

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 7)

Who or What Do We Fear?

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We are going to begin in II Corinthians 15 and verse 5.

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?

I want to touch on this just a little bit as we begin here, because he uses the term *the faith*. I used that frequently in a sermon about three or four back—showing that there is one specific faith. Nine times in the book of Acts it uses this phraseology to indicate that there is **one faith**, and that faith is a specific group of doctrines.

Now, I want you to tie this to Jesus Christ and "except He be in you." How is He in us? Well, we can say that He is in us by His Spirit. He says His Word is spirit. He is in us by His Word. And these specific doctrines that make up **the faith** are specific words arranged in a simple, direct, and true way that any person—called of God—can understand.

I began this series back in January, when Richard and I made the trip to South Africa. Then, shortly after that, the Barna Report concerning rampant disbelief of biblical doctrines by those considering themselves born-again Christians was published. The people who are the focus of this report clearly feel free and clear to pick and choose doctrines pretty much as they want—apparently believing that this is acceptable to God. This is despite the fact that several times God warns us to neither add to nor take away from His Word—His Word!

I have made repeated references to the findings of that report, warning that the Church of God is not immune to that sort of careless and foolish deterioration of faith. In point of fact, doctrinal disagreement is the very means by which the Worldwide Church of God was devastated.

When God took away His wall of protection, the Worldwide Church of God very quickly disintegrated into numerous factions. And I used that series as part of a theme to help us examine ourselves prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread. Where do we stand in regard to these things?

In my sermon just before Passover I stressed the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. And then on the first Day of Unleavened Bread I touched briefly on the doctrine of eternal security. I chose these two doctrines for two reasons. The first is because they are part of the base of why true Christians have such a hard time overcoming. We might say not just overcoming but getting rid of the leaven, or coming out of sin (in keeping with the Days of Unleavened Bread).

The second reason is that those two doctrines clearly show how belief affects behavior. This is especially true with the doctrine of eternal security. Brethren, why strive to overcome if, once one has accepted the blood of Jesus Christ, one is saved regardless of what he does?

These two concepts greatly weaken people's resolve and endurance, wearing away at growth; and, in many cases, it virtually stops it. Why do you think that there are so many warnings that God's way is difficult and narrow, and requires a great deal of self-denial? It is because acceptance of Christ's blood only begins a process of growth involving making a multitude of right choices—that one might have **right character**.

Regardless, everybody is going to have character. The question is: Is it the right character? And in order for a person to have the right character, he has to have the right teaching; and he has to make choices to believe and follow that teaching.

In addition to Jesus' warnings that we would do well to count the cost of discipleship, there are numerous warnings—such as Hebrews 3 and Hebrews 4, in which Paul stressed that rampant unbelief of God's Word produced a multitude of bad choices by Israelites; and, therefore, the witness of virtually all who left Egypt.

IF the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of eternal security are true, THEN the warnings that Jesus and Paul gave in the Bible are contradictions to them; and, therefore, the Bible cannot be trusted.

But it is no mystery why we have such a difficult time getting rid of the leaven. The problem, brethren, is that—like the Israelites—we do not really **believe** God's Word in many cases. If we have reservations and fears, then the truth is that our belief and fear of something else is greater than our trust of God.

On the last Day of Unleavened Bread, I showed that the fruit of this careless, disbelieving approach can lead to a very serious case of **presumptuousness** that became the focal point of I Corinthians 10, leading to Paul's warning. He said:

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I Corinthians 10:12 Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

This is a very serious sin, and especially important to those of us living in the end time because Jesus' warning in Revelation 3 regarding Laodiceanism is a parallel. His description of a Laodicean is that he says, *"I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing."* He is clearly stating his presumptuousness. *"I do not need a thing. I am okay the way I am."* Right in the end time church, that is.

Do you understand that the root of presumptuousness in the Laodicean is **unbelief** in God's Word, just as it was with the ancient Israelites? We are surrounded by unbelief in this world, and this is the very thing that we have to come out of. God shows that this is the problem, right from the very beginning of Genesis. Adam and Even sinned because they believed something different from what God said, and they submitted to the different teaching.

