

## Knowing God: Formality And Customs (Part 6)

Becoming Childlike

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As I prepared my previous sermon in this series I did it thinking that I was preparing the final one, but as I finished I had already begun to think of another sermon I felt would be good for concluding this series. However, as things developed, I thought of yet another, and so there will be this one and then one more, which will bring the total to seven parts of this series.

This "dress decorum and church custom" subject has the ability to affect us particularly hard because it can expose us visibly to others, and sometimes that can be embarrassing. It has the potential to hit us right in our vanity, perhaps especially in regard to the use of cosmetics.

Often in regard to our shortcomings, we're able to hide them from others, and our deceitful heart will dismiss them to ourselves as being nothing important. But this subject challenges us right up front because it's out where everybody that we might want respect and approval from can see. This reveals a characteristic of human nature that, whether we know it or not, we are dealing with constantly. Human nature is comfortable with the way that it is. It resists by fighting back and by providing all sorts of justifications to any challenges that might be in its way.

I brought with me a paper that I had filed away. David Grabbe had taken it off the Internet last April and sent a copy of it to Richard and to me, and I think also to Martin. I read it and filed it away, and I forgot about it, and so it was no motivation for this series. But I was filing some things away in that folder and I saw this paper, and I thought, "I'm going to read this to you." It is a newsletter from Doug Philips and the *Vision Forum Inc*, dated April 22, 2002. I have no idea who Doug Philips is. I don't know who *Vision Forum* is at all, but the topic is "Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America." Eventually this letter will get around to evaluating a book titled *The Public Undressing of America*, but before he does that, this man writes this newsletter to the people who are apparently part of *Vision Forum*. This newsletter has a couple of very interesting concepts within it.

Dear Friends:

Henry van Til once observed that "culture is religion externalized. [By this he meant that the culture of a nation reflects the true faith of that people.] The

way a people live their lives, the way they communicate, their philosophy of work, and their approach to aesthetics all reflect the standards and priorities of the people, and those priorities are dictated by their true faith." [That's quite insightful.]

This is why we must recognize that even dress is "religion externalized." Cultures that worship nature and treasure sensuality tend to dress immodestly. Those which make an idolatry out of material possessions, often fall prey to a foppish enslavement to high fashion. On the other hand, cultures which embrace true Christian piety will seek to make personal holiness the driving standard for their dress code. They will develop clothing which emphasizes biblical principles like distinction, functionality and modesty. In short, dress is not neutral.

Furthermore, dress standards and dress codes are inescapable and inevitable. Whether you realize it or not, you and everyone else have a dress code. You will either have a dress code by design (meaning that you have thought through the moral and philosophical implications of your dress code), or you will have a dress code by default (because you have let others do the thinking for you and have de facto accepted their conclusions), but you will have a dress code.

Until the 20th century, most Christians understood that dress standards were inescapable. But with the rise of antinomianism (the rejection of God as lawgiver), the resurgence of Gnosticism (the belief that God is not concerned with physical things) and the widespread acceptance of the neutrality postulate (the notion that the Lordship of Christ over human action only extends to "spiritual" matters), many 20th century Christians have simply allowed themselves to be swept away by cultural trends, rather than following the biblical admonition to take every thought and action captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

It must be clearly understood that every time you hear someone rant or rail that it is inherently "unfair" or "legalistic" to have rules pertaining to clothing, that such individuals are directly and unequivocally attacking the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Whether they realize it or not, they are in effect saying: "My dress standard is a neutral zone. Jesus does not speak to this issue."

The real choice in the debate over standards of dress is not between legalism and license, but between God as lawgiver or man as lawgiver.

Once that debate is settled, and the Lordship of Christ is freely and boldly proclaimed over our dress standards, then we can get about the business of studying the Scripture to discern how we can wisely apply the many diverse and relevant principles revealed in Scripture to the issue at hand.

Because the Bible teaches a doctrine the Reformers called "the sufficiency of Scripture" (namely, that God has given us in Scripture all we need for our faith and practice), we can be absolutely confident that the Bible is sufficient for us to know how we are to dress in a Christ-honoring manner relative to our culture, our gender, and our station in life.

