

## Loving Christ

### The Problem with Floating

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This sermon began taking shape about a month or so before the Feast of Tabernacles when I prepared a sermonette that was based in Revelation 2 and 3 on the "eras" proposition that we have been taught for many years in the Worldwide Church of God ["A Truth About Revelation 2 and 3"]. After studying that once again, looking for some enlightenment there, I came to the conclusion that I do not believe that interpretation.

I am not saying it is completely wrong. I am saying that it is certainly not the first one we need to be looking at for help and for understanding the times in which we are living. Rather, I believe Christ intends that we understand that all seven models of congregations shown exist in the time just prior to the return of Jesus Christ, even as they all existed at the same time whenever the book of Revelation was written. Their main purpose is to reveal the doctrinal character and attitude differences *within* the true church against which brethren can evaluate themselves.

Now whether these are seven corporate entities, I do not know for sure, but I think that is also a possibility. Furthermore, despite the fact that there are so many differences in the level of spiritual maturity and dedication and conduct and attitude (and this is important), Christ nowhere says to the people of those seven churches that they should run from group to group, or float from group to group. Rather, He implies very strongly "**Repent**" right where you are. The situations and weaknesses in your life can be worked out, or the strengths can be used right there.

This practice of floating from one group to another is common since the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, and as I thought on this comparison, I concluded that in some regards what happened following the spiritual disintegration of the Worldwide Church of God after Mr. Armstrong died, is unprecedented in church history.

In other words, I am not saying that no church of God ever broke up or disintegrated in the past, but not in the way that we are facing today. What the situation today does is that it leaves it so one can easily leave the fellowship of one Church of God group and choose from several other Church of God groups, still believing that they are within the Church of God. That never happened before.

This optional fellowshipping circumstance was created, because never before did we have the combination of easy transportation and communication in existence, as it is today. I could find nothing in the New Testament that covered this circumstance, nor could I find anything similar in the Old Testament either. Can you think of any time that God advised the Israelites under the Old Covenant that when they found their nation unsuitable to their spiritual taste, they could just move on to Egypt, or Greece, or Rome? I think you get the idea.

There is something that maybe touches on this to some degree, and that is when Israel and Judah parted and became two separate nations. The Bible makes it clear that some Israelites "moved" (if I can put it that way) to Judah, because Judah was still kind of sticking closer to God the way that they were given than Israel did. But what I found interesting is that God makes no comment either way—yea or nay. It only says it happened.

Now was God aware that this circumstance *could* happen as it has happened? To my way of thinking, and my understanding of God's sovereignty, His awareness of things, and the vision with which He operates, that there is no way He did not think of this. He *knew*, because of this easy transportation and communication, when the Worldwide Church of God disintegrated and began breaking apart, and He let it occur in order to see how we would react to having so many options open to us.

What would we do? Would we learn anything from this? Does it strengthen us to do this? I think that remains to be seen. I think it will not be revealed until the final judgment as to whether it really was something God did not mind at all.

But it presents us with an interesting scenario. I want you to turn to Proverbs 14:12.

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way that seems right to a man;

We have got this whole menu of church groups available to us, and so the option is for a person to conduct his life, and move to another Church of God group because he always feels he is still in the Church of God regardless of where he goes.

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

None of the facilities—the transportation and communication—which make this easy movement possible is evil in itself. We know for sure that God commands us to choose, as He does in Deuteronomy 13. But why and how we make use of this might make all the difference in the world to the people involved.

Most of you are at least somewhat familiar with the *Soncino* commentary. At least you know it by name. It is a Jewish commentary. A multitude of people contributed to that commentary, but one of the rabbis made a statement on this particular scripture. He said:

The figure is that of a journey in which the traveler imagines that he is pursuing a straight path that will lead him to his desired goal of success and happiness, but finds too late that it leads to an early death and the destruction of happiness.

