

## What Does God Really Want? (Part 1)

**What is Perfection?**

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**Proverbs 24:21-22** My son, fear you the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knows the ruin of them both?

The admonition that is given here includes both religion, because the Lord is mentioned, and the political, because the king is mentioned. And so the admonition is that we should be concerned about anybody who wants to change things in these regards in our relationship with God and the king. It says in the margin that we are not to associate with these people. We will see a little later why this is so.

Adam Clarke has an interesting comment in regard to verse 21. He says, "The innovator—those who are always for making experiments on modes of government and forms of religion, [those who want to change things]—is the most dangerous spirit that can affect the human mind."

For five sermons my focus has been on the calendar. But to me the most important things that have come from this series are the elements that have broad practical daily spiritual application. Much involving God's sovereignty, His providence, and faithfulness in His oversight of His purpose and plan. These elements I feel are exceedingly more important than the technicalities of the calendar itself.

My experience in dealing with people over the calendar has shown that it is very difficult to get church members to agree on the technicality, largely because of the emphasis that each puts on interpreting the Bible's generalities. The Bible does not clearly spell out in "thus saith the Lord" statements what several of the exact rules must be, and that some rules are missing altogether. There is no book of the calendar. There is not even a chapter of the calendar. The word "calendar" does not appear in the Bible, even though it is apparent that Israel had one. It leaves researchers with

isolated verses and events that they try to interpret, and it is obvious that they are reaching different conclusions, because I have eight calendars, and each and every one of them is different in some regard.

This presents a situation to the church that is ripe with possibilities for finger pointing accusations, confusion, anger, expressions of self-righteousness, distrust—all leading to an atmosphere of disorder, of instability, and result in division. But James says that it is in peace that the fruits of righteousness are produced. It is no wonder that Satan wants to keep an atmosphere of disorder within the church.

The lessons that we learned of God's sovereignty, His providence, and faithfulness are exceedingly important if we are going to grow in trusting Him with our lives. What kind of God, a Father, would He be if He tells us to do something important, like keeping the Sabbath or the holy days, and then fails to give us the tool that we need to do it? Or a father and a mother in a family situation that gives you a job to do, and then gives you a tool that only works part of the time? This is essentially what those who want a calendar change are saying about why the calendar should be changed.

I want us to briefly compare another area of God's involvement with us, and that is there is a powerful witness in the physical creation of the thoroughness of God's providence. David tells us in Psalm 19 that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork." Brethren, is there something missing in the creation, something God has failed to provide so that we cannot fulfill His purpose for us?

David also said in Psalm 139 that "we are fearfully and wonderfully made." I heard something just yesterday that filled me with wonder when I heard it. A man said in a news report that every single molecule of DNA has about one hundred thousand genes in it.

God not only created this awesome detail in man, but also for every living creature in order that it can reproduce itself, and in the case of mankind, a variety of personal characteristics so that each person is an individual. Tell me, is there anything that God overlooked here? Is there something missing? But somehow, brethren think He overlooked the calendar, or that He did not supply His children with the correct one. In other places in His Word God

shows how He provides for the beasts of the field. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promises that God will always provide for us.

The creation declares a powerful witness to all who will open their eyes and mind on how God has created all things in exquisite, infinite detail, not overlooking a single factor, so that everything works in harmony to produce a wonderful environment for His work to be worked out in. Every law can be absolutely depended upon, because He is overseeing His creation. He says in Hebrews 1 that He upholds all things by the word of His power, but somehow the correct calendar has not been provided for His own children.

The unspoken accusation is that He has raised up a messenger, sent him with His gospel, commanded us to keep His Sabbath and holy days, and then allowed us to use a faulty calendar. James says that God tempts no man. But the way I understand what these calendar changers are telling us is God led us right into sin by not providing us with the appropriate calendar.