Here Evelyn and I are in Scottsdale, Arizona. And the Phoenix area is not an area that I am overly familiar with. I have a little bit of familiarity with it, having been here eight or ten times in the last ten or twelve years. But suppose a map is the Bible. And I look on a map, and I am in Scottsdale (which is just to the east of Phoenix); and I want to get to Glendale (which is over on the northwest side). And so I look on the map, and it says if I take route 101 and head west I will come right into Glendale.

But I do not believe that, because I believe that I ought to take route 101 south towards Tempe. I only changed one part of what it says. I changed west to south. But where am I going to end up? Am I going to end up in Glendale, or am I going to end up in Tempe? You get the point? It is that simple!

The map to God's Kingdom contains the Word of God. We read it; and then, all too often, something makes us change something in the direction that He gives. Instead of believing what He says, we insert what we believe. Hopefully we will repent. But sometimes, brethren, we do this hardly even consciously aware that this is what we are doing. That is not so bad in terms of sin; but, when we do it deliberately, it begins to become more and more serious.

I initially brought up those two doctrines—the immortality of the soul and eternal security—because they are two of the major doctrinal base that is driving what we today call the Evangelicals. And it was the Worldwide Church of God leadership's communication with Evangelicals that played the major role in breaking up the Worldwide Church of God.

Those Evangelicals convinced the Worldwide Church of God leadership that the Church of God doctrines were wrong—even as the serpent convinced Adam and Eve that God was wrong. And those same doctrines impacted greatly on the first century church. Eventually, we are going to get around to that. What goes around comes around. But we will not get to that in this sermon.

In my last sermon, I gave two examples: one involving Passover, and the other on counting Pentecost when Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath—showing that many in the Church of God today are either ignoring or deliberately disbelieving what God clearly says. Thus, they are reaching wrong conclusions.

I want you to turn with me to II Timothy 2:14-16. Here we are reaching back into the first century.

II Timothy 2:14-16 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

I mentioned, in that last sermon, that God's Word is described (by Paul, in II Corinthians 11:3) as being simple. It talks about the **simplicity** that is in Christ. Maybe it is an unfortunate translation, even though it is not totally incorrect. The word in the Greek more specifically means direct or frank. It is open. The Word of God is direct. It is not convoluted. It does not go around in circles. God means what He says, and He says what He means; and it is frank. It is right to the point.

But I have found, in my 45 years in the church now, that those who want to teach something different than what the Bible clearly states produce convoluted ways to get around the Bible's plain statements. This is the reason why Herbert Armstrong called the magazine "The Plain Truth."

With Passover, the fact that the Israelites were in their own homes until daylight in Goshen to observe it, and that they had to walk during the daylight hours of the 14th to the gathering place, must be denied. And so a twisted explanation involving hair-splitting parsing of ancient Hebrew words is substituted. You can see from II Timothy 2:14 here that people in the first century were following the same practice.

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I want you to think about this because, in principle, this is what the serpent did to Eve. He parsed the word "die." He split hairs and came up with a convoluted lie: "*You shall not surely die.*" They did not die right away, but God's word was true. They did die! And they brought death upon themselves, which he (the serpent) did not tell them. So he split a hair there.

Now, regarding Pentecost, a ceremonial occasion—the waving of the sheaf—is speculated upon as a possibility. I have all of the Worldwide Church of God papers on this, and it is speculated upon as a possibility as having occurred in Joshua 5. But then, without notice, the speculation becomes the very basis for a doctrinal conclusion. "*I guess.*" And then, in a minute or two, "*This is a fact!*"

If you look at Joshua 5, there is no indication of any other observance except Passover. They most assuredly kept the Passover. No sheaf was waved. No sacrifices made. And besides that there is plenty of information available (in Exodus 23, Deuteronomy 12, and Leviticus 22) showing that Joshua and the Israelites were forbidden to make the very offerings that without warning become the basis for the doctrinal conclusion.

Well, it is interesting. When some are confronted by this, they then say, "*Well, Herbert Armstrong issued a decree as an apostle.*" He issued a decree that the sheaf always has to be waved within the Days of Unleavened Bread. But let me ask you just a simple question: Since when does a man's word—any man's word—supercede what God has already decreed. God decreed it in His Word, and He says, "I change not." What did He decree? There was no wave sheaf during Joshua 5.

Now let us go to I Timothy 6:20-21. I and II Timothy are the last epistles that Paul wrote before he was martyred. I guess I can put Titus in there too.

I Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, keep [guard] that which is committed to your trust...

Now, what was committed to his trust? It was the teaching that Paul received from Jesus; and then, honestly (truthfully) passed on to Timothy. And he says, "*Guard it!*"

I Timothy 6:20-21 ...avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [or, knowledge] falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith. [There we are, back to that again.] Grace be with you. Amen.

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II Timothy 1:13-14 [Writing to the same man, Paul says:] Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. [That is a command to every minister of God.] That good thing which was committed unto you keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us.

II Timothy 2:1-2 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses...

Why in the world do you think that he is going over this again, and again, and again—to Timothy and Titus, two young men that he undoubtedly felt very close to? I will tell you why. It was because the church was being attacked by charlatans who were teaching it false doctrines. The deviations may have appeared on the surface to be tiny, but they were deviations nonetheless. So, in order to prevent any further deviation, he is warning these young men, "*You preach what I told you.*"

II Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit you to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

II Timothy 2:5 And if a man also strive for masteries [which is what we are doing. We are striving for Christian masteries.]; yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

And "lawfully" would be that which Paul gave to Timothy. So in his final letters, Paul gives not one iota of indication that permits us to deviate from what was delivered to him by Christ and he then recorded. We absolutely must guard, hold fast, and teach those things without going out of the way—because Israel, and modern Christians, are clearly doing it.

We are NOT free to pick and choose doctrines. The Bible is **the voice**. Remember the sermon in which God said, "*You obey the voice of the One (the Angel) that is in the cloud.*" Well, the Bible is the written voice of the One who was in the cloud in the wilderness. And we do not want to fall victim to *disbelief* in the same manner that Israel did.

I have found that much of the time disbelief *per se* is not our problem. Something else plagues us in the same way that it did Israel. I want you to turn back to the book of

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Numbers, where we are going to begin to address that which plagued Israel. It was *fear*.

This takes place following the return of the spies that went into Canaan from the wilderness to look over the land and bring back a report to the people of Israel.

Numbers 13:27-33 And they told him, and said, "We came unto the land whither you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan." And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. " But the men that went up with him said, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

Numbers 14:1-11 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. [Boy, they were really feeling this.] And the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!" Or "Would God we had died in this wilderness!" And "Wherefore has the LOORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Where it not better for us to return into Egypt?" And they said one to another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spoke unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, "The land, which we passed thorough to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LOORD delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which flows with mild and honey. Only rebel not you against the LOORD, neither fear you the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LOORD is with us: fear them not." But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And

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the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, "How long will this people provoke Me? And how long will it be before they believe Me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?"

It would seem as though Israel had every evidence that God was with them, and that He was clearly powerful enough for them to trust Him. But that evidence—what He did to the Egyptians; the dividing of the Red Sea; His providing two million people plus with manna every day, with water as was needed, and even quails for them, clothing that did not wear out; and He even provided them with shade during the heat of the day—was not enough.

And their faith evaporated when fears (for their own safety, for the preservation of their flesh, and the satisfying of their appetites) overrode the trust of almost everyone. Their fear overcame whatever level of faith they had, and it motivated rebellion. It led directly to the death of everyone over twenty, except for Joshua and Caleb. Do you get the point?

Fear kills! That is its ultimate fruit.

This illustration here in Numbers 13 and 14 is clear evidence that these people were *walking by sight*. What they saw were giants, and it intimidated them—as if God was not bigger, greater, more powerful, smarter than giants. So God has to ask, "*How long is it going to be before they believe Me?*" It is like He says, "*What can I do that might give them more faith?*"

Now let us go back even further in time, to Exodus 15. This one is note worthy because it happened immediately, within a few days after God divided the Red Sea.

Exodus 15:22-24 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Now hold that thought, and let us go down to chapter 16. This is just a few days later.

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Exodus 16:1-3 And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. [They are gone one month.] And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said unto them, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full.

Their memories were not very long. These people were slaves. You would have the idea here that they were living high off the hog. "When we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full."

Exodus 16:3 For you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Israel murmured in a multitude of places and circumstances during their wilderness journey. And these are, at least, partly recorded for revealing their fears **to us**. What they feared was what they murmured about! That is how you can tell what they feared. Often, what they feared was that they were not going to be fed.

