

Knowing Christ (Part 3)

Moving Toward Perfection

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I think that it is fitting that we should be here in Anaheim on the fifth anniversary, partly because *five* is the number in the Bible that is most frequently associated with *grace*, and I certainly believe that God has been full of grace to us in light of the things that have happened in the church of God, not just the Church of the Great God, but in the church of God, wherever it happens to be. And directly associated with this is the fact that what became the Church of the Great God began in Laguna Niguel with many of the people who are still with us here in Anaheim as a part of that group.

That sermon was held on January 11, 1992 and the subject of the sermon that day was, "Do You See God?" I know that I did not understand at that time the significance of the theme of that sermon. I had given it a number of times before. In fact, I first prepared it several years before that, and it began to dawn on me that this was a message that needed to be heard by a great deal more people, because I was coming to understand that even though people had been baptized for very many years, they really did not have a very clear vision of God, of God's character, of what God is doing—of even what His personality is like—and so I felt that in order for them to understand their own responsibilities to God better, it would be awfully good if they could come to know a great deal more about God Himself.

The theme of that sermon has become, I would have to say, a major issue in why the Church of the Great God exists as an organization. The reason for that is because God is our ideal. He is the object of our devotion. He is the one that we would like to be like, and we will never be as devoted to Him as we need to be, or be like Him, unless we see Him in as great detail as possible so that we can have as truly an accurate scriptural picture of Him as is possible. It is *important to the max* that we come to understand Him, that we come to *know* Him, because as we are coming to know Him, we have the best opportunity to be in His image and to yield to the machinations that He is going through to make us like He is. So whether consciously or subconsciously, every true son of God is thinking about God and wants to be like Him.

Right after the Feast I stumbled across that verse there in Philippians 3:10, and that set in motion this present series. If I counted all the sermons that I have given since the Feast, it is probably about 7 or 8 sermons in this series, and they have evolved, they have changed somewhat as we have gone from one phrase of that verse to another phrase, but every phrase in that verse applies to us becoming like God. In that verse

Paul says that he wanted to **know** Him, and the power of His resurrection, **and** the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.

I do not know whether you get it or not, but this was what Paul was saying was his life's objective. This is what he was *doing* with his life. He wanted to *know* Him, to know the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being *made* conformable to His death—Christ's death.

Today we are going to continue on an aspect of "the fellowship of His sufferings" part, and that is the part of this verse that is absolutely necessary if we are ever going to have the devotion, the spiritual perception of the ideal, and at the same time grow to be like Him.

The theme or the element that is being considered is thought by many Bible scholars to be **the** religious act—meaning the specific thing or act that will bring about a desired result, or typifies the essence, the spirit, the main point, the essential element of life itself, and when applied to Christianity, when applied to *knowing God*, every son of God must exemplify this. If it is missing, then the religion of the person is not authentic, and maybe the religion itself is suspect.

This element is so important that it is also the essence of *love*, whether toward God, or toward man, or even toward the self. Without this element, Christianity would never be. Without this element, it will not work. It flat out will not. *It will not work*. If we are ever going to be like the Father and the Son, if we are ever going to fulfill our responsibility of the holy priesthood, sacrifice is going to have to be operating consistently in our lives.

We are going to begin in the verse that I might have left off the last time, in Ephesians 5, but we are going to touch bases here once again and use it as a springboard.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Be you therefore followers of God as dear children: and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

Paul says, "Follow God," and he does not mean just somebody who is in line after God, as a leader. He means, "*Imitate* God." Follow the leader by imitating God. Now it is in this context, after this opening phrase, "Be you therefore followers of God as dear children: [Be an imitator of God as a dear child of His] and walk in love," that the word **sacrifice** appears, exemplified by what Jesus Christ did with His life. And so what Paul is saying in its broadest sense here is that we are to imitate the sacrifice of the Father

and the Son, and most specifically the sacrifice of the Son.

