

Checklist For Overcoming

Overcoming Satan's Temptations

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Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 58. We are going to begin our fast here, and I want to say at the very beginning to understand that the purpose of this fast is not that all of those things listed in Isaiah 58 could occur on the day of the fast, but rather my greater concern is that the fast should be done with such a purpose, and an attitude, and manner that the things that are listed there are the fruits of the fast.

Isaiah 58:5-7 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and you hide not yourself from your own flesh?

The problem being addressed by Isaiah is the empty externalism of the people, that is, that the people showed an outward evidence of wanting to do God's will. They were attending services; they occasionally consulted with the priest; they even endured the inconveniences of fasting, but they never really followed through to meet the moral and social demands of God's way. What did a little abstinence—that is, in fasting—matter if they could retain their same basic lifestyle without ever making a change?

A fast, except for the Day of Atonement, is a voluntary spiritual exercise devoted to humbling ourselves before God in order to make a turn in our lives so that the future will be more correctly spiritual than the past; and therefore filled with love, with faith, with oneness, with holiness, and with unity with God and the church. And fasting is merely the beginning of a practical process intended to produce those kinds of things.

We all understand, at least to some degree, that the greater church of God is in trouble and has been in trouble for an extended period of time. How clear the understanding, and how fervent the measure of concern about the problem, is going to vary from person to person. But all of us cared enough to leave the fellowship of the Worldwide Church of God in order to find a more doctrinally correct, peaceful, and fruitful fellowship. For a while, the issue seemed to be resolved in the forming of other fellowships that spun off the Worldwide Church of God but, brethren, the problems are continuing.

The problems do not have the same intensity as three to five years ago but it has nonetheless been continuing. When we left the WCG, we believed that the enemy and the reasons why we left were very clear; even though there might have been some sort of a residue of uncertainty in what we were doing. But if you are at all like me, you now realize that you did not leave with anywhere near as clear of an understanding of the real causes of the problems as we now have. In some cases, all we had then were broad generalities and the effect of that on each of us was that we did what God tells us not to do in Isaiah 58:9:

Isaiah 58:9 Then you shall call, and the Lord shall answer; you shall cry, and He shall say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away from the yoke from your midst [that which is enslaving or guiding life in a wrong way], the pointing of the finger [and accusations], and speaking vanity . . .

Each and every one of us had a collection of war stories. I am not saying that these things were untrue but that was what we were concentrating on whenever we left. But after several years of evaluating the scene, and especially coming to understand portions of prophetic scriptures much better, I think that there is an even sharper focus now on what is the enemy. If we are honest as to where some of the specific problems reside, I think we have to say, with all honesty, that we have met the enemy and “they” is us.

Lamentations 1:8 Jerusalem [which is a type of the church] has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile.

I just wanted to pick up on the principle here because this is the Bible's approach. God blamed all of Jerusalem; in other places, God blamed all of Israel for going into captivity. In other places God blamed all of Judah for going into captivity. Yes there were times when God specifically aimed His accusations against the king, as in, "so and so did evil in His sight." There were times that God aimed His accusation at the priest or the false prophets. There were other times that He aimed His accusations at the wealthy of the land, especially in the book of Amos. Are the poor not sinners? Yes, they are. And yes, there are those in positions, like in the church, the Pastor General and his staff, and the ministry, who have greater influence and also bear greater responsibility on the outcome of events, but nobody can escape God's judgment of having some measure of responsibility as being some part of the problem or the reason why the church finds itself in this scattered and very disunified condition.

For any of us who were part of the events of the Worldwide Church of God in the last twenty years or so, if we think that we were not part of this scattering then I have to say to you that your thinking is a recipe for disaster—spiritual disaster.

We can update this into Revelation 3. Remember what God says about the Laodiceans. The Laodicean says he is rich and increased with goods and he has need of nothing. I think that word 'nothing' to be a very serious proclamation on his part because the Laodicean is in reality saying he does not even need God. But when God evaluates the Laodicean He says I see you as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. That is why I say that anybody who says that they are not part of the problem, is probably in this condition and does not even see it—blind, and does not see the spiritual nakedness.