This leads to something else. It makes the fear a bit more specific. They feared their flesh's demand for gratification was not going to be satisfied. I want you to think about that. Even though God was every day supplying them with the very best food they could possibly eat, their demands for gratification for a wide variety of other things to eat continued. They wanted all of the trimmings. What they were saying was, "*God, what you are giving us is not good enough.*" And what they feared was that they were not going to have their taste buds and their bellies gratified with the variety that they wanted.

I bring this up because this kind of thing is in us. And maybe it is in we Americans more than any other people on earth, because we have so much at our fingertips; and we expect to be gratified by virtually all of it. Is that good? Apparently God did not think it GOOD for them in the wilderness to be gratified with every desire that their minds could come up with. And that is what they feared—that they were not going to get what they wanted. So they feared being denied their gratification.

We are going to go back to the New Testament, to Mark 4.

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Mark 4:39-40 And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace, be still." And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, "Why are you so fearful? [Notice the next thing that He said.] How is it that you have no faith?"

There is a direct connection between *fear* and *a lack of faith*.

Mark 4:41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

When we fear our flesh's ***demand for gratification*** is not going to be taken care of by God, the reason is a lack of faith. That is, trusting Him that He will indeed supply all of our needs. Not everything that we want, but all of our needs. And it too is evidence that we are walking by sight and do not really truly believe God in the biblical sense. That is, that He is really going to take care of us.

Now, does walking by sight affect any of us?

Mark 8:34-38 And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples also, He said unto them, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

I especially want us to pay attention to "ashamed of Me and My words." He is the Living Word. The Bible is the written Word. Jesus made it very clear that followers of Him are ***required to deny themselves***. That is clear, is it not? I think that it is right here that we have put our finger on our most severe belief/fear problem.

Salvation is by grace through **faith**. We might say, "trust." Salvation is by grace through faith/trust. It is faith that opens the door and provides the foundation for hope and for love. It is faith that opens the way for financial security, good health, sound mindedness,

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peace of mind, self control, the abundant life—because believing God makes us acceptable to Him, and He responds by giving those things to us.

Mark 10:17-18 And when He was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said unto him, "Why call you Me good? There is none good but one, that is God."

Did you ever wonder why Jesus responded that way? He could tell the way the young man was perceiving Him by the way that he addressed Him. He addressed Him as any Jew would have addressed any man that he considered to be a teacher. In other words, he was already not really looking at Christ for what He really was—God in the flesh. He was simply looking at Him as just another human teacher.

Now, he respected Jesus. But that is as far as it went. He really did not have faith in Him as being the Son of God. If he had addressed Him differently—as God—Jesus would have never made that reply, because it would have been a worthy address. He would have recognized Him then as who He was. That is why He said, "*There is none good but God.*"

So, in verse 19, Jesus goes through with the instruction anyway because there is a good lesson here.

Mark 10:19-22 "You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not kill,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Defraud not,' 'Honor your father and mother.'" And he [the young man] answered and said unto Him, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Anybody with normal intelligence (maybe people with pretty great intelligence) can pick up the Bible, do some studying, and agree with very much of what it says without changing their lives one whit from what it was before they picked up the Bible and looked into it. But it will change the lives of those who believe it because they will **submit** to what it says, when they trust it.

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This man was not willing to submit to the Word of God. He was willing to be taught, but he was not willing to submit to it. There is a big difference between the two! Do you know why? Do you know what was in the mix? Fear was in the mix, because those who do not trust it fear *the cost of obedience* to it.

Notice that even though the young man was sorrowful, the sorrow still did not motivate him to obey because his sorrow could not overcome his fear. He recognized the good in what he heard, but he still could not bring himself to pay the cost of producing even more than he already had.

He did not really understand or value the intangible, truly important qualities of life that Christ could give him. And so he was unwilling to pay the price. He feared having to pay it through sacrificing something more important to him. His trust was in his wealth. He was living by sight.

Do any of us agree with some portion of the Bible but still do not submit to it? Are we having maybe some degree of sorrow, like this young man? Jesus said to the young man, "*Come, take up your cross.*" That is just another way of saying, "*Deny yourself.*"

Do you know that the most common reason that people do not tithe is because of fear? They fear that they will not have enough to meet the demands of the lifestyle that they choose to live. Do you know what the mind will do then? It will search to find reasons why they should not have to tithe.