One of the most important of these issues to be addressed is the question of modesty and nakedness. The Bible has much to say on this issue. In fact, the Bible begins in Genesis 3 with the revelation that man is to be covered, and that public nakedness is a sin. In past centuries, Christian peoples were often noted for their modesty, and heathen peoples for their immodesty. Today, the line between the professing Christian and the savage tribesman has become increasingly blurred, as more and more "Christian" people resort not only to the pagan practices of scarification, tattoos and body mutilation, but have thrown off the "restraints" of modest dress in favor of the trendy and the physically revealing. The result is that modern America has been publicly undressed. What is worse, Americans have come to think of nakedness as normal and acceptable, even preferable.

I want you to turn to John 8. We're going to look at two verses here. In one sense we're going to give an overview of the entire chapter.

**John 8:31-32** Then said Jesus to those Jews which *believed* on him. If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

I want you to first notice that this instruction by Jesus was spoken to those who claimed to believe Him. However, their human nature resisted acceptance of a concept of truth that they couldn't see any immediate benefit from, and the process of rejection began. We won't go through the whole process as it unfolds detail by detail, but I do want you to notice that by verse 45 Jesus said to them:

**John 8:45** And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not.

This began with people who **believed** on Him, but by the time the process of information was given to them, and the rejection began, they were already **not** believing on Him, and charged so by Jesus Christ.

**John 8:52** Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.

By verse 52 they accused Him of having a demon. This went from people who believed on Him, to people who rejected Him, to people who were now castigating Him.

**John 8:59** Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

By verse 59 they were on the verge of stoning Him. It went from *belief* to *stoning* Him in what seems to be a matter of what we'll say fifteen minutes. This chapter is a vivid illustration of human nature's powerful proclivity to protect itself from something that is damaging to its opinion of itself.

Turn now to Ephesians 5:29 to see what the apostle Paul wrote.

**Ephesians 5:29** For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church.

This is a **driving** impulse within man to protect himself, and to take care of himself. But brethren, there are times when we must sacrifice our feelings about ourselves in order that things might change, so here is a challenge that faces all of us all the time. This is what came to my mind on the heels of this series. The challenge is to make practical use of a fact that truth sets free, but at first **hearing** truth it may not **appear** as though it is going to make us free. It may on the other hand appear to actually enslave us. This is what creates the challenge that is so difficult for human nature to overcome.

Israel in the wilderness provides a clear historical example of this on a wide scale. There they were in slavery, and they were released from slavery through the truths that were given them through Moses and Aaron, combined with God's faithfulness to the

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truths that had been given to them. But once they were in the wilderness, human nature fought back, spiritual degeneration took place and kept turning them **back** toward their former slavery in Egypt.

Jesus' instruction in John 8 is that **continuing, remaining, living in, obeying His Word** makes one a true disciple, and **confirms** the freedom. If we do not remain or abide in the truth, the truth will not be confirmed in us. It has to be lived. Israel shows in the wilderness (and as this illustration in John 8 shows) that even people who believe can be so strongly deceived by human nature that remaining in the truth is not always easy, and so steps must be taken to not only accept, but also to keep us on track.

We're going to go back to Matthew 18 where we left off the last time. I didn't go into all those verses in Matthew 18 in the last sermon that we're going to look at now, but rather I used a series of verses, beginning with verse 4. This is what precedes that which I ended on in that last sermon.

**Matthew 18:1-4** At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven [or the kingdom of God]. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I closed my previous sermon in this series by stating that it is my hope that we have learned that there is a strong biblical base regarding dress standards for this church, that they were not randomly plucked from the air, and that they are not the notions of a Victorian-minded old man. I further stated that it is my hope that we were fortified in our belief so that we can dress with understanding and conviction that is appropriate toward representing God, and if changes are needed, we have been fortified enough to be motivated to make them.

I want to remind you that the foundation of that whole series in one sense rests on only two principles: (1) Knowing, believing, and caring about God's point of view, and (2) Knowing and believing and caring **who or what we are**. I do not plan to go into either of those in this sermon. "Knowing, believing, and caring *who or what we are*" will be the next sermon. In this sermon I'm not going to go into those, but they are a very important foundation for this sermon, and the instruction in this series of verses in Matthew 18 is the launching pad.