So there is a way. Are these people choosing correctly in doing what they are doing? Their way is to float. The solution to their problem is to float from one group to another. I think there is hardly any of us listening to the sound of my voice who has not made at least one change, let us say, since the Worldwide Church of God. I am not condemning that in any way. It is an option that is available to us, but is it profitable to do that?

Since Jesus does not give any instruction in Revelation 2 and 3 (and in these congregations there surely were problems), nowhere did He ever say—we will just consider the Philadelphia church—"Well, why don't you just move over there to Smyrna? Things are really good there. People are really strong spiritually, and that will really help you." He just said, "Repent," meaning repent of *your* problem.

**Matthew 13:18-23** "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. [I am not paying particular attention to this in terms of unconverted people, but rather

with converted people involved; at least assuming they are converted.] But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Basically what Christ is showing here is that people respond differently according to their circumstance and use of the word of God which was planted in them. He continues in verse 24 with another parable.

**Matthew 13:24-30** Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

When you arrive at the Feast of Tabernacles this year you are going to find that the group is smaller than last year. In fact, we have been losing small numbers of people just about every year, but this is not unusual for Church of God organizations. You might recall Mr. Armstrong saying that Billy Graham could go into a town, and when he preached, the crowds got bigger every service. But if *he*, Mr. Armstrong, went into a town and preached, the crowds would get smaller every service. That is because hearing the truth of God begins a weeding process in peoples' mind, and they begin to realize they do not belong there.

I have been told that other groups formed from the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God are *also* generally losing people. One reason for this is that many of us who came from the Worldwide Church of God are getting quite old. Death, all by itself, produces a fairly large attrition. However, it is the loss beyond the deaths that has puzzled me, because the losses are taking place in a time of relative calm in the church.

It is not calm out in the world, but church-wise we are not in the same kind of circumstance as we were in the Worldwide Church of God when it was breaking apart and other groups were forming. There was a great deal of turmoil in the church for quite a number of years. But those things have settled down, but some people have not settled down since that has occurred. What is occurring though is a continual, slow bleeding.

I have not only looked, let us say, outside to try to find answers to this, but I have also looked inward to myself in order to understand that maybe *I* am the cause of the slow attrition that is taking place. It is more rapid this year, but nonetheless an attrition. I have also looked upward to God as well in prayer, trying to understand if there is anything I can do in order to make sure this does not occur.

We are going to turn to Ezekiel 33, which is a scripture Mr. Armstrong used to refer to quite often.

**Ezekiel 33:1-5** Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.

Now I am the watchman you have chosen, and what I am doing is part of my responsibility. I think God has given me another reason as to why this picture we see out in the general Church of God is taking place. There are things about which I can do very little, but I can do what I am doing right now, and that is preaching to you so that you understand and maybe you will be warned a little yourself.

For a good while I attributed the losses to the fact that the world is crammed full of distractions—the thorns of the parable we just read in Matthew 13, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches stated in that parable. The distractions are indeed at least a part of the answer, because this world is jammed full of "appealing-to-human-nature" diversions which draw peoples' attention and distracts them. They kind of lose their way by involving themselves in spiritually extraneous distractions they do not really need.

What I have noticed through the years is that people, who do this in relation to the Church of the Great God, just drift away, and we never hear of them again. They do not float. They just drift completely out of the church.

It may be surprising to you that the Church of the Great God has literally lost hundreds of people to this cause. This especially took place in the early '90s when the Church of the Great God was new and the Worldwide Church of God at that time still had a pretty good head of steam going. The Global Church of God had just begun, and United was still several years off into the future.

When we look back on it, it is easy to see that most of those people—those hundreds I am talking about—were truly confused. They got caught in the maelstrom of what was happening within Worldwide. They did not know which way to turn. They simply did not have the spiritual resources to patiently wait it out. Maybe for a little bit they came to the Church of the Great God, or to Global, or to Philadelphia a little bit earlier. They could not maintain the strength of the faith they had because it was too weak. They were easily distracted whenever they found that the concepts with which they came into those groups just were not going to fit, and they did not have any support from the people in the congregation for those concepts, which were mostly doctrinal or policy concepts, and they got restless and they left.