The Bible contains those instructions most important to the completion of God's image in us. Complete rules for the calendar are not in there, God having provided us with a calendar He is pleased to accept our worship through in another way. Jesus never spoke on the calendar, so that ought to tell us something. It was a non-issue, and it should tell us that He was content with the calendar being used. But those attempting to get you to change calendars try to convince you that the calendar now is different from what was used then. But they do not have proof that the church of God, as a body, ever rejected the Hebrew calendar for one of their own devising.

Now these people claim to be following God, but their hypocrisy is revealed in that how can they be following God when His Word does not contain all of the rules one must use to construct a calendar? In order to form their calendars they must resort to exactly the same practice that they accuse the Jews of using.

**Philippians 4:19** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

**Psalms 23:1** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

**Isaiah 40:11** He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm [That is you and me!], and carry them in his bosom [How can He fail to provide for us when we are right in His bosom?], and shall gently lead those that are with young.

The primary focus in all of these verses is spiritual. There are times that we lack physically, but God always abundantly supplies what we need for the completion of His spiritual purpose, and that, brethren, is what is important. What is important to us is that we know God's faithfulness, because then we can exercise our faith. He never fails to provide His children with what His children need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ.

I was in Psalm 105. I simply need to go back there again.

**Psalm 105:45** That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise you the LORD.

I asked you there, "What is that referring to?" Well that verse is referring to what preceded it. We are to praise Him because of what He did. And so we find in verse 26 that He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron as well. In verse 27 He shows the people signs among them. Verse 28 begins a reviewing of the miracles: darkness, waters to blood. The land brought forth frogs. He spoke and there came different sorts of flies. He gave them hail. He smote their vines. He spoke and the locusts came. Verse 36 says He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. In verse 37, He brought them forth also with silver and gold.

**Psalm 105:28-45** He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings. He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number, and did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their

strength. He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night. The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: and gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people: That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise you the LORD.

He went to all this trouble so they could obey Him, and then He failed to provide a measly calendar? And at the last minute, if we update this into our time, He suddenly moves to provide one after we have been sinning all this time, and He did nothing?

**Psalm 90:10-12** The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength, labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

I was motivated to give this sermon on this subject by three widely different events. The first was actually a series of three sudden deaths of fairly young people I either knew personally or I knew of. The second was that I re-read much of Ecclesiastes to and from South Africa, and its theme struck me very forcibly, and that is that life and all of its labors, its fears and pain is absolutely, unequivocally meaningless, a hopeless vanity, a chasing after wind, without knowing God and His purpose for life. And it asked the question from a carnal perspective: "Why were we born?"

And the third is what has been going on intensively in the church now for about twelve years, and that is the seemingly unstoppable drive in some associated with the church to change the teaching we have received. This drive for changing doctrine keeps those who are touched by it simmering, either with some measure of doubt, stirred by a fear that they are not

measuring up, conscience stricken because they feel guilty of some sin, or excitedly going off on some new path so as to distract them from the main path of life which God calls "the highway"—the one that is above and beyond the other way. Jesus called it "the straight and the narrow."

All of this push for change has a powerful tendency to produce accusations and distrust because faith is damaged, and when faith is damaged, so also is love and joy and peace because they are dependent upon our faith, and they are replaced instead, I fear, in uncertainty. This is doing inestimable damage to the unity of the church. At the foundation of this movement is the unspoken accusation against God, that He has not been supplying our need, but He *is* with this change, and then usually Herbert Armstrong is almost invariably blamed. But apparently those writing these papers have not learned another biblical principle, that one cannot blame the one God *sent* without also calling God into account for failing to watch the store.

Now some measure of this thrust for change is always occurring, and indeed it should be this way because there is always room for fine-tuning our understanding of Christian living through broadening and deepening it by understanding further elements of holiness and giving better, clearer illustration of application. My concern here is the wholesale throwing out and replacement, so that it greatly alters major portions of the configuration of where we are headed, why we are headed, how we are going to get there, and what we are to be when we arrive.