Now listen to a paraphrase of what I said regarding Matthew 18 about becoming as a little child. The paraphrase comes fairly close: Jesus said [that] unless we **turn** [which is a better translation of that word "converted"] and become as a little child, we won't even **be** in the kingdom.

This is a huge overall and foundational principle regarding change and growth. It involves humility at its base, and a great deal more besides. I think we need to understand that Jesus' instruction here did not occur in a vacuum. In other words, it didn't occur just as something out of the blue.

We're going to go now to Mark 9:31-36. I'm only reading this because it is a parallel of what I'm going to talk about here in just a minute.

**Mark 9:31-36** For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that you disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed [argued, debated] among themselves who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and said unto them, If any man desires to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, ... . [And on we go.]

This is Mark's introduction to the same episode in Matthew 18. Luke also speaks on this, and he uses a stronger word than either Matthew or Mark. He said it was a downright argument, with a great deal of heat (is the implication) between these men.

At first glance Matthew appears to broach the subject abruptly, with no background. But Matthew actually magnifies the background **more** than the other two between chapters 14 and 19. Now putting the three accounts together provides a clear picture. Mark provides us with the information that it was Jesus' mention of His death, following the Transfiguration, that immediately triggered the discussion on the road to Capernaum. But Matthew provides us with a fact that this thing had been brewing for quite a long period of time. Matthew shows that Peter had been singled out by Jesus no less than a dozen times, between chapters 14 and 18, for some special attention in a variety of ways. Competitive feelings were arising in the other disciples because this attention was very clear to them.

In their favor is the fact that at least there was some level of belief in the future establishment of the Kingdom of God, and that Jesus was going to have a very prominent place in it. But when Jesus came into His Kingdom, what about them? Where would each of them sit in relation to Him? This was already on their minds. Was Peter going to be next to Jesus in importance?

But then they remembered, and undoubtedly argued about it that Peter had also been sharply rebuked by Jesus (when Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan") and that his suggestion that three shelters be built following the Transfiguration hadn't even been answered. Jesus just ignored it. Was it possible that Peter would not be second to Jesus, and if Peter wasn't going to be second to Jesus, who then? "Maybe me!" each one of them was thinking.

In Matthew 17 Jesus had just announced to them His impending humiliation and death. Their reaction to that was to get into a quarrel, craving for exaltation and adulation. It is this vanity that is all too often the drive, the motivation, for much of what we do. Competitiveness, the question of rank, the seeking of adulation, and the attention of one's peers—"Who is going to be the greatest?"—is the trigger for Jesus' instruction.

But Jesus diverts their attention to a far more serious question that has to be answered first. Will they even *be* in God's Kingdom? See, they were already thinking that they had it made. If they didn't think they had it made, why argue? And so Jesus got right to the heart of the issue that they were missing entirely: ***Would they even be there?*** What Jesus was implying in the question was, "If you continue in the attitude that you have right now that is motivating you to argue with one another, and compete with one another, I can guarantee you you're not going to be there unless you ***turn*** and become like a little child."

Jesus uses a little child to illustrate the major qualification one **MUST** have, or one will not even be in the Kingdom, and so His answering to "Who will be greatest?" doesn't even need to be addressed to any but the smallest of responses. He gets to the real crux of the issue quickly because the sinful yearning to be greater than one's fellowman, to rule over, to be looked up to, and to be greatly admired by them, is not a passive attitude but an active drive affecting life and all of its relationships.

The first thing that Jesus did was to place this little child in their midst. Think about "***little***." We just saw in Mark that this child could easily be picked up in His arms. It says that He picked them up and put them in His arms. He took this little child and put him in the midst of those ***big*** men. In all probability they were standing in a crescent in front of

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Jesus, and immediately a size difference was created: big men with big ideas and big egos, and a little kid who was so soft and unassuming that he could be picked up with no trouble at all, and cuddled. In this visual instruction it is the one **looked** upon as being **little** by the **big** who possess the nature of the kingdom of God.

What Jesus verbally instructed is that this is the competitive-drive antidote, the solution to answering the question of whether one will be in the Kingdom of God, and is the opposite of the kind of attitude these men had. But it is not merely becoming like a little child, but also being kind to, loving, protecting, forgiving each other as if **they** were a child. Now the being *kind, loving, protecting, and forgiving* aspects are addressed in the remainder of chapter 18. If you read through that you will see this is what Jesus instructs on. Right here at the beginning of the discourse is the broad foundation, and that is **turning** to become childlike. That is what leads to being able to make practical applications in daily life.