There are other groups of people smaller than that first group. They were sincerely religious, but nonetheless, I believe, unconverted because God's truth eventually lost its appeal to their nature, and they too dropped by the wayside because God simply had not called them. I think some of these people would have fit into "the stony ground" thing. There was no real root in them even though they

had a natural bent toward religion. They were sincere, and had pretty good conduct and good character, but were not converted. It was just something they brought into the groups from Worldwide, but they just drifted away because there was really no converted root within them.

There are brethren who need some help in understanding something that maybe they have unwittingly fallen victim to. These are people who are converted. I generally have no doubt they are converted, but they are still restless, and they are still confused as well to some degree. These are the people who generally tend to be the ones who move.

I personally know some people who have been in four or five different Church of God groups simply because these groups are available in their city, and they really cannot find a home in *any* of them. It is these people I am concerned about, at least for this sermon, because I feel that there is still a fairly large number of these people in the groups, not just the Church of the Great God. I am not talking about the Church of God really. Those people are just out there, and they are like a mass that is trying to quiver.

Now why do you think that they move from group to group? Well, there is within them undoubtedly a measure of restlessness. There is a lack of real strong belief that is a convicting belief, and so they are not really sure. They want to know more. They want to understand more. I think that they want to grow. But if their problem was being solved by moving from group to group, why does it remain *un*solved, and they move again? I think the answer to that is they are looking at the wrong thing. The problem is with them. It is not really a problem in the group. It is *them*!

**John 6:66** From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

Now is this not interesting? Was there ever a better minister than Jesus? Was there ever anybody who gave better sermons than Jesus? Is there anybody who had just the right personality at the right time, *all* the time, than Jesus? Was there anybody Jesus treated unfairly? I do not think so. What I am getting at here is that these people left *Him*, and even the most magnificent speaker who ever walked on the face of the earth *lost* people. Do you understand that? He gave sermons. He gave talks. He gave studies that went right over some peoples' heads. Thankfully, not everyone's. So we read in verse 67:

**John 6:67-68** Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Now, here they were, in the presence of the One who was at the height of perfection and truth, and they were in the position to grow as they never had after that. Do you see what I am getting at? Is not the church the body of Jesus Christ? He is still the Head, and though we might argue with the effectiveness of this of any minister, or the loving concern or the friendship and fellowship of the brethren, it is still the body of Jesus Christ, and it is never going to meet the needs, if I can put it that way, of a person who has the problem within himself. So the solution to these people floating is not to move. The solution, as Jesus said, is to repent where you are. We will see why, and we will see that solution expounded a bit further as we go on.

One of the things these people use as kind of a crutch—and it is a true one, but again it is not really the answer—is that they feel safe going from one group to another because they know the doctrines are going to be the same, or at least basically the same. There might be little nuances or

interpretations that are different. There might be some policies that are different, but that is usually one of the crutches they use. [They say] "The policies are better over here." "The doctrines are preached a little bit better." These people might get more sermons on prophecy, or whatever justifications they might use.

Incidentally, one of the crutches they always use is that the congregation is not friendly. It is not just the minister, the congregation is not friendly. They are not loving. They are cliquish—those kind of things. So, they feel a security in going to another group.

What we can learn from this is that doctrine is not anything but a foundation. It is a teaching that is true. What is important is that the member—understand this—understands the doctrine, understands the doctrine's application for himself, personally, and then uses it. Simply going to another group is not going to change that fact. Jesus said, "If you believe what I am saying, and then you use it, then you will understand." And He was saying the truth.

One of the characteristics of these people is that they are often faithful in attendance, and that is good. However, I very carefully chose to use the word "attendance." I did not say they were fellowshipping. The reason I did not say that is that true fellowshipping, in the biblical sense, is those who are fellowshipping have the same mind. You can attend, you can talk to somebody, but you are not fellowshipping unless there is a unity of mind not only in what we believe, but in how we act and react and conduct ourselves in our lives.

