entire sermon, but I think that we get the general idea here. Now desire (James 4), when it is combined with envy, which is mentioned here, is a powerful consumer of time. These two sins are working, either singly or in tandem, to greatly complicate life, and they are deceptively subtle in the pressures that they exert upon us. But as they grow, they produce discontentment and feelings of

unease—we begin to feel as though God does not love us, everybody's against us, I do not have what others have. We begin to feel that one does not look as well off or as presentable as others. I think that you get the idea.

But when it says here "they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"—desire and envy all by themselves produce a great deal, but they also lead to other things, like judging one another, comparing ourselves among ourselves; depression. Do you know where depression comes from? It is actually very simple. It is a very focused self-consciousness. You cannot help but get depressed thinking about yourself. So a person becomes psychologically unbalanced. There is nothing complicated about it. It is self-concern that is taken to an extreme. It also produces regret. Pride. The reason is because lust or desire and envy force our focus away from God and on ourselves and other people.

I got this quote from that little book that I told you about, *Intimacy With The Almighty*, and it is from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. If you every get an opportunity to read essays by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, I can almost guarantee you that they are going to be pretty sound-minded. He spent quite a number of years in prison in the Russian Gulag in Siberia. While there (he was already a very fine and prolific writer before they put him into prison), he was there he had an opportunity for a great deal of solitude and he was able to refine his thinking very sharply. And so when they released him from prison, at the insistence of the United States, the United States gave him asylum here. He went up into either Vermont or New Hampshire and lived a very Spartan life while he was there, even though probably because of his fame he could have asked for and received a great deal of very fine treatment. But listen to what Solzhenitsyn says. This touches on desire and envy.

It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold, and if thirst and hunger don't claw at your insides, if your back isn't broken, if your feet can walk and both arms can bend, if your eyes can see, if both ears can hear; then whom should you envy, and why? Our envy of others devours us most of all.

That last sentence is true, because it breaks us spiritually, by forcing us to focus on ourselves, and in the process it consumes enormous amounts of time that should have been spent on other things.

It is interesting the way privation effects men; women too. Solzhenitsyn became very aware, that in his solitude and privation, that he did not need very much. But I knew another man who had undergone a great deal of privation—he really did—in a German prisoner-of-war camp. He did not have very much to eat. He vowed to himself, that if he ever got out of that alive, he was never going to go hungry again. Well, I did not know the man until very later in life, and he became enormously heavy. He died before his three- score and ten. I think that he literally ate himself to death, and that it contributed a great deal to his early demise. That is another subject that probably deserves an entire sermon.

But brethren, when I said that I was going to lay something on you that was pretty heavy, I meant it. Simplifying our lives is not easy. It is like sailing against the wind, that it is not just a nice thing to do, it is essential, and it requires much determination, because these two alone—lust and envy—devour an enormous amount of time. I will probably hurt some people's feelings here, but brethren, we were not born to shop.

I mentioned briefly in the previous sermon **junk mailings**. Well I began to notice that shopping was an area that I could gain a considerable amount of time by cutting back. Now I do not want to give you the impression that I was out at the mall doing shopping. No, I was doing my shopping looking at all of the catalogs that came to our house, the catalogs and direct mailings from advertisers in the Charlotte area. So I decided to write down what I could think of who it was that we were getting catalogs from every month. Compare with a list that you could make. Sears, Montgomery Ward, Home Depot, Lowes, True Value Hardware, Penney's, Service Merchandise, Best Buy, Radio Shack, Circuit City, Toys "R" Us, Kohl's, Walkama, Revco, Eckert's, Winn Dixie, Food Lion, Reader's Digest, Space Savers, Pets Mart, Home Plate, 84 Lumber, Arby's, Burger King, Boston Market, Wendy's, Mac Donald's, Wal Mart, K-Mart, Target, four or five jewelry stores, Auto Zone, Western Auto, and Pep Boys, besides that. I am sure that I have forgotten some.

We are inundated with applications for credit cards, offers of cutlery, insurance of one kind or another, offers of vacation cruises, buying of time-share condos, automobiles, and tires. Do you get the point? How many of those things do **you** look at? You are not going to the mall, but you are shopping, see. That is just one small area that almost everybody is confronted—male or female—with controlling. And many times, in many cases brethren, I think that we **are** compulsive, obsessive compulsive shoppers. We see it, we have to do it. We are always looking for a bargain, and at the same time consuming valuable time that can never be reclaimed, and we have convinced ourselves that it is really worthwhile. But is it profitable, brethren, that we are penny-wise and pound-foolish?

II Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

God made it plain and simple, but we make things very complicated.