Why? Because sacrifice typifies their lives. In one sense they sacrificed for the same reason that we do, that is, in an overall sense, for the purpose of bringing about God's purpose of reproducing Himself. So they make sacrifices in order that that be successful. Well, so do we. But when we get into specifics, the reasons that we are called upon to sacrifice are far different from theirs, but in an overall sense it is exactly the same as theirs. Here we are urged to follow their example and walk in love as Christ did by giving Himself as an offering to God—a *sweet smelling savor*. Now we will never be like them unless we follow their example, and this is central to their character. The willingness to sacrifice brings forth *service*. That is its fruit.

Turn with me to I Peter. We are still laying the foundation here, so we are going to move through several scriptures kind of rapidly.

I Peter 1:18-20 Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

In terms of time, this is the first implication of sacrifice for the success of God's purpose. In terms of time, I mean as early, or as far back as we are able to look in God's Word. I am not talking about where it appears in the Scriptures, but in terms of *time*. This is the first indication of sacrifice being necessary for the success of God's purpose. So they planned together that it was going to take sacrifice—the sacrifice of one of their lives **as a man**—in order to redeem from this otherwise impossible dilemma of being unable to pay the penalty of sin and still continue to live, because the wages of sin is *death*. Somebody had to die in such a way that the penalty would be paid, but we would be able to continue right on living. So they determined in their wisdom that Christ would come and be that sacrifice as God, as man. The penalty would be paid, and then those that God called to be like Him could then continue right on living.

Let us go all the way back to the front of the Bible in Genesis 3 where God says:

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

In terms of the actual outworking of this plan, once the earth was re-created, once man was created—this is the first revelation to man that a sacrifice was going to be made that would break sin's grip on our lives. Now it is entirely possible that we would never recognize what is being implied here when it says, "It shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel," except that we are able to look at other information in other portions of the Bible and recognize what is being spoken of here. But what is being spoken and implied *is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ*, by which Satan was going to be defeated, by which man would be free from sin, but that was going to cause the *bruising*, as it were, of the heel. In other words the damage of the one giving the sacrifice would be temporary; but nonetheless it would occur.

Genesis 4:3-5 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LOORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LOORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect, and Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

Here we have first example in the Bible of offerings actually being made to the Creator, looking forward in anticipation of what that sacrifice would accomplish. Now God must have instructed Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel. At the very least, He instructed Adam and Eve, who very likely passed on the instruction to Cain and Abel. But perhaps God directly instructed them, because if He had not, there would be no basis for His displeasure with Cain; nor would there be a basis for Abel's belief, which God could congratulate and applaud, be pleased in, because he believed what God said regarding sacrifice. Hebrews 11 shows that Abel had faith, that he had to have faith in the Word of God; therefore God, from the very beginning, was already instructing the very first citizens of planet Earth regarding *sacrifice*.

We are dealing here with a subject, with an act, with a way of life that is **absolutely essential** to the outworking of God's purpose. No sacrifice—its purpose is not achieved.

Instructions and examples that reveal the importance of sacrifice are developed throughout the Bible far beyond the necessary act of one dying for the sins of many, to the almost necessary encompassing of the *whole* of a person's life. In Genesis, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob especially, are frequently shown making offerings to God. Most notable of all is the offering of Isaac, which of course becomes a type of God the Father sacrificing His own Son.

In Exodus, much detail is given of the tabernacle, which was the commanded place of

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sacrifice. Hang onto that thought. That is very important. In the early chapters of Leviticus, a great deal of detail is given of the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the trespass, and the sin offerings. The book of Numbers reveals the offerings required on each holy day, and each and every day in addition to the holy days.

But so far, as we progress through the Bible, book by book, sacrificing is shown appearing to be something that a professional class of people do, and that professional class of people is the priests, the Aaronic priesthood, and that the ordinary person is not involved in doing much except for providing the animal that is going to be sacrificed. In the burnt offering and in the peace offering, that person had to actually kill the animal while standing before the priest. He provided the offering, he cut the throat.