The reason I bring this up is because through the years I have learned that these people who float attend, but they do not really fellowship. They are not really one with the group. They are often just a little bit apart from us, and sometimes *all the way* apart from it, even though they are attending. Fellowshiping requires being truly of the same mind.

I am going to turn the sermon a little bit to the solution to this problem. We are going to link three scriptures together to advance the concepts a little bit further.

**Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

From here we are going to go to Romans 8:24-25.

**Romans 8:24-25** For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? [Giving the idea that it is in your possession so you hope for something you do not yet have.] But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Faith is a foundation. That is what we learn in Hebrews 11:1. It is a solid entity beneath our spiritual feet. Now we have learned in order to really make use of that faith we ought to have something we *hope* for so that the faith is activated and we are carried along by that hope toward a goal. We have to understand that the way God operates means that it is going to take perseverance in the use of faith, and that hope is going to have to be sustained while we are going along.

**II Corinthians 5:7** For we [Christians] walk by faith, not by sight.

So faith is our foundation. We have hope and a goal. These two together give us a base to work toward the accomplishing of that goal, and we find out that all the while we are waiting, are persevering, are hoping, we have to *live* it continuously. It is not a stutter-step kind of arrangement, but we live by faith. We conduct our life by faith.

Let us advance this one step further. Just about every Sabbath that Evelyn and I go to services, we pass a Methodist Church on the way. They have a bulletin board right out front telling you what the coming Sunday's sermon is going to be about. They have it already up on the Sabbath, and we get to see it before those people ever get the sermon preached to them. But it said on that bulletin board, "A Christian is to live by faith, not feelings." This is important. Feelings are very changeable. Feelings are educated from our experiences in the world, but everybody's feelings about something are not the same. They are highly variable.

But if our faith, our confidence, and our hope is in an unchangeable God and with doctrine that is absolutely true, then what is it that is supposed to guide us toward that hope? Is it not supposed to be the truth of God, and not how we *feel* about things? Because feelings are highly variable and change in all kinds of situations?

If a person is not grounded in that way, even though he has the doctrines in his mind and believes them, if his feelings are directing his life, he can become easily offended in a congregation for whatever reason. He can blame the minister. He can blame others. The problem, you see, is always somebody else. It is never in him. This provides the motivation to move.

Let me hasten to add here that feelings are not unimportant. They are a gift of God. However, *faith must override feelings* in importance in a person's life. Faith is created from a solid understanding of God's truth. Feelings are not always created in the same way, with the same foundation. That is why they vary from person to person. God says, "I am God. I change not." And His truth does not change. Faith must always override feelings. We all have feelings, and it is easy to become upset, offended, angry, or whatever when we rub against one another. But does that change the truth of God? Not at all.

We have to advance beyond here. Actually this sermon picks up where I left off on the Feast of Trumpets. We are going to go right back to that last verse I used in that sermon, because Paul said in that verse, "This is what is driving me!" We are going to look at it again. It is also in II Corinthians 5, right after he said that we have to live by faith. We are going to go to verse 14 and read all the way through to chapter 6, verse 2. This is tremendous what Paul says here.

**II Corinthians 5:14** For the love of Christ compels [constrains] us, . . .

It is not Paul's love for Christ. It is Christ's love *in* Paul. It is Christ's *love* that constrains Paul. Let us get that straight. I am not saying that Paul did not love Christ. Of course he did, but the way he worded this he made sure that we understood it was the love of Christ that constrained him. He begins to explain a bit:

**II Corinthians 5:14-15** For the love of Christ compels [constrains] us, because we judge thus [here's the way we should judge]: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Paul just gave us the answer to this sermon. We will see why in a bit.

**II Corinthians 5:16** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Paul is saying that conversion utterly changed his mind so that he no longer looked at people in the way he did before, converted or unconverted, whether it was Jesus, or it was the Father, or his fellow ministers. How was he now looking at things now? From God's perspective.