God blames all on Jerusalem's fall; all on Israel's fall; all on Judah's fall. If we apply Lamentations 1:8 to the church, and I very strongly feel that it does, God is blaming everybody, and I am going to show you a verse that is very complete in this regard right now. Let us turn to I King 8.

I Kings 8:46 And if they sin against you . . .

I will give you just a bit of background. This is Solomon's prayer when the Ark of the Covenant was brought out of the City of David into the newly finished Temple. This particular section of Solomon's prayer is largely an appeal to God to hear our prayers. And I think that his appeal, beginning in verse 46, is quite appropriate to the situation in the church of God today.

I Kings 8:46-53 “When they sin against You [Look at this parenthetical statement:] (for there is no one who does not sin) [Everybody is caught in God’s net; everybody has to share in the blame of what has occurred; nobody escapes], and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; yet when they come to themselves [That is, meditate upon why they are in that condition] in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness; and they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they be Your people and Your inheritance, which You brought forth out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace), that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.”

Verses 47-50 are especially appealing to God that in our scattered condition we think over why we are in this circumstance. Repent and turn to Him with all of our hearts, imploring Him for His favor and forgiveness that He hears. With verses 51-53, you have a major reason why God should do this, and

that is because He has called us, He chose us, He separated us, we are His people, we are His inheritance, and we bear His name. And the implication is, from Solomon to God, that You should rescue Your people because they bear Your name. Not that we deserve it, but because we bear His name and because we do not want God ever to suffer any kind of defamation, implying that He could not save His people.

Was Solomon's prayer answered? Let us turn to II Chronicles 7. This chapter in II Chronicles corresponds to I Kings 8, but it occurs just a bit later time-wise; and what we see is God's response to Solomon's request.

II Chronicles 7:11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and Solomon successfully accomplished all that came into his heart to make in the house of the Lord and in his own house.

Let us drop down to verse 14. I just wanted you to see that this occurred a little bit later. In verse 14 now God is speaking here because it says in verse 12, that “the Lord appeared to Solomon by night.”

II Chronicles 7:14-16 If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. [There is a promise: He will hear.] Now My eyes will be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

God repeated the qualifications that we must humble ourselves and pray. God then not only promises to hear, but He also promises to closely examine. His ear will be attentive, focused in upon, and He will think this thing through thoroughly because the church bears His name. This is quite a promise, because God is going to, in a sense, take us at our word—not entirely at our word, because I am sure that He is going to be able to see certain things in our heart that lead Him to see that He should respond to our prayer.

I believe, brethren, and that however weak it might be—that in, the keeping of this day; this fast that we are doing—that we are attempting to do what we can, first of all, to get ourselves right with God, and hopefully also to take the first stuttering steps toward a much better unity. Now whether that unity ever includes one with another group, I do not know. I do know that it is our responsibility to be more unified, and to follow the instructions that God gives in His Word. To follow through with Him. And then, in a sense you might say, at least part of the ball is in God's court for Him to do what He will.

But what we are doing now is not sufficient in itself. II Chronicles 7:19 I think makes that clear:

II Chronicles 7:19 But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them [then He goes on: "I will uproot you."]

God is going to be watching very closely because the keeping of His commandments, with the attitude that they are to be kept in, is the evidence of our love for Him. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:15? Jesus gave in a very succinct statement what is going to be the evidence that He will accept that we love Him:

John 14:15 If you love Me [He says], keep My commandments.

God will be watching the very sincerity of our conviction at this time to determine whether or not He should respond. And He may respond. He may respond only to this group so that our unity never develops past us. But if He decides in that way, well, that is fine. We have not lost; we have done what was instructed. But if it is not within His will at this time to unite the greater church of God together, let us say into one body, then we have to accept that fact and go on. Nonetheless we will not have lost at all. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose in what we are doing in following God's instructions.