That is the extent of the average person's participation in sacrifice, as far as we have gone in the Bible. But after Deuteronomy, sacrifice begins to take on a different cast as we begin to see the development towards its New Testament form.

Now turn with me to II Samuel 24, where a very significant event occurred in the life of David. This has great significance in regard to sacrifice as well. This is one of those memory scriptures I think that everybody ought to carry around with him, and it is one of those that is easy to remember, because it is II Samuel 24:24.

II Samuel 24:24 And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of you at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which does cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

A sacrifice is not a sacrifice unless it costs us something. In other words, God is already beginning to warn us that in sacrifice there is **pain**. In sacrifice there is going to be a resistance that must be overcome, because if something is going to cost you and me something, there is going to be, perhaps at the very least, a nagging feeling that we should not do this. Because if we do this, we will not have this anymore; or it is going to hurt us to do this, or it is going to cost us time, or it is going to cost us money, it is going to cost us something.

How many times have you withdrawn your hand in doing something that you knew would have been a very good act, but you did not do it because it was inconvenient or costly? Sacrifice bears with it a price.

This is a very interesting context in which this appears as well, because it was in this chapter that God describes what happened when David numbered Israel. There was nothing wrong with counting the population. It was the reason *why* he was counting the population that was the problem. That is what God had something against David for, because David took a population count in order to find out how many men he could muster together in an army so that he could make more conquests of the nations around him. Joab knew that, and that is why Joab resisted. "David, you're taking this count for the wrong reasons." Does not the Bible show earlier that God had Israel counted as they went out of Egypt, and while they were in the wilderness? There is nothing wrong with counting the population.

The only reason why God was against what David was doing was because the motivation for taking the count was he was going to raise an army and do some more conquering. So God began the plague, and so He asked David, "Which one of these plagues do you want?" So David did make a choice. Do you know what the lesson was that David had to learn here, and why he mentions sacrifice? David had to learn the lesson that the reason God put him in as king of Israel was not to make war—it was to be ***shepherd over God's people***, to pastor them, to be their leader in peace and harmony and unity.

God let David do what was necessary for unifying Israel, but when David started to go beyond what God wanted Israel to be in terms of size, God chopped David down immediately. David recognized what the problem was, and David had to sacrifice his natural desire to be *a man of war*—to become truly *a man of God* in the fullest sense, and pastor the people of Israel. But God still would not let David build the Temple, because he was a man of blood. So David had to overcome that desire to go to war and to fight, and to become truly a man of a unifying spirit who would bring Israel together to be the kind of nation that God wanted them to be.

We are beginning to see here that sacrifice has a great deal more to do with life than merely (the word *merely* probably is not right), being a representation that a Savior was necessary to pay for our sins, because a sacrifice is really of no avail until it becomes part of our character. It is not just something that Christ does. It is something that every God-being does as a way of life.

David understood something that very many irresponsible people today want to overlook, in light of the overwhelming amount of teaching about grace, about how Christ did it all for us, and that the law is done away. That is sheer nonsense! If one wants to have a good relationship with God, **it does not come cheaply**. It is the most expensive proposition any of us will ever enter into. Already it has cost God the life of His Son.

Each one of us has to learn this lesson in our own lives, but God is not demanding for His own benefit. It is not that He is trying to get adoration, or attention, or is mean-spirited, so that He desires groveling and whimpering service. He wants sacrifice as a major part of our relationship with Him, because it is good for us, it is good for our character, it is good for our relationship with other people. Sacrifice **builds**, not destroys. Sacrifice creates prosperity, peace, cooperation, unity. Sacrifice produces humility. But there is one thing that sacrifice destroys. It can do all kinds of positive things, because it destroys undue attention to the self.