You might recall an illustration that Herbert Armstrong used on occasion of how in a picture puzzle each piece, except from the edge pieces, fits together harmoniously with four other pieces adjacent to it. He used this illustration that the doctrines given to the church likewise fit together in order to give a complete picture. If you remove a piece from the picture puzzle, the picture is altered. If you change some of the knobs or indentations of the piece, it no longer fits into the picture, and other pieces must be altered to accommodate the changes in the knobs and the indentation.

When doctrines began to change rapidly shortly after Herbert Armstrong's death, I used this illustration once when speaking with Evelyn, illustrating that the Tkachs were going to be unable to stop the changes, that adjustments to other doctrines were going to have to be made, because when one doctrine

changes, it forces changes on other doctrines because they no longer coordinate perfectly. Thus the pieces must either be altered or unnaturally forced together.

In an attempt to convey this sense of continuity, Herbert Armstrong also used a similar illustration involving a movie, and that is, if one comes into a movie toward its end, without knowing the beginning or the middle of the story, the movie does not make much sense. Now in the biblical context, what he meant was that what has happened previous to our age, to men and women like Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samuel, Ruth, David, and so forth, has a direct-line impact on who and what we are and what we are going through here at the end time.

We must understand these principles in order to properly grasp our lives. We—the church—and the doctrines given do not exist in a spiritual, historical, or doctrinal vacuum. They all fit into the complete picture God is working toward, and we cannot go around willy-nilly changing things.

God knows the end from the beginning. He knows *exactly* where He is headed, and why He gave the doctrines that He gave us through Herbert Armstrong. But we look through a glass darkly, as Paul said, and we must exercise faithfulness, loyalty, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God, as Abraham did. We must live understanding that we play tiny but important parts, inextricably linked to the orderly flow of what has happened before we lived, and also what will happen after as well. God leaves *nothing* to chance in regard to doctrine. Our lives are too important to Him. He has invested the life of Jesus Christ in this process.

We were predestined to be called, and we and the doctrines given to the end-time church fit into this great eternal purpose. We must have faith in this fact. The doctrine and the requirements do not have to be precisely the same for every portion of time as God works out His plan. Some doctrines will be adjusted depending upon what end God is working toward in these people's lives. For example, David was permitted to go to war, was he not, and to kill people.

Many people held governmental offices both in Israel and in Gentile nations. How about Daniel? He was a very high-ranking official in Babylon and in

Persia. Joseph was a very high-ranking official in Egypt. There was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These are things that we are *not* permitted to do. God was working toward different ends, and so there were some doctrinal adjustments made.

Was God overseeing His apostle and the development of His end-time children, or did Herbert Armstrong manage to sneak one over on Him while His back was turned? That may seem simple, but that is the issue here.

Now look. God sends the prophet, or the apostle, with the message that He wants. Do we believe this? You believe it when you look at Isaiah and read it. You believe it when you look at Jeremiah and read it. You believe it when you look at Jesus Christ in the Bible, or in Peter and Paul, and you believe it. You see what I mean about the accusations to Herbert Armstrong that go toward him, because there are very many foolish people who do not *believe* the same way toward him.

Look at the experience that others prior to Herbert Armstrong had in Romans 10.

**Romans 10:16** But they [meaning Israelites] have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias [way back to Isaiah] said, Lord, who has believed our report?

The report was the message that they came with. I want you to think about this in today's terms. Were there people who did not believe that Herbert Armstrong was God's messenger? Were there people who did not believe the message that came through him? Why did the Tkach group change the doctrines? Because they thought the messenger God sent was wrong, and that doctrinal changes were going to make the church better.

Now, those who want to change the calendar have exactly the same thought in mind. They will not say it that way, but the thought is there, and that is that the messenger God sent was wrong, and their change will make things better.

Did the Tkach-group changes make things better? Neither will the calendar change. The thinking behind the calendar change follows the same pattern as



what drove the church into this scattered condition. The only difference is that this time the change *they* promote is *their* baby, not the Tkachs.

**Proverbs 6:16-22** These six things does the LORD hate: yes, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies, and *he that sows discord among brethren*. My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not the law of your mother: Bind them continually upon your heart, and tie them about your neck. When you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you.