Notice first of all, becoming childlike is something that we **can** do. It's not something that God presses a button and we become, but He says, "Unless you **turn**." For those who are having a relationship with God, it can be done. It is something that we can become by making the choice to do so. Being childlike is not impossible. Now being childlike is not just one characteristic either. It is a very attractive mixture of humility, straight-forward simplicity, innocence, purity, openness, unpretentious sincerity, truthfulness, accepted weakness, and an apparent vulnerability that makes children so endearing. Every one of those characteristics points to things that this world considers to be weak.

It's not without reason that God, who names things what they are, named Satan the Adversary, the Slanderer, and the Destroyer. It is the nature of the Prince of the Power of the Air that human nature reflects. "Childlike" is not adversarial. "Childlike" is not destructive. "Childlike" is not a deceptive liar. "Childlike" describes the nature of the Kingdom of God.

These qualities are pretty much captured in the first four of The Beatitudes. "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit." (Not the arrogant.) "Blessed are those who are meek." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." "Blessed are those who mourn." Each and every one of these qualities implies weakness and vulnerability as human nature perceives them, but as God sees them they are profound strengths and virtues that human nature rages against, making God and whoever who has them an enemy to be competed against. It's no mystery at all as to why this world—"Babylon"—is perceived by the writers of the Bible as being an organized system **against** God.



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It's interesting to note how quickly the disciples' sorrow over Jesus' announcement of suffering and death reverted to their craving for exaltation and attention. It's to Jesus' glory that He didn't even scold them for their insensitivity, their callousness, and forgetfulness of His impending agony. Their grief seemed to evaporate almost in a moment to concern for themselves, but noting this though, is no good unless we recognize that this same drive is in us. It's exposing itself in our attitude toward the overall subject even of formality and decorum.

I very rarely ever read a poem to you, because for some reason I'm not often attracted to them. I think it's because I don't want to be challenged by the poet's economy of words, to spend the time meditating upon them in order to determine what the poet had in mind. I'm going to read you a simple poem written by an anonymous person that I think catches the practical spiritual essence of Jesus' instruction here.

Make me, O Lord, a child again, so tender, frail, and small,  
In self possessing nothing, and in You possessing all.  
O Savior, make me small once more that downward I may grow,  
And in this heart of mine restore the faith of long ago.  
With you I may be crucified, no longer I that lives,  
O Savior, crush my sinful pride by grace which pardon gives.  
Make me, O Lord, a child again, obedient to Your call,  
In self possessing nothing, and in You possessing all.

Jesus said, (through Paul as recorded in II Corinthians 12:9), "My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul understood, because he in turn instructed you and me in response to what Jesus said to him: "When I am weak, then I am strong."

There are examples I think of what Jesus expects of you and me, and one of the interesting ones is in Luke 24:13-14 (just to get a feel for the context here), and then in verses 25 through 27.

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**Luke 24:13-14** And behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three-score furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

The time element there was after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and He joined these two men as they were walking along the road, and they had quite a conversation very revealing to those men. Notice what Jesus said to them in verse 25.

**Luke 24:25** Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Jesus called them "fools." He called these disciples of His **fools**. Now these weren't two of "the twelve," but still someone who was close enough to the group that Jesus felt moved to call them fools.

**Luke 24:25-27** Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

That's a pretty strong rebuke! He surely expected them to understand.

Perhaps you have never had a church of God minister go through the principles that I have gone through these past five sermons on dress and decorum. I could have made it even more detailed because there is a great deal more than I ever touched on. I told you at one point that one reference work I looked into said that clothing and dress are mentioned over 700 times in the Bible. That's no small number. I'm going to read to you again the opening paragraph in *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* regarding clothing that I read to you once before.

The imagery of garments and clothing is of major importance in the Bible. Its significance can be physical, economic, social, moral, or spiritual. The imagery of investing and divesting a person of clothing is usually symbolic of larger issues. [In other words, this is pointing to something **big** that lies beyond.] The function of clothing moreover is multiple. Clothing can protect, conceal, display, or represent a person's current state, and can be symbolic

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of moral and spiritual qualities.