It is not enough, it is not sufficient to be in the right group, having the right doctrines. Do you recall the statement that is given there in Jeremiah chapter

seven? The statement the people were making to God and to each other? They were saying:

Jeremiah 7:4 The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these.

Updated into the church era that means: “I’m okay because I’m in the church. I have the right body of doctrines.” It is not enough to just have the right doctrines. God goes on to say in verse 9, “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely . . . Will you break My commandments and then say we are delivered to do these things?” They were in the right place; they were in God's nation; they had made the covenant with God and there is a very clear example to the church not to follow that, because again that is a recipe for disaster. Having the right basic doctrines is a very beneficial foundation but it provides nothing else unless the doctrines are acted upon.

Last Sabbath, rather late in my sermon, I arrived at Romans 12 and began to expound it. Afterwards, as I was reflecting on the sermon, I felt badly. Partly because I did not leave myself enough time when I got to Romans 12 to do it any justice. I also felt badly because even with what I did do, I felt that I had not done justice toward the scriptures that I intended to cover. Because I feel that the material contained in the final chapters of Romans is an excellent checklist for people in our circumstance. People who have the basic doctrinal package right, but then what do you do with it?

In our specific circumstance, we have to examine ourselves in order that we might get our attitude and conduct right during this period of disunity and confusion; and that is what the book of Romans does. It lays out, in very fine order, what the most essential doctrines of the church are. For eleven chapters Paul does that in quite a bit of detail and then finally in chapters twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen he gives the practical ramifications of the first eleven chapters. It is like, okay here is the way of salvation. Here is what you do with it and this will make it go. There is a good base in the first eleven chapters and then we find out what the doctrines mean in terms of conduct and attitude.

What Paul has done here in Romans 12 is to begin with a very important precondition to any practical application and that is that there must be a

willingness to sacrifice ourselves in service to God. Why? Why would he begin with sacrifice? A whole sermon could be given on this, but I will just turn to one place in the book of Romans. Most of us should understand the content of Romans 7 because Paul shows how he wrestled with human nature all through his conversion period and how human nature was always with him.

Romans 7:21-24 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. [Paul wrote this in the 50s AD. Twenty or more years he had been converted by the time that he wrote this and still evil was present with him.] For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. [Paul was certainly sincere about his conviction and he loved the law of God; he loved God's way; he loved God; but that did not stop the fact that evil was still dwelling in him.] But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. [He called it the law of sin and so he says:] O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?

Why is it necessary that there be sacrifice mentioned? First of all in terms of practical application of the right body of doctrines; because there is a force already resident in us emanating from the spirit that we have had since birth that is going to fight tooth and toe-nail to hold on to what it feels is its possession. Your life and the only way that this can be dispossessed is for us to make the choice to submit to God's Spirit rather than to it [the law of sin] and to follow through in obedience by its power: That is the power of God's Spirit. Hold your finger in Romans 12 and let us go to Galatians 5, just to reinforce this a bit.

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For [here comes an illustration] the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not [It does not mean that it cannot be done, but rather that you do not] do the things that you wish.

You cannot give yourself permission to do them.

I want to read some of Galatians 5:17 from two different translations so that we understand this very clearly why there has to be the willingness to sacrifice. The first one is from the Twentieth Century New Testament:

Galatians 5:17 (*Twentieth Century New Testament*) For these cravings of our earthly nature conflict with the Spirit, and the Spirit with our earthly nature—they are two contrary principles—so that you cannot do what you wish.

That last phrase: “So that you cannot do what you wish,” I am going to read to you from the *Knox Translation*: “And that is why you cannot do all that your will approves.”