They will say, "*Jesus did away with it.*" Or, "*That was only for the Old Covenant.*" Or, "*It only has to be paid on farm produce.*" Or, "*Since it was given to the priests and the Levites and they do not exist under the New Covenant administration, one does not have to tithe.*" And there are many more besides. I know that I have not read them all, but they are out there. Almost always that research has its beginning in the desire to quell a fear of not having enough to satisfy the flesh.

When Paul uses the term "flesh," he is most frequently using it as a synonym for *carnal*. He often uses those terms interchangeably in the way that we might use the term "human nature" today. In Romans 7, he says:

Romans 7:19-24 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. 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

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bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!

Do you think he was not sorry about what he knew was within him, and that he had to do battle with? This that I am calling fear, Paul calls "the law of sin that is in my members." The fear of the flesh is being denied the satisfaction that it desires, and then to find reason to satisfy the flesh's demand for its satisfaction; and it does this through sin. Those avenues to satisfy or to gratify the flesh are very many. It can be through gossip, maybe overeating, illicit sex, pornography, intellectual vanity, stealing from God, or you name it. Fear comes out as a sin.

There is another very closely related fear, directly tied to the fear of self-denial. In fact, it might just be another form of self-denial. But it is one that is specifically noted in the scriptures. So I want us to turn to it, in John 19. Jesus had just died.

John 19:38-39 And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate gave him leave [permission]. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night [Now, why did he come by night? For the same reason as Joseph of Arimathea—he was afraid], and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

Both of these men had the same problem. Both men were occupying seats that gave them a fairly large measure of authority within the Jewish community. But they feared the ridicule and condemnation of their peers, who were also men they respected to a pretty great measure. So their fear—their respect—for their peers was greater than their faith in Jesus, or their respect for Him.

Both men had positive beliefs regarding Christ's teachings. But they had nowhere near enough conviction until witnessing the cold-blooded murder of Jesus, which was motivated by their own peers that they respected.

This little snippet was actually put in there by John to show that these men were overcoming their fears. They were overcoming their problem. Joseph had to go and present himself publicly to Pilate. And then Nicodemus had to join with him publicly while they wrapped the body of Jesus and put all the spices around it. And so they were exposed. But now their faith was a great deal stronger.

Did you ever stop to think what they lost out on, because of what they did? Their fear kept them from enjoying the closeness of traveling with Jesus—walking and talking with Him the way the apostles did. Of being able to receive instructions right from His very feet, and to be able to witness the kind of examples that He gave to those men in the way that He lived and the way that He responded to them. And how about all of the stimulation that He could have given them towards a living faith towards God?

They lost all of that which they could have had along the way because of *fear of exposure* before others that they feared. They did this because they were unwilling at the time to risk the loss of position, social ostracism, and possible expulsion from the Sanhedrin and the synagogue. And so they permitted themselves the gratification of their vanity.

John 12:42-44 Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, "He that believes on Me, believes not on Me, but on Him that sent Me."

How many times, brethren, have we already denied some aspect of God's truth before family and friends because we feared what they might think of us? This is the fear of the flesh being denied being well thought of by those we respect. We desire that those we respect—that is, fear—judge us within certain perimeters that are acceptable to us.

Being thought of as outside of those perimeters causes us to squirm, to vacillate, and to equivocate. In other words, we do not like to be thought of as being "a goody two shoes," a devoted follower of Jesus and the Christian religion. And so we mumble, stammer, and excuse our way out of delicate exposure. This is nothing but vanity, through and through.

Now let us watch what happened to Peter. We are going to go to Matthew 26. Jesus had been taken on the inside of the high priest area.

Matthew 26:69-74 Now Peter sat without in the palace. And a damsel came unto him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied before them all, saying, "I know not what you say." And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man." And after a while came unto him they

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that stood by, and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them; for your speech betrays you." Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, "I know not the man." And immediately the cock crowed.

Despite Peter's obvious leadership qualities and his seeming bluster and courage, he denied Christ and even took an oath and cursed under the pressure of Christ's arrest. First he pleaded ignorance. The second step is that he passed off even knowing Jesus. And then third, he vehemently denied and cursed. Step by step, his fear pulled him into a tragic sin.