Those people who produced that work can see that it is not minor to God from the sheer fact that He devotes so much space to it. It is not minor. Clothing is important because it tells God so much about us. It is a **major** point in His judgment of us. It is used as a large part of our witness before and of God.

There is much more to reinforce what I have already given to either remind those of you who have been in the church for a long time, or to show for the first time what the principles of dress and conduct during services consist of, but I passed them by. So be it. But the witness, brethren, has been made to you, and the burden has passed from me to you, and I am free and clear on this subject for the present.

I do want to give you very briefly a plan of attack for dealing with this issue that may help. I'm going to give you four simple broad principles that apply not only to this subject, but almost to any other challenge to your faith that you may have both now and in the future. I think these are especially significant in light of what Richard said in his last sermon regarding the Laodiceans. This is something to take serious note of.

The Laodicean is not lazy. He is well off. You don't become well off by being lazy, but he is distracted to things that are less important to his spiritual well-being. It's a matter of emphasis. We have to understand from the skimpy material God gives us that God expects these people to be doing much better than they are. It has such a strong rebuke because (if we can understand that these seven churches are also eras and they flow one into the another), the Laodiceans came out of the spiritually rich Philadelphia era.

The Laodiceans then become distracted by the world around them. They have all the equipment to work with, and they are wasting it. They think they are much better off than they actually are. Their human nature is deceiving them, and so instead of becoming childlike they are becoming more worldly in their approach to life. They are being distracted by the things that are in the world. These things can be attractive, but the Laodicean is showing by his attitudes and by the way he is living that God does not really occupy first place in his heart, and that childlike quality is dissolving away.

### **Step #1: LOVE Good INTIMATELY**

**Psalm 7:11** God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

God has been sold, by and large to modern Protestantism especially, and maybe Catholicism to a lesser degree, that He is in some way a wonderful, benign grandfather—a teddy bear—that you crawl up into His lap for comfort. But does He ever correct? This verse says He is angry with the wicked every day.

I want to tell you of an event that happened one hot summer day in June or July of 1968. I had just been hired fulltime by the Worldwide Church of God. This was before I went off to my one year at Ambassador College. For that two months I worked under Jimmy Friddle in Pittsburgh, and he gave me a job to do.

He gave to me a whole stack of names and addresses of people who had been contacted before by a church of God minister. They were what we call "pm's"—prospective members. They had not been invited to church, and there had been no further contact by a church of God minister. Nobody had ever contacted them again, and they had not gotten in contact with Jimmy Friddle or anybody else again. So Jimmy Friddle decided to give me practice in going out to visit people. I was to go out and visit these people and attempt to determine whether God had actually called them, if they were growing, and if they were showing any signs that they were going to go on to actually become converted members of the church.

I made an appointment to see a family that lived just outside the east of Pittsburgh in a nice suburban area that we would call a lovely lower or middle class sub-division. In addition to the parents, the family included two small children. I went to see them on this hot summer day in June or July of 1968.

I walked up to the house and knocked on the door. As the door opened and I was invited in my nose was assaulted by a horrific stench. As I stepped inside I could see that flies were buzzing all around the living room. Right in the center of the living room was a small child's pot into which it had defecated. The parents had not removed the load in that pot. Over in the corner I also spied the kitty litter box. Well, you could imagine where the stench was coming from. But the people who were there were oblivious to the stench, and I discovered that after I was there for a while, I no longer noticed it either!

That's the way it is with the Laodicean. He has drifted away from God, and has adjusted his life and no longer notices that his normal life now no longer includes God in the same attitude or with the same level of conduct as it had before. That's why the two different judgments are there. "You say you are increased with goods and have need of nothing; but I say unto you, You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." The Laodiceans are totally unaware, just like these people in the house, and just as I

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became—as my nostrils adjusted to the stench that was there.

But, brethren, God *never adjusts* to the breaking of His principles so graciously given to the redeemed for their benefit and for their glory. The redeemed are those who have seen that their sins lay exposed before God, and they have done something about them in order to have them covered. The people in this house were not covering up even the stench.

The redeemed have come under the blood of Jesus Christ, and so now they have a Redeemer who is guiding them into His Kingdom. But if the redeemed will not put on the garments of salvation, one of which is this **turning** to becoming childlike, they won't be there. Is this not an indication that there is still something wrong in the relationship?