**II Corinthians 5:16-17** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. [Not carnally anymore.] Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;

Paul is extending this out to you and me. He is not just saying, "It is not just me who is this way. It is anybody who is really converted."

**II Corinthians 5:17** . . . old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Please understand, all things become new in our mind gradually. We evolve into the image of Jesus Christ.

**II Corinthians 5:18-21** Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

**II Corinthians 6:1-2** We then, as workers together with *Him* also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you."

Let me give you some ways that verse 14 is translated in other bibles.

**II Corinthians 5:14** [Moffat Translation] For I am controlled by the love of Christ.

Paul had to allow it to be that way.

**II Corinthians 5:14** [Phillips Translation] The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ.

**II Corinthians 5:14** [Revised English Bible] For the love of Christ controls us.

**II Corinthians 5:14** [The New International Version] For Christ's love compels.

**II Corinthians 5:14** [The Living Bible] Whatever we do is certainly not for our own profit, but because Christ's love controls us now.



Do you see the connection he is making with Christ? As Lord and Master, he is submitting to everything Christ says. Now if we want to do this to perfection, Paul says, "I will do nothing unless I have received permission from Christ that it is okay that I do it." That is allowing yourself to be controlled.

One of the translations, which I did not write down, says, "For the love of Christ lays hold on us." It will not let go, is the implication.

I think as you can see there, the translators used a wide variety of English possibilities in order to give us the sense of one person—Paul—pushing himself forward to accomplish on the foundation of an internal influence that had its source in his knowledge, his understanding, of Jesus Christ. He just completely gave himself over.

Regardless of which terminology is used, they all give a clear impression that Paul's motivation for the conduct of his life arose from his conviction about Christ's importance to everything in his life—everything his life contained after he was knocked down and blinded on the road to Damascus. With Paul, that made such an impression on him like it was somebody flipped a switch. With most of us it is not that dramatic. It is interesting that God was able to do that with Paul, and yet not destroy the personality that was there.

Right in the context Paul said that his knowledge of and belief in Christ, and what he knew of Christ, forever changed how he perceived other people. It vastly altered his perception of Jesus Christ Himself so that he could no longer perceive Jesus as he had done before, because before he perceived Him carnally. How did he think of Christ carnally? He was an enemy! And then suddenly, Christ was the Savior! That is what he means. Maybe there was some period of growth there where he had to sort things out, but I think you get the idea. One minute Christ was an enemy. God converted him, and he said, "Yes, Lord!" He just submitted to Him. "What is it You will have me do?"

Maybe our conversion is not that dramatic, but it follows the same process. We may evolve into it slowly, but that is what he is talking about. Brethren, this is the point of what our life is all about. Our life is about this change from *looking* at things, how we *feel* about things carnally, to how we believe in faith in what Christ said we ought to think and do, and it becomes part of us.

Do you understand what I am getting at? These people who are floating are lacking this. They are looking for it, you see. We will give them the benefit of the doubt that this is what they are looking for, but the answer is not to go from group to group. The answer is to **repent**, and see they are being driven by the wrong thing. That wrong thing is how they *feel* about things rather than being convicted by the truth of God. The other people in the congregation and the minister are secondary. What is important is what Christ is to him or her.

Now as God's work unfolds, because of Christ, others who came to believe in Him were having their lives transformed, too. That is what Paul is saying there from roughly verse 17 on. Each in his order, to be sure, but within a plan and a purpose, huge in scope and also merciful, kind, and generous beyond measurement. All of this (and much more) because of what one Man did because He was God in the flesh.

Paul lays our responsibility to Christ for what He did right on the line, saying that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and rose again. This is what life is about—this transformation from carnality to godliness, from looking at things carnally to looking at and believing on things spiritually.