Why do we need to have the spirit of sacrifice? Because once a person is converted, his mind becomes a battleground. It is a struggle for possession of a life. It is a struggle to set at right the conduct and attitude of a life that formerly had been anti-God, against God, not subject to the law of God but now delights in the law God and wants to submit but it is that law of the flesh, that law of sin and death is not going to give up easily. There is a fight, a struggle, and so there has to be a willingness to sacrifice because fighting against human nature is painful. And in order to confront the pain is going to require that spirit of sacrifice.

Not only is that nature that is within us very strong in some area of its character but it is also subtly deceitful at convincing us “it really doesn’t matter.” So, our minds can then put out a string of justifications: “Well it doesn’t matter because God is so merciful.” “It’s okay just this one more time.” Or, “It’s okay everybody else is doing it.” Or, “That’s okay, God doesn’t really expect me to be perfect.” Or, “It’s okay because a guy has got to have some fun once in a while.” I guess we could go on and on. Those are just the ones that I could come up with in just a few minutes time because I have given those to myself. We have a struggle on our hands.

Back to Romans 12:3. This verse, and what is contained within it, blends right into the preceding two verses and what follows as well. It is extremely important to the proper attitude and the proper conduct.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone [men and women] that is among you [that is a church member], 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.

This verse shows us the ingredient of character that will enable us to sacrifice ourselves. It is pride that motivates us to exalt our will against God and thus disobey. Remember what one translation said about that verse: “You cannot do whatever your will wishes.” It is pride that motivates us to exalt our will against God and thus disobey. It is this very characteristic that God is going to work at creating the circumstances that will tend to deflate it and to produce humility in us.

God can do this. God can create the circumstances that are needful, but we always have to remember that even though He does that we still have to make the choice to be humble. Humility is something we choose to be and to do.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

I Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.

Did you catch it? Humble yourself! That is a command. It is something we can do. God will create the circumstances to take the wind out of our sails. He will create the circumstances by which we are able to learn what our attitude really ought to be. But we still have to make the choice; and it is a choice, if I can put it this way, it is a choice we *must* make because our whole relationship with God may depend on it. We have read that verse in Isaiah 66 in the last two sermons that I have given, because God says now you want to do something that impresses me? Humble yourself!

Men are proud of what they do with their hands and brains; God says, “Humble yourself; that really impresses Me.” You see, that goes against pride; it goes against human nature, and the proud are generally very unwilling to humble themselves and sacrifice because it takes the sacrificing

of pride to be submissive to God. It was pride that preceded Satan's fall and his subsequent challenge of God in a war. Many researchers say, without equivocation, that pride is ultimately the father of all sins, whether Satan's or ours. It matters not.

It is pride that moves us to put others down, to gossip, to talebear, to lie to make ourselves look good. Pride motivates us to justify our sins before others. It moves us to seek the highest seat. It moves us to fear. It moves out to run from correction. It moves us to pursue fads so that one is in on the latest thing. Its pursuit moves us to want to be in the in-crowd—the inner circle. It moves us to gripe and to murmur. It is really at the foundation of almost everything that we do against the will of God.

In Galatians 6 Paul makes an interesting statement there:

Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

That translation is a little vague to me because it is almost like it leaves us an out; like you could think of yourself as being something. Well, I do not want to go into that because it gets too involved but let me read this to you from the J. B. Phillips' *New Testament in Modern English*. It is really clear:

Galatians 6:3 (Phillips') If a man thinks he is “somebody,” he is deceiving himself, for that very thought proves that he is nobody.

I think that is pretty good. We have got to qualify this: nobody in terms of what is important to God's Kingdom, because that is the perspective this book takes. In this world people are considered great according to rank, office, wealth, some profession, title, or maybe eloquence. The appeal here in Roman 12:3 is that in the church the standard is different. All the things previously mentioned: the rank, wealth, office, skills, or whatever, have no intrinsic value as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned; the only true standard pertains to what constitutes the moral and spiritual nature of a person and this in turn is reflected in their humility because a humble person submits and his faith works.