Jesus stated an interesting principle in Luke 16:10-11.

**Luke 16:10-11** He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

It's a simple principle to understand that those who are responsible to carry out **little** things, the course of their life is being set. God can judge, knowing full well that when greater responsibilities are given they will carry through with the same sense of responsibility as they did with the little things because the character, the virtue, the drive, is being built within them to just keep carrying through.

Human nature has a powerful tendency to attempt to convince us that our sin is such a minor affair that God will surely overlook it in His mercy, that He will somehow adjust, overlook what is right, and honor us. But brethren, that attitude will not fly. God doesn't adjust. Do you know why? Herbert Armstrong put it this way: "God will not give in one inch concerning His law." The reason that can be said with strength and authority is because God cannot deny what He is, and what is right.

Can a teacher simply accept a wrong response from a student without correcting it? That would not be fair to the student. That wouldn't be loving at all. Such a thing would be rewarding bad conduct. The solution is to reassess our relationship with God, and to turn and love Him. That's what Jesus did at the beginning of Matthew 18. He got right to the crux of the problem by stating the principle that was going to save those men. He corrected them right away, and He did it gently, really, through an illustration that

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anybody ought to be able to understand. He didn't honor their wrong concept of what was acceptable for the Kingdom of God, but He corrected it right away.

Redemption is given for the very purpose of freeing us from slavery to unrighteousness so that we are **free** to submit to God. It is not without cost on our part because it introduces us into a war with our very indwelling nature. But now we are free to choose to love God. That's the foundational issue: *Love **Good***. The emphasis is on Him. "*Love God **intimately***."

What's the first and great commandment? "You shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, **all** your mind, **all** your soul, **all** of your being." We could keep on going: "Love God with all your proclivities, all of your activities—everything!" If we do that, we **will turn** to become childlike. But the dynamic that is driving that is the desire to love God. That's how I know we can become childlike. So now we are free to choose to love God and life, rather than self and death, if we will. Is that not what two who love each other do? Does not each do all in his power to please the other and to make choices in the best interest and the well-being of the other, sacrificing even seemingly to the detriment of the self? That is the issue clearly stated that either helps us or keeps us from meeting this first step: LOVING **GOOD** INTIMATELY.

It's very clear that if one is going to accept what is in the Bible as true, that God wants us well-dressed, and **modestly** dressed, but not worshipping the world's god of fashion by adherence to its standards. Many fashion standards are deliberately designed by the god of this world to produce stumblingblocks to sin, and so Step #1 is to love God above all.

Step #2 follows right on the heels of this.

## **Step #2: DENY THE SELF**

**Luke 9:23-26** And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

Turn now to Luke 14:27 where there is a similar statement.

**Luke 14:27** And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

I want to read Luke 9 once again, but I just want you to listen. I'm going to read this to you from *The Amplified Version*. Listen to how they amplify this.

Incidentally, Richard showed me a chart in which the various translations of the Bible were rated according to their *literalness*. Guess which Bible translation came out in first place. It wasn't the *King James*, which is a literal translation. It was the *Amplified Bible*. The reason is because such a wide variety of synonyms are given everywhere so that they hit the nail exactly on the head with one of those synonyms almost every time as to what the Greek or Hebrew word literally means.

**Luke 9:23-26 (AMP)** And He said to all, If any person wills [*showing there are choices here*] to come after Me, let him deny himself [disown himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interests, refuse and give up himself] and take up his cross daily and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also]. For whoever would preserve his life and save it will lose and destroy it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he will preserve and save it [from the penalty of eternal death]. For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and ruins or forfeits (loses) himself? Because whoever is ashamed of Me and of My teachings, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the [threefold] glory (the splendor and majesty) of Himself and of the Father and of the holy angels.

I mentioned just a few moments ago that this way of life is not without its cost. It cost Jesus His life, and much more, to provide us with the opportunity to choose to lose our life. In like manner, Jesus states broadly and plainly that the same principle is now **our** responsibility if we are to take advantage of the opportunity. We must choose to lose our life in submission to His way of life. That is, we must choose to sacrifice what we normally would do by nature if it is contrary to God's way, whether it directly violates a command, or the spirit of a principle of God.