I want us to go back to Deuteronomy, because I want you to see what the Bible says is driving God. I discovered this in my research for the sermons on Deuteronomy, and I thought it was really wonderful, so I will give it to you here. It is in Deuteronomy 33. This is the blessings that Moses made for each of the tribes of Israel. Listen to what Moses says about God because it is the first thing he gets to. He wants us to see where this is coming from. He is talking about the relationship between God and Israel, but the principle here was the same for them as it is for us, because it is the same God.

**Deuteronomy 33:1-2** Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir [the general area of Mount Sinai]; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints [when He gave the law]. Yes, He loves the people; all His saints are in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; everyone receives Your words.

We are going to look mostly at verse 3, as it helps us understand God's attitude toward you and me. The first thing I want you to note is the statement "He loves His people." I want you to tie this together with what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:14 through to II Corinthians 6:2. The One who inspired II Corinthians is the same One who inspired this in Deuteronomy 33.

Jesus Christ has always worked with Israel and the Church, which is now the Israel of God. So the One that is being spoken of here—the One who came to Mount Sinai, to Seir, and to Paran—is the same One who converted Paul on the Damascus Road, and the same One Paul was extolling there in II Corinthians 5. What did it say there in II Corinthians 5:7? Paul was teaching us that the love of this One is what compelled *him*. That is what Moses is saying, too.

It is God's love that is the very foundation of our relationship with Him. He loved us before we loved Him. He loved us while we were yet sinners. Let us look at this love, because it is really beautiful.

The word that is translated "love" here is rightfully translated so, the difference being this is a word that is used *very rarely* in the whole Old Testament. When I ask you, "What is the love of God defined in the Bible?" everyone would say I John 5:3—"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."

There is nothing wrong with that at all, but this word takes God's love into a different area altogether, because this word means "to cherish with affection." It literally means to pull somebody into his bosom; it is not legal at all, it is *feeling*! It takes us into a different area of God's life and God's motivation than we normally think of Him in. He just does not love us legally—"Oh, I will forgive your sins by the blood of Jesus Christ." No. His love is one that pulls us into His bosom even while we were yet sinners, because that is when He does it in a cherishing relationship.

But it goes beyond that. It is not mere cherishing. It is not mere tenderness, because the whole phrase together gives the implication that this love is *timeless*. It has no beginning of days nor end of life. It is not inconsistent in any way. It never goes up. It never goes down. It is *always* cherishingly tender.

Remember, I said that emotions are good. They are a gift from God. But with us, because our emotional states are so variable, we always have to remember that faith has to override emotions because our emotions, our feelings, may be wrong. But God's are never wrong, but always under perfect control. What He is saying is that His embrace is tender and it is timeless.

Now who is a saint? Because that is critical to this as well. A saint is one who has been separated from the world because he is consecrated to God. That is the one He is tenderly embracing. How does one respond to God's embrace? We should hug Him back. In other words, we *respond* in love. But *do* we? Paul did.

Now not only that, Moses goes on to say that the saints are in His hand, not just hugged. Another figure of speech here...and what it shows is that in His hand is eternal security. These people (these saints who are in His embrace) are safe under any circumstance, anywhere, at any time. We are so close He cannot miss us, if you get the picture here.

Are you beginning to understand why Christ, who has carried this picture with Him all of His life, never felt insecure, never felt fear, because His awareness of this love was so sharply honed that He could go forth and do what He did even though what He was doing was not going to be accepted, and of course they eventually killed Him as well. But He could go through life with that picture in His mind.

Jesus said that no one can snatch anybody from His Father's hand, and that is true. Nobody can do it. Not even Satan. But we can walk away from it by failing to respond, by not returning His love. We can walk away from it and take ourselves out of that most secure area that anybody could ever possibly be in.

But Moses goes on. He did not stop there, because the next thing he said is that "the saints sit down at His feet and receive His word."

You might recall the time that Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet and Martha was bustling around there, complaining about Mary just sitting there doing nothing while she was doing all the work. Hey! Which one was it that Jesus corrected? He said, "Mary has chosen the better part, to sit at My feet and listen to what I have to say." You see, every one of these figures gives a picture of a close, tender relationship with God.