I will tell you something: Those that know do not what religion is, or what its purpose is, their chief care is to make it cheap and easy to themselves, and are best pleased with that which costs them the least pain—and money, I might add. Nothing worthwhile has ever been achieved without sacrifice.

I wonder if you have ever thought of it this way—but even some forms of evil require a great deal of sacrifice in order to achieve it. I mean, some crooks are really geniuses, and they sacrifice all kinds of time and effort and energy in order to pull off the perfect heist, the perfect scam. They wrack their brains and they work hard on it day and night. God even tells us in the Bible that the wicked stay up all night in order to achieve some evil end. That is what He means by it. Even evil is achieved through sacrifice. All that skill that we admire in artists, writers, scientists, athletes, craftsmen, is usually achieved because they have sacrificed great portions of their lives, holding their skills in their discipline, whatever it happens to be.

Everyone who has ever experienced the most intimate of all human relationships—marriage—ought to understand from that experience that marriages are made to be successful through a combination of giving of trust, of being trustworthy, and responsible, and sacrificing for the sake of one's commitment. Now people may say that it is love that makes marriage successful. Well that is correct, but it is also a very general term to really adequately describe what is responsible for the successful relationship. Besides that, all too often love is confused with passion. But it is sacrifice that makes marriage go, and endure.

Nobody will come to know God and become like Him who does not give himself over to working sacrifice into his character. This is not something that happens by magic. It is not something that happens merely because one accepts Jesus Christ. Sacrifice is a key element in our quest to be like and to know God, and it is not something that occurs because one wishes it to be. David understood this principle, and that is why he said, "I will not make a sacrifice that will cost me nothing." Actually he said, "I will not make an offering that will cost me nothing."

Let us go to Psalm 50. I do not know how familiar you are with this psalm, but it is one of the more sobering psalms in all the Bible, and it is in a fitting position, right before Psalm 51, which is David's psalm of repentance.

Psalm 50:4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he [God] may judge his people.

This is what makes this psalm so sobering. God is calling His people together to **judge** them. And He says:

Psalm 50:5 Gather my saints together unto me. . .

And then to make it really clear, He says:

Psalm 50:5 . . . Those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

So there will be no doubt who His saints are, it is those who have made a covenant with Him by *sacrifice*.

It is in this psalm that some of the figurative aspects of sacrifice truly begin to come to the fore in the Bible's teaching. The author of this psalm, who was apparently Asaph, understood sacrifice in the way that David did. He understood the spiritual implications that were behind the actual giving of an animal's life. So sobering is it that Tyndal's commentary remarks on verse 5 are: "The Christian . . ." Now who are the Christians? Christians are those who have made the New Covenant with God. Seemingly in the context of Psalm 50, we are talking about people who made the Old Covenant with God.

Brethren, we are to live by every Word of God. Psalm 50 is addressed to *you* and *me*, and we have to understand that God is calling His New Testament saints into judgment before Him, and whether you understood it or not, *you made a covenant of sacrifice with God*. So Tyndal says, "The Christian may reflect on the demanding implications of enjoying a still better covenant."

We will not go through the whole psalm, but God is calling His people into account here for their hypocrisy. In order to be sure we understand whom He is speaking about, we need to reflect on this thing about sacrifice, "Those who have made a covenant with Him

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by sacrifice." We have to do this because many of us have frequently fallen into the mistaken belief that everything is in order between us and God. But God says in verse 6:

Psalm 50:6 And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is judge himself.

And He says "Selah." "Think about this." It is an implication right at the beginning of this that God is not pleased with His people's righteousness. In other words, it is not as righteous as they think it is, and they think that everything is okay between them and God. The book of Ecclesiastes speaks on this a couple of times about the people who think that because things are going on smoothly, that everything is okay.

God wants His people to know, that as Sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, He will not tolerate that which does not satisfactorily meet His requirements. He specifically names, He brings to the fore, *sacrifice* at the beginning of His charge.