All a calendar change will do, brethren, is produce more division, and I fear that there are some who are going to have an awful lot to answer for before God for this discord that they have sowed.

Regarding Moses' prayer in Psalm 90, he asked God to help us to number our days because we have so little control over so much of life. Life is short, and it is so busy. It slips by at a seemingly rapid pace, and it is so easy to be distracted by things of lesser importance. "Numbering our days" means to put them in order, as in 1, 2, 3, 4. Or another way of saying it is to help us organize and prioritize so that we are paying attention to the most important areas of life. This is a constant challenge because so much can so easily distract us.

Would you not agree that the instructions most important to God's purpose to salvation are in the Bible? What is it that is most important to salvation?

In the aftermath of what happened in the Worldwide Church of God, I have to judge that many—very many—seem to think that the answer is having right doctrine, to having every "t" crossed and every "i" dotted, every technical issue understood. But according to whom? According to the messenger God sent? Or according to their own vision?

Let us go back to Genesis 17. How often did God say in the Old Testament about false prophets? "I haven't given them a vision. Their vision is their own." But He did give vision, as it were, to Isaiah, and to Jeremiah, and to

The Twelve, and to Ezekiel, and others besides. Now look at what He says here to Abraham.

**Genesis 17:1-2** And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be you perfect, And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.

Here is "the father of the faithful"—the father of those who are faithful—doing what? He says, "Walk before Me, and be perfect [or blameless]." God was here confirming the covenant with Abraham. He was saying to Abraham, "You do this, and I'll do that," and He was setting a condition that if Abraham would walk before Him without blame, then God would bless. I think that this is easily understood. But blameless doing what? Maybe blameless *being* what?

There is an interesting contrast to be made of Enoch and Noah in the way that this is worded by God. God back to Genesis 5.

**Genesis 5:22** And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

In regard to Noah, this is what it says in Genesis 6.

**Genesis 6:9** These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

Now when God was talking to Abraham, He said, "Walk *before* Me." Enoch and Noah walked *with* God. "*Before Me*" means "in *front* of Me." "With" gives the implication of *beside* Me. Remember, Abraham is "the father of the faithful." He is in this sense "our father in the faith." Abraham was to understand, and thus we too, his children, are also to understand that our conduct as God's children is ever within the gaze of the Great Almighty God. We are to understand that He is watching, and that everything we do is naked and open before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Now there is something very interesting here, and that is that we are to understand that there is no threat in this. It is in reality an assurance.

You might recall the Night to be Much Observed. The reason we are commanded to observe it is because *God was watching*. He was watching over Israel as they left Egypt. They were *before* Him, and His observation of them was so careful, so precise, that not even a dog barked as the two and one-half or three million people walked out of Egypt.

What God is giving Abraham here, and you and me, is the assurance that He will always be near, surveying, providing, guiding, protecting, because He loves us, and it is a part of His providence, and yet another evidence why I cannot believe that God would allow His church, His children, to go without a proper calendar for centuries—indeed, a millennia or more.

But we still have not reached out to understanding "perfect" or "blameless"—doing, or being, what? So turn to Deuteronomy 18.

**Deuteronomy 18:9-14** When you are come into the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD your God does drive them out from before you. You shall be perfect with the LORD your God. For these nations, which you shall possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for you the LORD your God has not allowed you so to do.

This word "perfect" in verse 13 is the same word as the word there in Genesis 17:1, but it is in a different setting. This setting clarifies by showing that "being blameless" is a moral issue. It has to do with breaking the Ten Commandments.

Let us go back to Genesis 6:9 once again.

**Genesis 6:9** These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

This too is the same word as appears in Genesis 17:1 and Deuteronomy 18:13. My study Bible that I am using today as I give this sermon says that the word "just" means "conformity to an ethical or moral standard." Noah was an ethical man. Noah was a moral man, and that is the picture that is given to the word "perfect." It means *perfect, blameless, complete*. Add that word to your synonyms, because that is what it says in the margin as well. It means complete, whole, finished. It can be drawn that far, and so when God says, "Walk before Me and be blameless," He means "Don't be breaking My Ten Commandments." "Be moral." "Be ethical." "And if you will do that, Abraham, then I will fulfill My part, because you have met the condition."