Those pictures which focus on the human being...what are they doing? Their focus is directed on the One who is giving them the love. That was Martha's problem. At a time she was serving people, she should have been serving God by sitting at His feet too. That would have been the right thing to do at that time. How long do you have the Savior of the world remaining in your presence like that? Not often.

What this does is it puts us into another different position. Jesus changed the illustration a little bit. He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me." But it is drawn from the same picture. He changes the figure to a sheep instead of a human being and shows that those saints will follow Him.

There is one more thing here about the saints sitting at God's feet and the character—the sheep—that Jesus used. All of these combined together give a picture of the saints' attitude. What is it? It is docile, and it is submissive. Think about it. There is a lot to be learned there. The Christian does not have an adversarial attitude. He is one whose mind has changed. It does not mean that he might not

see other peoples' points of view. That is not it. They are not adversarial like Satan, trying to get control of a situation. No. They are being controlled by Christ. That is what Paul said. It is the love of Christ that compels.

In Psalm 32:9, the psalmist says there, "Do not be like the horse or like the mule which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you." If you have ever had any dealings with horses, you go out in the field, and they are going to start going away from you. That tendency is just in them, especially if the horse is not *your* horse!

The picture there would be the way it would be, you see, between Christ and a non-Christian. A non-Christian would be like the horse or mule, and they would begin sidling away if Christ walked up to them. But if it were one of His sheep, they would turn right toward Him because they would recognize the love. They would recognize that they are to be submissive to that One.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 7. This makes an interesting connection in this regard.

**Deuteronomy 7:6-11** "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

What we have seen, then, is commandment keeping, statute keeping, and judgment keeping is not being seen as simply a legal maneuver, but rather it is a submissive maneuver in love, in thanksgiving for knowing the truth and being embraced by this One who will does oodles and oodles for us.

We are going to go now to the New Testament to the book of John. Now we have to see a little bit more of what Christ expects from us—from those of us who have had this embracing tender love given to us.

**John 15:1** "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

**John 15:5** "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides [continues] in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

**John 15:8-11** By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide [continue] in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that *your* joy may be full.

Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be joyful? Do you want life to be pleasant and accomplishing?

**John 15:12** This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Oh! He just put a pinnacle to love that none of us is ever going to reach in this life, but He holds it out there for us to strive toward. Can any of us love each other the way *He* loved us?

**John 15:13-14** Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

It is helpful to understand that these verses we just read—mostly 8 through 14—pretty much constitute the conclusion of the "vine and fruit" illustration which was given at the beginning of the chapter. The main point is this: Participation in Christ's life is the source of all good. It is important to understand that and think it through.

What good things do you want out of life? You see, there is *One* who can supply these things, and that is Jesus Christ, but the key to it is the relationship—a relationship that *He* instituted by extending His arms, as it were, and drawing us to Him in an embrace. Here is this One who has the answers to everything, and the willingness to provide them if we will respond in love to Him.

Are we not in a marriage relationship covenant? Does it not seem right and logical to you that if we are going to marry the One who drew us into this relationship and hugged us to His breast that we should respond to that love? Who could we possibly marry who could give us what *He* can give?

We just saw there that this relationship contains the greatest hope that we could possibly hope about life, and we might break it down to something this simple. What do I have to do to get these things? This is kind of crass, or whatever, but all we have to do is love Him in return. That is what He is asking for. Why do we ever resist Him?

Participation in Christ's life is the source of all good, and abiding in Him is the means of participation in His life, and that abiding in Him is the same thing as abiding in His love, which is exactly what Paul was explaining there in I Corinthians 5.

Keeping the commandments is the legal foundation of love. It also provides evidence that one is submitting to God in some measure. However, we just saw in Deuteronomy 33 that God's love also contains a tremendous degree of tender embracing and consistent *timeless* affection. Thus God's love has an emotional element on top of commandment-keeping, which can easily be nothing more than an obligatory duty performed in a disgruntled "Well, if I must" attitude. This is far better than nothing at all, but it is that, plus the feeling of affection for Him, that matters very greatly.