It is very easy to jump to the conclusion that making a covenant by sacrifice indicates the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is that which makes possible the covenant with God for us, and so that is a partially correct conclusion. But let me add something to this. The *Kiel-Delitsch Commentary* states that the participle used in the Hebrew in this phrase demands that sacrifice be understood as **constantly continuous**. It is a constant continuous. In other words, once the sacrifice begins, the sacrifice **continues**. It is not to be looked upon as something that occurred in the past, but it is to be looked upon as something that began in the past and is continuing right up to the present. Oh boy! That puts a different spin on this psalm altogether, and it is no wonder that Tyndal says "It would be good for Christians to consider this in light of having made a better covenant with God."

Even at that, there are two possible applications, and that is that the Christian is constantly looking back upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and there is possibility that this is correct, because, for instance, in I John 1 it says that Christ is our sacrifice for all of our sins, and if we come before Him, we will receive forgiveness—confessing those sins. And so in one sense, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is renewed to us daily. So that is one aspect of it.

But the second application is that those who are being called into account—the *saints*—are the ones who are to pick up from the original sacrifice and carry that principle and sacrifice out in *their* lives in order to maintain the relationship established

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by the covenant. Now I know that this is correct, because this is the principle that inspired Paul to say, "Be imitators of Christ," and sacrifice your life, my life, like He did.

Rather than say that one is correct and the other is incorrect, I think that they are both correct. They both apply. On a practical day-to-day basis, we ought to be coming before God, and with cognizance of our sins, confessing them before Him and receiving forgiveness. But on the other hand God also requires of us that on a daily basis we are working the principle of sacrifice into our lives, and like Christ we are following His example in laying down our lives.

Let me drag one more thing in here. This is from the last sermon that I gave, but it is very important to understand this. Peter said, did he not, in I Peter 2:5 that we are a *royal priesthood*. What do priests, pray tell, do? Priests sacrifice.

Before we leave this psalm I want us to consider briefly verses 22 and 23, just to show you how sobering this is.

Psalm 50:22 Now consider this, you that forget God. . .

God's people forget God? Not entirely, I think. But on the other hand, very likely neglecting Him, and may as well have forgotten Him.

Psalm 51:22-23 Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, [you people who are not making adequate sacrifices—called to be a kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood] and there be none to deliver. Whoso offers praise glorifies me: and to him that orders his conduct aright will I show the salvation of God.

In order to overcome that hypocrisy, it is going to cost in order to get that conduct correct. Now remember those two things: 1) *Offers praise* and 2) *Orders his conduct aright*, because it becomes important a little bit later in this sermon. We will see a connection between the New Testament and right here.

Now let us go to the book of Malachi.

Malachi 1:6-14 A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Says the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And you

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say, Wherein have we despised your name? You offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and you say, Wherein have we polluted you? In that you say, The table of the LOORD is contemptible. And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person? Says the LOORD of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this has been by your means: will he regard your persons? Says the LOORD of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do you kindle fire on my altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, says the LOORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, says the LOORD of hosts. But you have profaned it, in that you say, The table of the LOORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. You said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! And you have snuffed at it, says the LOORD of hosts; and you brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus you brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? Says the LOORD. But cursed be the deceiver, which has in his flock a male, and vows, and sacrifices unto the LOORD a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, says the LOORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

The book of Malachi ought to be one of particular interest to us at this time, because the best of scholars can tell that the events took place not long after or possibly even during the time of Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. Let me just set the stage for you.

The Jews went into captivity into Babylon following their defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Seventy years later a small contingent of them returned to Jerusalem to resettle, to rebuild the temple and the wall under Ezra and Nehemiah. Now they began to rebuild the Temple. Scholars feel that it was probably about 537 B.C. The Temple remember, is a type of the church. After a couple of desultory years of work, they left off working on it, and they turned their attention to building their own homes.