That is important. Whether a person is a college graduate, a doctor, a lawyer, an Indian chief, male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or corporate, or an academic giant with three PhD's, it does not matter at all. All that matters to God is the person's attitude and character. And it is faith, you see, that works to produce character, that is why faith working is so important.

It is important to know this. Do you believe this and practice this? Because what Romans 12:3 says has very great impact on relationships within the church. The attitude expressed here bridges between the willingness to sacrifice and relationships with His people, and especially those who are in the church. The Pharisees were very willing to sacrifice in their rigid approach to life, but wow, were their relationships with people terrible. They were some of the most moral and yet offensive people who ever walked the face of the earth.

Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Paul immediately shifts the emphasis to relationships: sacrifice, humility, relationships. Do you think there is any connection between those things? There very definitely is. That word 'for' in verse 4, means that another illustration is coming to give understanding as to why Romans 12:3 especially is so important. So he says that there are many offices in the church; and therefore each person and his function is fitted to and needful to the church's well-being. Just like each part of the human body is fitted and needed for its well-being. There is an analogy going on here. The church is being perceived as a body, every part of your body is needed and every member in the church's body is needed.

If members, because of their pride, are not treating each other with the humble kindness they should, it is an indication that they do not really love the church, because they are inflicting injury upon it. This becomes all the more serious when we consider that the church is Christ's body and in this analogy the injury is being inflicted on Him.

We are getting into deep water here. We have to come to understand that we—church members—are mutually dependent upon each other, even as every part of your human body is mutually dependent on the other parts. No part of the body can live without the blood. No part of the body can live without the brain; but the brain is depending upon the feet and the legs to take it where it wants to go. I think we understand the point.

When one person, supposedly a Christian, in his pride gossips or talebears about another so as to make themselves look good, and in the process destroys a reputation, that is hardly an act of mutual dependence that builds the church. Rather, in the analogy of the church being Christ's body, of which each one of us is a part, it is an act of self-destruction as well as an attack on Christ. Just in case you think that I am blowing hot air here just reread Matthew 25:34 and you will get the point very clearly.

So, let us look at Romans 12:6-8, because Paul carries on with the thought. Brethren, do you understand what I am getting at? These are things that divide and disunite; and Paul is writing this to get the church into one body using the foundation of the doctrines, that appear earlier, in chapters one through eleven.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry [of serving], let us use it in on our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he that gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

“Having then gifts differing:” This begins a very interesting section, especially when applied to the church today and the things that are going on within it. I think we would all agree that I Corinthians 12 clearly shows that God gives gifts by His Spirit, and that everybody in the church has been given gifts. It is also entirely possible that Paul here is also thinking of what we might call natural endowments, as well as the spiritual ones. The Bible is primarily concerned with the spiritual ones so it dwells on them; but within

the principle the natural endowments, things that we have received by inheritance from our parents, things that are in the genes, as we would say, are also considered here as well.

I think that it is clear that we are not all equally endowed, or gifted. Some undoubtedly have more than others. And for this there are some who feel a measure of offense toward God. It is like they were behind the door when the brains were passed out. And I think we should be able to see from our own experience that God never intended that everybody be equal. But for most Israelites, schooled in the workings of democracy, this is very frequently a difficult point to understand and to accept, and we frequently respond with, "I'm just as good as you are!"

Brethren, this is not even the issue. It is not a matter of who is better, and for a person to think like that is sheer vanity. It is a matter of who has been given what gifts to serve the church and it is showing by the fruits of their life. It is this very lack of understanding and acceptance, when combined with a great deal of impatience, or possibly not even being converted, that is causing the continuation of much of the problem of disunity in the church.

Is everybody out in the world equal? Equal in everything? Does everybody in the world have the same academic or athletic ability? Were you ever in a class in which it seems that no matter how hard you worked, you could not lift yourself maybe above a C, and more than likely, there was some other person in that class, who looked as though they have never even cracked the book and when the report cards came up, they had A's and you had C's.