This is what made Paul so effective. Paul not only kept the commandments, he *loved* Jesus Christ. With him it was personal. It was not a stick figure that he loved. It was a person that he loved and who saved his life.

It is this level of love that God wants us to shoot for. It is this level of love that produces the abundant joy, the fruit that God wants us to have in our lives.

In John 8:29, Jesus said, "I always do that which pleases My Father." I am amazed at that. He *always* did it. He was so close to God He always knew what His Father was thinking, because He thought the same way. Like I said before, I do not expect any of us to reach that pinnacle, but it is what we need to strive for.

That is all well and good. Now let us apply it to those people who are floating around. I told you before that I think that this is where their problem lies. They are unsettled because they have not focused on the most important thing in their life. They have not settled on the most important relationship in their life, and as a result they are restless. They are going from one place to another, seeking the answers for something and not even realizing that the problem is in themselves. It is contained within the relationship with the Father and the Son.

Again, remember that Jesus did not say anywhere in Revelation 2 or 3, "Go to that other congregation, and there you will find happiness." He said, "Repent," whether they were in Ephesus, or whether they were in Thyatira, where they had all kinds of problems, even doctrinal problems.

I can understand somebody wanting to flee doctrinal problems. God has given that option to us, so there is a good side to this floating, but eventually it has to stop because I think God has also provided groups which are steady and stable, and they have virtually everything right. The people are imperfect, that is to be sure. But it does not mean that their group is not part of the Church of God. They are our brethren, and we should love them. But simply to leave one group and go to that other group is not the real solution to the problem.

As I mentioned to you before, these people almost always leave, complaining about the ministry or the people within the congregation. In other words, it becomes their justification for leaving. The people were not friendly. They were cliquish. The minister was, whatever. You get the point.

So what did they do in making these justifications and going off? This again has to tie in with my Feast of Trumpets sermon, because when I began that sermon I started in Matthew 24 on purpose. The last parable in Matthew 24 has to do with things we need to be concerned about as we approach the end, and that parable is about relationships within the congregation.

"In the days of Noah." He warns, there, that these people ought not to be smiting one another. They are not to smite their fellow-laborers. Paul used that word "fellow-laborers" in II Corinthians 6:1. "We are fellow-laborers together." We do not want to smite one another. Is there any real difference between smiting somebody with a stick and smiting somebody with a tongue, running them down with gossip, when our judgment is only going to be partially right? But even if it is right, should we be doing this? No. We should not be doing this.

Now what is the key to their problem? This is what most of this sermon has been about. The key to solving their problem lies in *their* own relationship with Jesus Christ.

Does not God give us plenty of opportunity to understand that His people ought to be able to live, we will just say, pure lives, seamlessly in a relationship with Him regardless of where they are? The environment may be bad, but that does not give us an excuse for being bad within it.

Now when they smite their brethren, who is it that they are smiting? They are smiting the One who hugged them to His breast. I will give you the scriptural truth on that. In Ephesians 1, right at the end

of the chapter, verses 21 through 23, Paul says that we are part of His body. So, if somebody smites the body of Jesus Christ—the body of which He is Head—they are smiting Christ's body. It is the same as smiting Him. It is no wonder He says they are going to be cut in two and there is going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**Ephesians 1:21-23** ...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all things to the church, **which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

I will give you another one. It is in Ephesians 2. At the end of the chapter Paul said that we are all part of a building—a holy temple. We are bricks and stones and mortar, and whatever. But again, you see, Christ is part of that same body.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

I will give you another one. This is really a killer, if you want to know.

**Matthew 25:40** And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

That puts the final nail. So those people who leave one group and go to another and run the old group down are smiting Christ, and they are making it worse for themselves. If they want to go, the best thing to do is to just keep their mouth shut. At least they will not be smiting Christ in that regard. But the real solution is for them to get themselves straightened out in their relationship with Christ.