Somewhere around 15 to 17 years later—15 to 17 years of ignoring the condition of the temple—God sent Haggai, and then He sent Zechariah. He did this in order to stir up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, and the people to repent of the inattention, and to turn their attention to once again restoring the Temple. Well Haggai's and Zechariah's efforts were successful. The people repented, so they put their efforts

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into rebuilding the Temple. But almost as quickly as the Temple was rebuilt, they gradually reverted again to a neglectful, self-centered attitude toward God. This is when Malachi was sent. This time much of the problem was in the ministry—the priesthood—and again in the carrying out of their responsibilities. Their duties was the issue.

But before we allow ourselves to, in our mind's eye, point the finger at the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God and other associated organizations, I think that we better look inward to ourselves, because when we were in that organization, we were still called to be a *royal priesthood*. In God's mind's eye, we too—all of us—were associated with that ministry, especially in terms of prophecies like this, because prophecies like this are of value only as they are personally and individually applied. They apply to the priesthood of the New Testament church just as surely as they applied to the priesthood of the Old Covenant church.

Now the tone is set in verse 6 where He says, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master." Let us go back to I Corinthians 7.

I Corinthians 7:22 For he that is called [you and me] in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

It does not matter whether you are called, being a servant—you are Christ's servant; or whether you are called, being free—you are also Christ's servant. Everybody called into the work of God is Christ's servant. That ought to be easily understood.

A priest stands in the position in Malachi 1:6 as a servant. But think about this. You and I are not only servants, we are also *sons*, because we were been begotten by God and we are called to be a *royal priesthood*. Malachi 1, 2, and 3 and 4 is addressed to the New Testament church, and recorded in their time because it was appropriate to an attitude that needs to be corrected in God's people from time to time.

So we are the sons of God, called to be a royal priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices (I Peter 2:5). As sons we are to give Him honor, i.e., we are to live our lives bringing glory to Him by showing Him that honor. To show honor means *to place a high value upon*; and in this case the highest value of life. As servants we are to reverence Him, to respect Him—responding in our lives, always deferring to His will in *everything*. Malachi 1:6-14 applied to the New Testament priesthood in spades—both ways, as sons of God and as a royal priesthood.

Now consider this: To the Levites was given the responsibility of the care of the tabernacle, which was the religious instrument of God *and* the center of the religious instruction of God's people. It was *they* who stood between the people and God, bridging that gap. The Levites were almost always the smallest in number of the thirteen tribes. In addition to that, it was only the family of Aaron, within Levi, that could serve in the priesthood, a very very small percentage of the total population of Israel who are privileged to act on behalf of God for the people.

You can see another parallel is beginning to emerge here. Out of the multi-billions of people on earth, we alone have been accorded this privilege of being *sons of God*, and a *royal priesthood* in formation, to act in behalf of God for the people. ***To whom much is given, from him much is required***, and God is not going to accept half-measure from His people. Is it beginning to have a familiar ring with Psalm 50? The sins might be a little bit different from hypocrisy to being lackadaisical and lethargic; but nonetheless it is something that is addressed to us. We are in a *very* privileged status.

While we are in I Corinthians, go to chapter 12.

I Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

I Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit.

I Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all.

I Corinthians 12:8 For to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit.

I Corinthians 12:11 But all these work that one and selfsame spirit, dividing [distributing] to every man severally as he [God] will.

When God works with a person and wants that person to carry out a responsibility to Him, what Paul is saying here in I Corinthians 12 is that God always gives the enabling power and gifts necessary to carry out that responsibility. *We have no excuse* is what I

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am saying, brethren. We have no excuse for not carrying out our responsibility of offering spiritual sacrifices before God to the very best of our ability.

Now it is hardly likely that the priests back in Malachi 1 would come to the deliberate, let us say reason, and deliberate conclusion that *servicing God* was contemptible, or that their privileged position as part of a priesthood was something that was despised. It is interesting that in verse 12 the word "say" frequently means in Hebrew, "say to oneself." They were not going around saying to people that God is contemptible, or that God's table is contemptible and boring; but rather, what was happening was the way they were going about carrying out their responsibilities which showed God that they considered them, deep within themselves, to be secondary responsibilities—secondary matters requiring no particular care. In other words, they were careless about what they were doing. Do you understand what Malachi is describing here?