I was one of those nerds in one class: geography. It was a real important subject, you know! Would you not know it would be in something like that? And I do not know why. I could go into a geography class and never cracked the book and I would have an A at the end of the year. All I can say is that I had a gift for somehow being able to see in my mind's eyes where something was and the effect that it might have had on the weather or the population or the demographics or whatever came up in class; it was just something that was first nature to me.

On the other hand, I could not diagram anything but the most simple sentence in English! No matter how hard I tried in English class, I could

never get my grade above a C. It was not a matter of not trying or not a matter of not being interested, because I am here to tell you that I did try. And the report cards would come out and there was another C. My test papers came back with all kinds of red marks on them. I wished every class was geography but it could not be that way because not everybody is equally endowed.

Schools have accelerated programs for those children that they even call gifted. But that is not the only area of life in which people are gifted. There are some people who are not gifted academically but they can do marvelous things with their hands; they have a gift with mechanical things. There are people who are gifted artists, whether it be in playing an instrument, or they have been given a wonderful gift of a voice that can make you thrilled to the sound of it, or people who are gifted athletically. There are people who are gifted with the kind of bodily form that is considered to be beautiful, whatever the time of society happens to be. And that fact is just as true in the church as it is in the world. God gives His gifts, that all may benefit.

Turn with me to I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit [the gifts are emanating from the same Source.]

I Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of ministries, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all [So that is so that all may profit.]

And then he starts naming some of them: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy (that is, inspired speaking), tongues, and on and on.

I Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things [now look at this:], distributing to each one individually as He wills.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Just as surely as He put the brain where it is, the two eyes where they are, and the mouth where it is, and the ears, and the feet, the toes, and everything where it pleases Him to come to a comely design for man. So in the church God is in charge; He has put everybody in the church that He wants to put in, and He has put them in the position that He wants them, and He has given them the gifts that they need to carry out the function that He wants them to carry out. But everybody is not endowed equally. Sometimes this makes people upset. They want to be what somebody else is, or they are jealous of, or envious of, what somebody else is.

Turn back to Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:14-15 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.”

Another illustration:

Romans 9:20-22 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, “Why have You made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another to dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction . . .

I just read that last verse so that you would see that it is God Who is the Potter and it is we who murmur and complain because of the way that He made us, or the gifts that He did or did not give us.

If you can understand these verses and what I have been saying, that there is a principle involved that is very important so that we understand the principle involved here: The giving of gifts is an exercise of God's sovereignty. And brethren, He does not give gifts equally. He gives to Paul a multitude of gifts, and then on the other hand sometimes He sets up the basest of men and even brings a Pharaoh into the church. This is something that we have to come to grips with.

So from your own experience, combined with God's Word about gifts, you ought to be able to judge from this that you have gifts and I have gifts, but your gifts did not make you either perfect or better than anybody else and neither did my gifts make me any better or more perfect than you or anybody else.

So what do we have that we did not receive? Paul said that in I Corinthians 4 the gifts are at God's discretion in order to give us a tool by which we can carry out our function in the church. I received gifts in order to function as a church pastor in service of whomever it is that God gives.

Turn to Exodus 31.

Exodus 31:1-6 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you."

There is the principle. Each of us is a gifted artist, commissioned by God to work at building and embellishing the church. Those gifts carry with them the authority to perform the function for the church's benefit. But by faith you must know this—that each of us is responsible to God for the using of those gifts, and to whom much is given, much is required.

Therefore, God evens out things in the end by making the standards of judgment of those receiving more gifts more stringent and difficult. (see James 3:1) What has happened in the church is that we have left off building so God did what He did in scattering us. But now it is time for us to begin getting ourselves together so that we can be used once again.

What we are finding—that is, in the ministry—is that there is a great residue of distrust and cynicism combined with impatience; and what it adds up to is a lot of proud people with an accusing and unforgiving spirit who wear their feelings on their sleeve, offending and being offended and being unable to take correction regardless of how gently or patiently it is given.