Now remember, we are the children of faithful Abraham, and the same condition applies to you and me. What God is looking for in His children is faithfulness to what has been given to them. It is loyalty to what has been given to them.

Let us go back to the New Testament to Hebrews 6, and we will see a New Testament take on this.

**Hebrews 6:1-3** Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

"Let us go on unto perfection." It sounds a great deal like Genesis 17:1, and we are going to see that it perfectly coordinates. We are called upon to do the same things that Abraham was called upon to do.

The translation "perfection" is misleading here because to the English-speaking people, perfection means "without flaw" and "faultless." I want you to think about this. Has anybody other than Jesus Christ reached the end of his life without flaw? How about Abraham? Moses? David? John the Baptist

or the apostles? By using the common English usage of "perfection" we would have to conclude that if "being without flaw" is the standard each must reach before death, then nobody is ever going to make it into the Kingdom of God.

The fact, brethren, is that we have already been spoiled. We have been rendered imperfect by sin even before God ever even called us, and therefore He had to forbear, He had to overlook, He had to tolerate us until He could give us grace and the blood of Jesus Christ, in order to legally render us justified. The reality is, according to Paul, in Romans 7.

**Romans 7:16-17** If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.

These are the words of a converted man—a deeply converted man; a towering example of Christian living, of Christianity, of Christian character—but he is saying that sin dwelt in him.

**Romans 7:18-23** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. [How can we be without flaw if sin still dwells in us?] I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. 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.

But brethren, even after being justified by God's grace and the blood of Jesus Christ, we are still imperfect, and we will be so until the resurrection of the dead.

Words change through time in the way that people use them. Perhaps the most easily recognizable change that we are familiar with is today's use of the word "gay." Another is the word *cool*. The word *convenient* has changed from *proper, fitting, appropriate* to "easy at hand." When the *King James*

*Version* was printed, *perfect* meant *complete*—the same thing as what that Hebrew word means in Genesis 17:1.

Today's common English usage does not give a correct sense of what Paul said here. He used a Greek word that is more closely synonymous with our English word *complete*, and so that when Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, and the apostles died, indeed they were complete to God's satisfaction. When they died, still flawed by remnants of human nature, but blameless because of the blood of Jesus Christ, had completed to God's satisfaction for living with Him in the Kingdom of God. Brethren, He tells us in Philippians 1:6 that He will complete His work in us. As flawed as we are, we will be complete, but He wants us, He requires of us that we meet a condition, and that is that we become moral, that we obey His commandments.

Turn to Ephesians 4. Paul is speaking here of the purpose of the ministry, and he says:

**Ephesians 4:13** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Here this word is used in the sense of "complete" or "mature." You can look up these words in Strong's or Zodhiates or anywhere else and you will find that I am telling you the truth, and this one here means "complete" as in various aspects of labor, growth—mentally and morally. That is what the context tells us.

What does God want from us? He wants us to be complete, but now He is defining areas in which He wants us to be complete. He wants us to grow up in things that involve morality.

Let us go to Hebrews 9. The same word is used.

**Hebrews 9:11** But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.

A greater and more perfect, more completeness because the New Testament tabernacle encompasses the spiritual application of God's word.

**James 1:4** But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

There is that word *perfect* again. Notice that word "*entire*, lacking nothing." Let me rephrase that. "Let patience have its complete work, that you may be complete." Completion, brethren, has to do with fulfilling the doctrines that God gave us, the doctrines that we have received, even though they are somewhat different from the ones given to David and to Abraham because of the purpose that God was working out in their own lives. When they reached the end of their lives, they were complete according to what was given to them. God wants us to be complete according to what was given us through His apostle, not something through the side door.