This is the same man who was later chosen by Christ to be the first one to go to the Gentiles—to preach Christ to them, and then salvation; and then to eat with them in their homes. This is something that no Jew in the first century would ordinarily do.

Now let us go back to Galatians. I am giving this to help you have a little bit of encouragement that fear is something that everybody faces. God gives us time to overcome it. But it must be overcome, because that fear is sin and it creates sin. That fear is evidence that we really do not believe God. We do not believe that He is really with us. We do not believe that He will provide for us.

Galatians 2:11-13 [Paul writes:] But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles. But when they [the Jews] were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

So here was Peter fraternizing with the Gentiles openly until he was confronted by other Jews in the presence of the Gentiles. Then he backed away, intimidated by their presence. These examples show that fear is a reality that all of us have to deal with. And even though one has been converted a long time, and maybe a person held in high regards, they still have **fears**.

You would think that someone like an apostle, who spent three and a half years walking around, sleeping with, eating with, hearing the sermons, watching the miracles, healings taking place, demons cast out, watching the way that He dealt with friend and enemy, watching His kindness, watching the compassion that flowed through Him for those who were weak—you would think that a person like that would never have to face fear.

Everybody has to face fear! And so it is not something to be ashamed of. But it is also encouraging to know that God is faithful, and that He is patient, and that He will draw us into situations that give us the opportunity to overcome it—even if it has to be done in places of great shame, like He did with Peter. Maybe Peter was one of those who just had to be hit over the head and shamed into overcoming it. But overcome it he did.

Luke 12:4-12 "And I say unto you, My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear Him, which after He has killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, Fear Him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. Also whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take you no thought how or what thing you shall answer, or what you shall say. For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what you ought to say."

This is the counsel we need to be in training, practicing, until we are thoroughly convicted of the rightness of God and His way. One of the lessons here is that, since fear is such a reality in everybody's life, it is *the object of our fear* that is most important of all. Fear of God is great! But fear of man is destructive. So it is the object of the fear that is important. That is something that we can learn to control and direct in the right way.

Psalm 40:4 Blessed is that man that makes the LORD his trust, and respects not [fears not, reverences not] the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

The object of our fear must be God. If God is the object of our fear, we will trust His Word and submit. It is this, brethren, that produces a witness that glorifies God. So the object of our fear must be God. He is the one in whose hand is all power, and whose power extends beyond death.

This fear is one that is a mixture of all of the various aspects of fear. It is not only a deep

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and reverential respect and honoring of Him. It goes all the way to the extreme of being alarmed—I mean terrified—to disobey Him or fail to submit to Him. Do you think that there was not a measure of fear in Jesus Christ when He was praying to God there in the Garden of Gethsemane? Do you think that He wanted to go through the torture that He knew was going to be given to Him? Do you think there was not a measure of fear that motivated Him to say, *"God, Father, take this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done."*

Fear is not just one thing. It is many things. And there are varying degrees, at different times in our life and in different situations. But I think you know this, which David made very clear: The fear of God is NOT something that we have by nature. It is something that must be learned!

So, after we become converted, much of the direction of our life is pointed towards growing in the fear of the Lord. Yes, we believe that He exists. We believe that He is on His throne. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior. But our fears of being denied what our flesh wants for gratification, or our fear of men, gets in between our fear of paying the cost, our fear of sacrificing, our fear of taking up the cross and following after Jesus. It gets in the way and keeps us from doing the things that we need to be doing. So it is a matter of growing.

Jesus, in order to encourage us, gives us that example of the sparrows. God is so aware of what is going on in His creation that even a sparrow cannot fall, as it were, without His permission. And we are worth many sparrows. Boy, if that is not a back handed compliment! We are just worth many sparrows. That is all. That is humbling and encouraging because, if He watches sparrows, how closely is He watching you?

Do you watch your kids, to try to keep them from something that is over their ability to handle, to keep them from pain, to make sure that they get fed, to make sure that they are instructed, to make sure that they grow up to be somebody that will bring honor to your name? How much more careful, how much more watchful, how much more power is there to intervene in God? But, I will tell you, we have to learn to overcome the fear that He is not really with us.

I fear, brethren, that those of us living in Israelitish countries have been so long living in circumstances of comparative economic security and tolerance of lifestyles that, when the threat to our well-being comes, we will find our disloyalty to Christ easily exposed—because we fear the wrong things.