Sometimes people come with a doctrine that they feel fervently about. This is just a little aside, but I have found, just in my limited experience, it is rarely somebody that is in the ministry. It is most frequently a lay member. But they bring it to the ministry and when the ministry, using some of the gifts that God gave them for their service to the body, says it does not fit into the faith once delivered, or determine that it does not fit into the scheme of things right now but maybe off in the future it might have an application, or maybe even outright says that is wrong because of thus and thus and so and so, I tell you that it is very likely that we are going to have a very offended person on our hands. That fairly frequently leads them to the conclusion that they do not need teachers anyway.

This is an outright rejection of Christ. Christ sent the prophets, and they were teachers. He established the priesthood, and they were teachers. I think His will is becoming pretty clear here. He taught the apostles and He sent them, and they were teachers of the church. Romans 12:7 says:

Romans 12:7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;

Christ has set teachers in the church to teach the church. But now people are saying we do not need teachers. You figure that one out! I Corinthians 12, right at the end of that chapter it says:

I Corinthians 12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .

God set teachers in the church! What? What do they just do? Are they window dressing? I am being sarcastic here.

I Corinthians 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?

Teachers are mentioned right along with apostles and prophets and others especially being set in the church by God. And Ephesians 4:11 mentions teachers as being Christ's gift to the church for the perfecting of the saints and for the work of service. Maybe, to those of you are not quite so aware of what is keeping the church divided, we are looking at a major problem. It all stands from this problem, this thing that is stated there in Romans 12:3 about people thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to.

The only way people can arrive at this strange conclusion, that the nice Christ's gift to the church is through a major misinterpretation of I John 2:27 and a desire to resist anything that they perceive as authority over them. There is the real problem. What is so interesting is that the man who wrote that, John the apostle, was himself a teacher who told the people to stick to the teaching that he and the other ministers of God that taught them because there were people in the congregation rising up to teach things not authorized by the apostles. And John called them antichrist!

Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

To say that it is fine for people to use their gifts to exhort, to give, to show mercy, and then to say that it is not okay for some to rule over is a gross hypocrisy and a rejection of Scripture. Did you see that in Romans 12:8? Maybe I did not read it clearly: "he who exhorts, in exhortation: he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence."

Who in the church rules? If you look up that word in *Strong's* [Concordance], I will give you the number so you can study it later: G4291. If you want to extend your search on this word out to other sources, this word is the combining of two words: meaning the first word, the prefix is

means before, and the body of the word, the root, means stand. Put the two together and it means: before stand; stand in front of; be placed in front of. It means to stand.

This is right out of *Strong's Concordance*: To stand before as to rank, to preside, to maintain, be over, to have the care of. Its synonyms in the Greek are words that mean, to rule, to be a master of a house, to lead, to shepherd, to guide. It is directly tied to the word 'elder' in I Timothy 5:17 as in "let the elders who rule well." That word 'rule' is the same word. "For Paul ordained elders in every city."

The issue is not whether the Bible gives the ministry the authority to use his gifts to do the job because the Bible gives authority to anybody who has received gifts to use them. The issue in the Bible is how they are used. Remember, to whom much is given much is required. Remember to whom much is given the standards are raised way up in order that everybody then, because of the level of gifts given, is judged equally, fairly.

This is where the pride and the impatience comes to the fore because many are so impatient, and really, when we understand it, lacking in faith that they will not give the forgiveness, the kindness, the mercy, and the time to each other. The ministry, which certainly is not perfect either, gets caught in the cross currents of these situations, almost invariably it becomes the bad guy because it is our responsibility to intervene and see what we can do to help.

Because decisions eventually have to be made. I do not know whether you come to understand this yet, but as long as there are human beings and we have feelings, and we have perspectives and ideas about things, there are not going to be any perfect answers, no perfect solutions. Brethren, sometimes we have to just bite the bullet and accept things as they are and get on with life in faith knowing God knows. S in verse 9 Paul says:

Romans 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to what is good.