We can rephrase this—paraphrase it a little bit. Loosely translated and interpreted, this James 1:4 can say, "Don't lose patience, or God's work might not get done in us." "Going on to perfection" primarily has to do with becoming in the image of God in terms of character and attitude as shown by the doctrines that He has given us.

Let us go back to Matthew 6 to a very familiar Scripture. What Jesus said here is very plain. What is it that God wants? What is of highest priority?

**Matthew 6:33** But seek you first the kingdom of God, *and his righteousness*.

We almost always read this very frequently, and maybe not always, "Seek you first the kingdom of God," and we forget that it says, ". . . and His righteousness," and God will provide everything.

Now what is *righteousness* defined as in the Bible? "All His commandments are righteousness." In one sense this applies to every commandment that He gives, because God does not give anything that is wrong, so every command that He gives is righteousness. We can break it down into the Ten Commandments and say that He primarily meant the Ten Commandments, and it would not be wrong. But you see, the doctrines that He gives to us

through His prophet or through His apostle are in a sense commandments, because here He is setting the requirements of what He wants us to do, what He wants us to live up to, and they are righteousness—even calendars that people think are flawed.

I am afraid, brethren, to call Him into account, because this is what was given us, and I am afraid of these principles that are so clearly spelled out—these patterns that are in His word. "Seek you first the kingdom of God *and His righteousness*."

So what I am saying then here in relation to Moses' request in Psalm 90:12 and applying that request to us, is that our first duty on a day-to-day basis is to be blameless before God with a morality and ethics that are on a spiritual level, not the technicalities of a calendar. He provided us with a calendar so that we did not have to be distracted by searching into one.

I want us to briefly consider the times *we in the church* are living in. I want to drag the church into this and bring it front and center, and what we are living through within it, and what has been so frequently happening in the church over the past twenty-five years, and to remind you that it has not yet stopped. Even at the very beginning of our calling, the issue was true spirituality, combined with morality. Our converted life begins with repentance of what we are and the sins that we have committed. The repentance of sin never stops. It is coming out of sin that highlights growing to maturity and coming to spiritual completion. But we face a major obstacle at this time in the life of the church.

**Revelation 3:17** Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

I think that very few will object when I say that we are living in a period of time in the history of the church, that it is dominated by the attitude that we call Laodiceanism. God shows these people's evaluation of themselves, that their sense of what they are is that they are rich, that they have need of nothing. That is their thought about themselves, [that] they are already complete.



Well, understand this that they are not saying this verbally, but rather what they are saying is through their conduct in their relationship with God and how they are conducting their lives on a day-to-day basis. This is what God is evaluating. They are showing God by the way they are living that they are already complete, and if they are already complete, can they be seeking God's righteousness? Are you beginning to see why He has something against them?

God's evaluation is just the opposite, and it is the true one. They are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. What is important here is that each of these terms that are part of God's evaluation has something to do with their deficiencies in attitude and character. It has nothing to do with money or clothing or health.

Laodiceanism is nothing more than a form of worldliness that features a self-righteousness of monumental proportions. It is so monumental that the Laodiceans are showing God by their actions that they need nothing from Him, that they are already complete, already blameless, already perfect, and yet they are spiritually poor, blind to the reality of their spiritual condition, thinking themselves to be full of knowledge and complete in character, but not clothed with God's righteousness, because they are naked.

Salvation has degenerated to largely become a matter of holding certain views, opinions about religious matters. Form has become more important than function, and the standards of righteousness have shifted from conducting the relationship to obedience to the ritualistic aspect of God's way. One of the things that has changed in the church has been a subtle shift in the emphasis from by faith becoming in the image of God to intellectual pursuits as the epitome of spirituality.

Once doctrine is set for God's covenant people through a prophet or an apostle, perfection, completion, is not achieved through doctrinal change. Once the doctrine has been set by God through an apostle or a prophet, a push for doctrinal change is an indication that the church has been invaded by enemies.

Turn back to Jeremiah 7 to a scripture that I have used several times in this series. This is to His Old Testament church—covenant people—but is written for our admonition.