Look at what is happening in the church of God. I do not know how closely you are observing it. I will say here that I think that things are going to get worse before they get better. They may get worse for a long period of time to come before they get better. But I guarantee you that it is very easy for us to be confused by the seeming complexity of the issues that are out there. But confusion is not of God. God *allows* confusion. It is we who are making it complex, not Him—"the simplicity that is in Christ."

The issues in the church of God, brethren, are simple. Are we going to be devoted to Christ, or are we not? I can guarantee you, that if you are going to be devoted to Christ, God will **move** you to the right place. It is not hard. It is a matter of trust. He will move you to where **He** wants you. He is the Sovereign, and He can do it. All He has to do is begin to put the thoughts in our mind to go in this direction. If He can do it to a hard-head like Cyrus and get him to release the Jews, He can surely do it to his children who **want** to yield to Him.

But things are being made very complicated in the church of God by, I will call them magazines or newspapers, like *In Transition* and *The Servant's News*. I will give those people the benefit of the doubt that they are trying to do a good job in trying to keep people informed, but I will tell you, they are confusing the issues. I told you that I cancelled my subscription to them. The reason I did was because I found that those articles were something that I did not need. I already had the basic truths that were given to me by God through Herbert Armstrong, and I will go back to those and we will begin **there**. And if God wants to change them, then He can change them. I do not believe, not for one minute, that He misled us through Mr. Armstrong. I do not need those other things. All of those ideas are doing nothing but complicating the issues, when the issues are so simple. We are the ones that make them complicated.

Well in my notes I went on to something else here, but it is part of the same theme, and it has to do with reading magazines—*Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and reading the daily newspaper. I know people who seem to read virtually everything in the daily newspaper, and feel that they are watching world news.

I will probably be considered a heretic for saying this, but brethren, that verse (Luke 21:36) has been overstated. That verse means "be alert to your spiritual condition." Read it again. Watching the news through television and the newspapers and magazines is only a very tiny segment of that. Certainly that word "watch" applies in its spirit. But when it becomes almost to the point of being an idol, that much of the day is consumed looking for "gotta keep up with the world news," and other more important things are neglected, something is wrong. The time needs to be spent drawing close to God. But most of the time when we do find something that may be applicable to prophecy, it by itself is just a very tiny portion of the picture—I mean that fulfillment.

Again I can guarantee you that if we are truly seeking God and improving our relationship with Him, we are going to be alert to what is going on in the world. You know that verse says "that you may be worthy" you know, to go the place of safety, to be protected in that day. Do you think that you are going to be taken to the place of safety because you are watching world

news, or do you think that you are going to be taken to the place of safety because your spiritual condition is such that God wants to protect you? So be alert to your spiritual condition. That is what that has primary application to.

Well brethren, I am going to drop this subject. I was going to give you a second thing that is even more difficult than the first. The first was "simplify your life." The second is tied to it, and maybe simplifying your life is necessary in order for this second one to be done. But the second one is: **We have to seek solitude.** That is being alone and seek being quiet. The two are tied together. Do you realize how much we are enslaved by sound? I wonder how many of you get up in the morning to a clock radio. Bang! Your day starts off with that kind of sound. You get into your automobile, the radio goes on the first thing. You go jogging or take a walk, the "Walkman" is right with you and you have got the speakers right in your ear. Everywhere you go, you are bombarded with **sound**. Everywhere you go you are surrounded by people. Is it not interesting that God had the Bible written by people who could probably get away from it all, and think?

I will tell you brethren, that is hard to do, because we do not spend very much time meditating. Meditating is really nothing more than talking with yourself, rather than have somebody else feeding sound into your brain. What you have going into your brain may indeed be worthy, but I will tell you this, it really does not become yours until that knowledge becomes written in your heart, and you have thought the truth or the principles through yourself. There is a big difference between the two. When you are hearing somebody else say it, then you know; but when you hear somebody else say it, and then you talk to yourself and work it through yourself, then it becomes a part of you. **Then you know that you know. You are convicted.** It was not what the church told you. It is what the church taught you that has been processed, and now it is yours. You cannot do that in the midst of conflicting noise or sound. It takes solitude and it takes quiet.

I just thought of another verse here. Let us go back to II Corinthians again. I gave you that verse in chapter 5. We will just finish here, where it says in verse 15 that "we should not live unto ourselves, but unto Him which died for us." Chapter 6 continues the same thought. Paul says:

II Corinthians 6:1-2 We then, as workers together with Him [Christ], beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. [Apply that to this series of sermons.] For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored you; behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is a day of salvation.

Now is our time. We cannot afford to waste it. So our focus has to be single-minded, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.