Turn with me to Hebrews 2. This happens over and over again. This is a part of life, and we have to catch ourselves. Every once in a while we need to be brought up short to recognize what it is that is causing all the problems in our lives. Maybe not all. That is going too far; but many of the problems in our lives.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed. . .

Were the people in Malachi 1 really giving *heed* to their responsibility? No. That is what was wrong.

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation: which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

That is what the priests were doing. In their attitude, they were neglectful in carrying out their responsibility with the enthusiasm, with the zeal, with the understanding that they should have, and God was saying to them, *You hold Me to be contemptible. You hold Me to be despised.* We call it today by a different name, and it is given in Revelation 3.

Revelation 3:15-16 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot . . . I will spew you out of my mouth.

Is that what happened? I will tell you, when you regurgitate something out of your mouth, what comes out of your mouth scatters in every direction. And that is what has happened to the membership of the church of God. We have scattered in every direction because *we*—it was not just the Tkachs; it was you, it was me—it was the **whole body** that was sick with Laodiceanism, and we were so contemptible in God's eyes that there was no reason to hold us together, and so He spit us out, that hopefully there would be enough remained within us that we would recognize in the scriptures the way that we were acting, and *repent*.

We were acting just like the priesthood in Malachi 1. Where were our sacrifices, brethren? Were our prayers ascending before God as we saw the church disintegrate? I can tell you now, I began to see the church disintegrate in the '70s, and I only saw it because Herbert W. Armstrong told me. Not me personally; he said it in a sermon. He knew the church was falling apart. Spiritually, I mean. That is why he told Mr. Tkach, "Get the church ready." He did not say to go out and preach the gospel. He said "*Get the church ready.*"

Brethren, we will never be unified until we come to understand that *I caused the problem, you caused the problem*, and quit pointing the finger of scorn at the Tkachs. Yes, they were used, and they had their problems, and so did the others. But we have to look at ourselves. ***We were the problem.*** I heard Mr. Armstrong on at least two occasions say that he first saw Laodiceanism coming into the church as early as 1969. He was aware. I will tell you, as soon as he was taken out of the way, and the strength of unity that he provided, because we respected him—the thing fell apart. It is not going to come together again until someone somewhat like him is raised up by God, and we recognize it and submit to that person—whoever it might be.

So we need to think about our part, about what is going on, because we have been neglectful. And so he says that we were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. We all know that clothing is a type of righteousness, is it not? God says that He will declare ***His*** righteousness, in Psalm 50. And He declares those who have made a covenant by sacrifice as being hypocrites.

We were this way in varying degrees. The weight does not all fall on one person, and not everybody, believe it or not, was Laodicean; but it was easily the dominant attitude in the church. I think that all of us can take the correction and begin to make changes toward getting back on making the kind of sacrifices that God wants from His people—the kind of sacrifices that a New Covenant Christian is required to carry out in God's behalf.

God has allowed this scattering to shake us out of our miserable condition. So right now my recommendation to you is *hang on*; but do not just *hang on*—get busy straightening out your relationship with our Creator.

Sacrifice always involves a measure of self-denial—or there is no sacrifice. It means denying ourselves something that we would otherwise like to have, or to do. It is the act of giving up something valued for a cause or a person that one esteems as being better or more important. There is always a measure of **fear**, of self-concern involved that sometimes can be so daunting that we will shrink back. But brethren, it must be overcome!

But in order to overcome this fear of sacrifice, it takes *courage* and *self-denial*. And it is in this process that character is built. This is why sacrifice has to be a part of every Christian's life. No sacrifice—weak character. No sacrifice—we are not like God! He went as far as anybody could possibly go in giving up the One, the only One, that He had a relationship with on His level. You just cannot go any further. Of course, Abraham exemplified that in a human being, as did Jesus Christ.