This is what we have to do, because we have faith in God. He is sovereign; He is still on His throne and we are going to be judged according to what we do; not by how we perceive somebody else thinks about us or acts toward us.

The issue is how and what we do with what we have been given. I Peter 2:23 says that “[He] committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

That brings us full circle because Christ committed Himself to God as Judge, as sovereign Ruler of His creation. He humbled Himself and allowed people to kill Him; to go that far to torture Him and kill Him without ever opening His mouth in complaint. Christ was that humble; He was that willing to sacrifice Himself in order to submit to God.

But the key element in this was His faith in God; He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. There are always going to be inequalities, inequities, things done wrong, and things said wrong within the church by the ministry or whatever. What is going to guide the outcome of things is that verse in Romans 12:3. It is our perception of ourself in relationship to God and to the church. There is not an absolute equality among man that we can rely upon. Paul began this particular section instructing us to make a sober judgment of ourselves; that is because it has such a great impact on relationships, and I have run through this because it is what is still splitting the church.

If you are receiving bad or very poor teaching on the issues of life, that is a very good reason to leave one group and in an honest search maybe find another. Or maybe if the group is in constant turmoil because of politicking or striving for office, so there is little or no peace, that too might be a good reason to leave because it might be a sign of bad teaching. It might be a good reason for leaving. But God’s overall advice here in Romans 12:9 is very positive. Our love, regardless of the situation, should be without hypocrisy. It should be sincere and unfeigned, not put on. The reason we need to do what is right, regardless of what others are doing, so that we can be a force for unity in a congregation or in the church as a whole.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Peacemakers do not add to the confusion. They are the means that makes it possible for the fruit of God's Spirit to be born and to flourish, according to John 3:18. A person who gives love without hypocrisy is a peacemaker and they will be blessed.

People who are respecters of persons divide congregations, stir hard feelings, resentments, and offense. This love is goodwill toward all despite the

response that we receive because it is not dependent on a certain kind of response we might expect. But because we give it as an exercise or an act of faith in God.

Perhaps more than anything in our life it may show that we are committing ourselves to Him who judges righteously. The person acts in goodwill because he believes in God and he desires to be like Him and that is enough for him. The response, though it may hurt, they know that in the long run it does not matter because they are meeting God's qualification.

What we have here at the beginning of Romans twelve are the starting points for the practical use of correct doctrine. Once we believe the correct doctrine there must be a willingness to sacrifice the self because human nature is going to continue to exert its will in order to maintain control of the person's life.

Next there must be an honest and sober assessment of oneself, especially of one's faith, because that is the springboard for proper relationships with the brethren. This is absolutely essential unless we produce idolatry and where we are the idol. Because that is what happens; in practical fact, that is what happens. Pride drives us to us becoming the idol that is served.

It is good to remember that Israel's example, especially clear in the book of Ezekiel, is that there are two major sins for idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Let me inject right here that Sabbath breaking, using the Sabbath for common, everyday activities is becoming more and more prevalent and the Sabbath is going by the wayside. Just remember we were warned in Ezekiel: idolatry, pride, Sabbath breaking, practical application.

Some of us have more gifts than others (continuing in summary here), and this may be a trial for both the more gifted and those less, but it is God's call and He has done what He has done for His purposes and by faith we must accept that. Despite the measure of gifts one has received, each person is necessary to the function of the church and is not to be treated as less important. Each has to do his function diligently. Finally, it is the responsibility of all that their love be genuine.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Be kindly affectionate. You are looking at something unique. This is the only place in the Bible that this particular word appears, tender affection such as that which subsists between parents and children. It is the kind of affection cherishing one's kindred, being fond of natural relatives. This verse then means that Christians should have a similar feeling toward each other; as belonging to the same family, united in the same principles and interests.

We are now very deep into the fast. In fact, it is a fast drawing to a close and the lessons of Romans 12 should be used as a springboard for a new beginning in real unity.