Evelyn mentioned to me on the way over here to services something that maybe fits

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right here. I do not know. You will have to judge that. But a year or two after Mr. Armstrong's death and that intervening period—let us say up to about 1995; but, in the late '80s—there were around 150,000 people attending the Feast of Tabernacles worldwide. Okay. Eighteen years have gone by. What is the population of the Church of God now? 25,000? I do not know, but I think that is a ballpark figure. What happened to 125,000 people?

There is a place where it is intimated that the church, as we approach the end, is going to be tithed. 10% of 150,000 is 15,000 people. We are just guessing here—just speculating—and I do not want you to take these figures seriously, but I do want you to think about them. Something is happening. I think that what is happening is that God is culling the church. He is culling people out.

He is allowing them to do it to themselves by simply not being able to bear the circumstance of a body split in how many different ways—where their faith is on the line everyday, and they are not depending upon Herbert Armstrong, or they are not depending on the local minister, or they are not depending upon this mass of people that they see at the Feast of Tabernacles, and its bigness and strength, and the World Tomorrow program and all of that.

Is their faith in God? Is their faith in His Word? The fear, I guarantee you, is going to come out. One of the first things is that they will fear that they are on a sinking ship, and so they bail out.

I was thinking about prosperity. In our prosperous circumstances, it becomes fairly easy to drift into an attitude that the comparative ease and tolerance that we have in a nation like this is a sign of God's approval, God's acceptance. Well, sometimes it is. But it is not an absolute—not at all. And it is helpful to remember, any of you that are familiar with the book of Amos, that it shows in there that Israel (at the time that Amos was preaching to them, which was in the last decades before they were attacked by the Assyrians) were going through one of the most prosperous periods of time that Israel had had since Solomon.

They were rich beyond belief, for those days—drinking wine by the bowlfuls, as he said, showing tremendous prosperity and abundance. But he said, *"I took away your rain. That did not change you. I took away this, and that did not change you. I did that over there, but you did not respond. I did this, and you paid no attention."* And then he says, *"Prepare to meet your God, because I will not pass this way any more."*

There is a time of reckoning coming. The prosperity of the United States of America is

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just about to go down the tubes. It may take a few more years, but it is nonetheless going, going, going. Canada is going to go right with us, and so is Japan. It is going to go right with us, and maybe most of Europe too—drawn into a worldwide economic calamity that this world has never seen. And who are they going to blame? The consumers of all of this wealth that is feeding into the United States primarily.

We need to fear God:

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare: but whoso puts his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

The fear of the wrong things is a highly destructive snare because it almost invariably produces sin. The fear is deceitful because, when we have it, it seems to offer so much. When we give into it, relief floods our consciences. But later on the reality hits us like a hammer, and we begin to feel the pain and the sorrows.

Fear is a powerful motivator. But the wrong kind of fear is an intense self-consciousness that is actually a form of punishment that is self-defeating. It can and does create a guilty conscience, and that sort of conscience punishes through anxiety. What a stress! We would have been far better off just to experience the pain or discomfort of obedience to God rather than give in to our fear.

Brethren, I am convinced that much of the time doctrinal truths are rejected by men because of these two fears: (1) the fear of denying the self and (2) the fear of men. They are intimately tied with one another. And we have the opportunity, just about every day, to work on the fear of denying the self. That is, saying "No" to something that our flesh might be crying out for, or our vanity might be crying out for. But they happen many times, even in one day.

We will conclude with Revelation 21:7-8.

Revelation 21:7-8 He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son. But the fearful, and unbelieving [Notice how those two are linked.], and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

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This is a very real problem to every one of us. It is part of our nature to fear. We can see that in the Israelites of old; and, if we are honest with ourselves, we can see it in ourselves—clearly working each and every other day. This is what keeps us, so frequently, from submitting to God and growing and overcoming.

Let us start working on it, making sure that every day is looked upon as a day of preparation—getting ready for the rest. That is, the rest that Paul mentions in Hebrews 4, the Sabbath rest that is coming with the establishment of the Kingdom of God. This is something that we can work on every day without even leaving our house, because it is present with every one of us. So let us make sure that we do this—working on denying the self its gratification when it is clearly wrong to do so.