You might recall in that last sermon I mentioned four general areas of sacrifice that God required of everyone of His sons. The one that is most with us is Romans 12, verses 1 and 2—that we are to be *a living sacrifice*. That is something that occurs every day. We can never get away from that, because overcoming is something that is with us every day, and it is in this area that we have to bear our burden most frequently.

The second area was the one in Hebrews 13:15—*the sacrifice of praise*. Do you know why God wants us to praise Him? This is not something that just comes off the top of our head. He means *a thoughtful praise*. He means the kind of praise in which we have thought things through, and we can see His hand in what is going on. He wants us to do this because it gets our mind off ourselves and helps us in the other sacrifices that need to be made.

The third one was *the sacrifice of service*. This one appears in Hebrews 13:16, right after *the sacrifice of praise*. You can make a tie-in with Psalm 50:22-23, where He mentions *praise*, and *he who orders his conduct aright*. That is the person He is going to look to. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man that he lay down his life for his friend," and He meant on a daily basis. *Pure religion and undefiled is to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction*—service to them.

What does He say in Matthew 25, when He separates the sheep and the goats? The

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sheep are those who did what? Who gave Him a glass of water, who fed Him, who came to visit Him in prison, and those who were offering their time and energy and effort in serving the brethren in their need. In I John 3:16-18, John makes a comment along this line as well.

Then the fourth one was *the sacrifice in martyrdom*. This is one we may not have to face, and I hope that none of us will ever have to. But on the other hand, it is something that we may have to face.

Let us finish up this sermon in Philippians.

Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

Let me paraphrase that for you. Paul says, "Yes, though I will probably be martyred for the benefit of the *sacrificial ministry produced by your faith*, I rejoice, and I will rejoice with all of you."

We heard a great deal about that in Richard's sermon last week, but the thing that I want to pick up from that is that Paul was acknowledging that if we strive for righteousness, if we strive for carrying out our sacrificial responsibilities to God with fervor, with enthusiasm, with desire to please Him, with courage, with faith—that we will probably produce persecution, and maybe even martyrdom.

Let us go back to Philippians 1 and we will finish on the same scripture that Richard concluded with, remembering that this sermon was on *entering into the fellowship of Christ's suffering*. This is a necessary aspect of our lives, because this is where we get the practical experience of *being like Christ*. Christ suffered because of righteousness. He suffered because He was righteous—and the world did not like it. Of course, He suffered because of sin—our sin—but that suffering that He received would never have occurred if we had been righteous. In verse 29 it says:

Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

So Paul wanted to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings—and he did, and there was hardly a greater man that ever lived after the time of Christ

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Brethren, sacrifice stifles—I may even go so far as to say that it **kills**—human nature. It is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that gives us access to the Father and to His Holy Spirit, thus providing us with the power and the gifts to overcome. But it still takes our sacrifice to use it, to deny the flesh what it feels that it is due. And it is when human nature is denied satisfaction that it *suffers and dies*; but it is that suffering that stops us in fear.

Think about this. Evelyn brought this up to me yesterday and I think that it is really a keen insight. Sacrifice indeed is painful, and sometimes a fearful thing; but God never requires us to sacrifice *anything* that is going to be good for us. The pain of sacrifice arises from human nature screaming out for self-satisfaction, and that is what has to be gotten rid of. It might give you, it might give us, some sort of an idea of how **deeply** implanted within us this desire *to serve the self* is. That is what produces the fear. But human nature will not die unless it is denied what feeds it.

So if there is anything that we can learn from this sermon, it is that, plus the fact that it is this that makes us to *know God*. Jesus was made perfect *through sufferings*, and we will too, if we suffer for the same reasons that He did—and that is our responsibility as a priest, to make sure that is the reason we are offering up these sacrifices to God.