**Jeremiah 7:3-9** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust you not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings: if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom you know not?

Can you see the problem, brethren? Being complete has to do with morality. "Being complete," "going on to perfection," "being blameless" has to do with keeping God's commandments. "Walk before Me, and keep My commandments." It easily could have been said that way. What is it that God wants? It is easily seen. He wants loyalty to what He has given us in our time of salvation.

**Jeremiah 7:21-23** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, *Obey my voice.*

What is He referring to here? He is referring to Exodus 19:4-5 when they came out of Egypt, and He was making the covenant with them, and He said, "Obey My voice." And when they said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do," He gave them the Ten Commandments.

**Jeremiah 7:23-24** But this thing commanded I them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people: and walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

Brethren, in our time the church has done exactly the same thing. The church turned its back on what was given through the apostle, and it blew us apart. Each request for change is founded upon the assumption that if we just make this change, then the church and its people will be more perfect. Back in the seventies it was the STP, but the bombardment became most intense in the first five or six years following Herbert Armstrong's death. But it is still continuing, and the church is still disintegrating.

Just to give you an example, in this last two or three weeks I received two letters in one envelope that essentially castigated Herbert Armstrong, the entire ministry, and every AC grad as being domineering nincompoops. Why? Because, [excuse my sarcasm] "anybody with two eyes ought to be able to see that Passover and the First Day of Unleavened Bread are the same day—the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, that the holy days are the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>, not the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup>."

I have gotten papers, it seems, on every conceivable doctrinal subject. One of the interesting things is that hardly any of it is from the ministry. Almost all of it has come from lay members, and there are so many requests for change that it seems that the only thing Herbert Armstrong got right is that we are commanded to keep the Sabbath.

I have no doubt that these people are sincere in their simplicity, but when the entire package of requests for doctrinal change is put together, it gives a very disheartening picture of mass confusion. This was one reason—and a big one—that I gave that series of sermons at the Feast on Ephesians. Actually on "unity" out of Ephesians. It is interesting that in Ephesians 4:14 it says, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

What an apt metaphor that Paul used. What does wind out in the creation do? It scatters, blows things around, and doctrinal change scatters the church. The church is scattered. It is no mystery why the church is in this condition. Satan knew **exactly** what to do. When God gave him permission, he knew exactly what to do to confuse, to create distrust, to scatter, to weaken, to divide: "*Change the doctrine.*"

I firmly believe that Herbert Armstrong was an apostle. Can you think of anybody who has lived in our lifetime that did what he did—worldwide? That preached the true gospel? Billy Graham did not do it. The pope did not do it. Nobody did it except him. No wonder that he said sometimes that "he was a voice crying in the wilderness of religious confusion." So I have no problem believing that he was sent of God, and that God was fully capable of getting the doctrines that He wanted in the church through him. If He could not, because Herbert Armstrong was able to steadfastly resist God so that God was not successful, then He is not much of a God, and Herbert Armstrong was sovereign over Him.

**Proverbs 19:21** There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Can God be resisted? No, He can't be resisted. "The counsel of the LORD will stand."

**Proverbs 16:9** A man's heart devises his way: but the LORD directs his steps.

Do you not think that He is going to do that in regard to His apostle, in regard to the doctrine that He wants His children to measure up to, to be complete within, to live by?

**Psalms 33:10-11** The LORD brings the counsel of the heathen to nought: he makes the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

**Isaiah 46:10** Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

Nobody can resist God. Herbert Armstrong could not resist Him, and God, because of what He is and the purpose that He is working out, and the end to which He wants to bring us at this end time, in order to be true to Himself, has to give us what He wants in the way of doctrine in order to have that fulfilled. He does not play games with us. He does not play games with His purpose. He does not tempt us. He always deals on the up-and-up. And if He chose Herbert Armstrong and sent him, you can be sure that those basic doctrines that have to do with God's purpose, and how we are going to get there, and what we are going to be when we get to the end, have to be true and right, or God is not God.