This point directly involves the issue of loyalty. Do you remember in the letter that I read to you at the very beginning, they said the issue here involving dress is **who is going to be our lord**. Will it be Christ? Or will it be the world? They said that once that issue is settled, then we can look in the Bible for instruction and apply it in daily life. Who is our

lord? That is the choice.

If we choose Christ, it is very frequently going to mean that we're going to have to sacrifice ourselves, deny ourselves, and do something in order to conform to continue in His way of life in order that we might truly have confirmed to us the truth of what He is saying. And so it means dying to self-ego, to self-glorification, to self-exaltation, and many times to self-gratification. "Taking up the cross" means doing what pleases Jesus Christ whether others do it or not. It means continuing in every day obedience as Jesus taught in John 8, even if others make fun of you.

The next principle follows right on the heels of this, and it is taken from Romans 12:1-2. We use that verse so often we ought to know it by heart. But there is truth here.

### **Step #3: DON'T BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD**

**Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

I want you to listen again as I read these verses from the *Amplified Version*.

**Romans 12:1-2 (AMP)** I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].

Remember, Jesus said "Only if you continue will the truth be affirmed."

There are three things listed here in order for us to know the will of God. I'll give these in very simple terms.



1. We must surrender our lives, including our inmost desires in dedication to God and His way of life.
2. We must not be conformed to the superficial external customs of this age.
3. We must make energetic effort to agree with God's Word in order that we might have the same attitudes and perspective as Jesus Christ.

Brethren, this is the pattern for coming out from among them and being separate, as Paul instructs in II Corinthians 6:17. We are commanded there, and we are also commanded in Revelation 18:4 "to come out from among them." But it takes a plan, and it takes dedication to that plan. These are the steps to be applied during that dedication.

I don't know how many times I heard Herbert Armstrong say, "If the majority of people in the world is doing something, it is in all probability wrong in God's eyes."

Be aware, and be warned. Think before you act, and you may end up saving yourself a great deal of grief in the long run.

#### **Step #4: DO ALL FOR THE GLORY OF God**

**I Corinthians 10:31-33** Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Whatever we are doing, we need to ask ourselves whether it is to honor God and to glorify God. Most of the time, brethren, I think that we're going to know the answer to that question. Our problem in this area is not so much in ignorance because we don't know the answer, but it's the pull of the flesh to exalt and to give gratification to itself.

In Colossians 3:17 Paul wrote something similar there, but there's a little twist on it.

**Colossians 3:17** And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the *name* of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

If we follow that advice we are going to glorify and honor God in all that we do, and so Paul adds the name of Jesus. What he is saying here is, "Dedicate your conduct to Him." If we are thinking of that principle we're far more likely to pass a better judgment on what we permit ourselves to do, because He is in our thoughts.

You might remember in the Psalms David's description of the person who does not honor God. David said, "God is not in all his thoughts." The implication, the other side of what David said there, is that those who are seeking to honor God, God *is* in all their thoughts. Everything is passed through the bar of judgment. "God is watching me," see. So what we do is not done out of terror, but rather with the purpose of glorifying Him, honoring Him, bringing praise to Him because we are representing what He would approve of. It's a positive approach not done out of fear, unless you think *fear* of being a proper respect, and not fear in the sense of terror. That can prove to be a very positive guide to life. We might almost say that it is a takeoff on saying or asking, "What would Jesus do?" It's very close.

Those four steps are these:

- 1) Love God intimately.
- 2) Deny the self.
- 3) Don't be conformed to this world.
- 4) Do all for God's glory.

This is a good, true, simple, and brief formula for making righteous judgments, the end of which is to help us to continue in God's Word.

The next time that I speak I am going to concentrate on "who we are," and who we are is very important to this issue, both to this sermon and to the other five as well. Once we think with clarity about *who we are*, you're going to see that you are unique, that you are a very honored person with tremendous privileges, and responsibilities as well. Perhaps thought in the wrong way it can be overwhelming, but God intends it for our good.

We are carrying quite a burden, brethren, in terms of what we are, but none of it is given to us for the purpose of overwhelming us. Actually He is giving it to us for the purpose of

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 6) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)  
inspiring us to go in the right direction, and it can be done, even with people with the  
attitude of a little child.