

Building The Wall (Part Two)

Hope

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My first sermon of this feast drew attention to the rising problem of immigration from Third World countries into the Israelitish countries ["The Handwriting Is on the Wall (2002)"]. In America there have been other times of massive immigration, but at those times the immigration was almost exclusively from Europe, and that immigration consisted of people who shared basically the same values of our culture, and were arguably of Israelitish stock.

This is not so today, because much of the immigration today is from cultures entirely different—ones that do not share the same values—and they are clearly what the Bible terms as "Gentiles." They are upsetting this culture and are dividing it. Even as they have already been into positions of great power in the Israelitish nation of South Africa, their rise to dominance in the rest of the Israelitish world has clearly begun.

It was this same principle that brought down the Worldwide Church of God. The Bible shows that there really are only two kinds of people, as God sees it. There are Israelites, and there are Gentiles. There are those who have made the covenant with God, and those who have not made the covenant with God; or there are those who are converted, and those who are not. The term "Gentiles" represents those who are not converted. They are not Israelitish in that sense. These people kept coming into the church, and when a critical mass was reached, they took over much of its leadership, and they destroyed it. We today might call these people "tares" or "heretics." We may not call them Gentiles, but in principle that's exactly what they were. They were the unconverted.

Aiding and abetting the influence of the Gentile immigration has been an internal influence of a way of thinking promoted by the highly educated "do-gooders." And so my second sermon, titled "How Did We Get This Way?" [or, "The Enemy Within"] focused on the moral relativism of multi-

culturalism, moral equivalence, political correctness, and situation ethics. Vance Packard termed this group as a "secular religion," and he named these people "the New Establishment."

Now because their influence is so profound on the American public, these people are dictating standards of behavior for the Israelitish culture, and the slim foundation that the Israelitish nations had from the word of God is being pushed into the background. This teaching of the New Establishment is focused on pleasing the self. It is the self that determines the standards, based upon one's own feelings. It ultimately makes each person a god and introduces mass confusion into the social environment in which we live.

The third sermon was titled "Building the Wall," and God tells us that we must come out from among them and be separate. He tells us that we must flee from Babylon. We can't literally do this because Babylon is not in one location. It is all over the world. Where would we flee physically to escape this? The fleeing has to be spiritual, and we must live lives separated *spiritually* from the surrounding social environment. To do this we must build a spiritual wall between us and it, and indeed we must ourselves *become* a wall if we are to succeed in this way of life.

Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

This is a parallel of I Corinthians 10:11, where after recounting some of the experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness, Paul said:

I Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition upon whom the end of the ages are come.

I've chosen to begin this sermon with Romans 15:4 because it basically says that we can look at what has been recorded as happening in the past, giving us an indication of what is happening in the present, or may happen in the

future, and that these recordings will give us hope—hope, because God clearly reveals patterns of humans and His behavior in these recordings. I'm talking about what is recorded in the Old Testament.

Because of this we can have faith, and therefore hope, because we understand what is written there and how it applies to you and me. Because of these, we can also persevere. We can do this because we know that "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever," and so the sequence of events regarding Judah sinning, God warning them, God tearing down or removing the wall of His protection, allowing Babylon to conquer them, the Jews then being scattered into captivity, and then seventy years later released, returning to Jerusalem, rebuilding the Temple, then rebuilding the wall under Nehemiah. This is one of the patterns Paul is talking about in Romans 15:4 that is given for our instruction.

A wall symbolizes protection and separation at one and the same time. The building of a city wall required costly expenditure of money, time, and labor on the part of its citizens. We saw the paradox that though God and His angels are a wall of protection and separation for us, He also requires that we build a wall, and that we become a wall and stand in the gap, as He states there in Ezekiel 22.

I want you to turn with me back to Jeremiah 1:18. Jeremiah is given his commission in this chapter.

Jeremiah 1:18 For, behold, I have made you this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.

It's like Jeremiah was completely surrounded by **brasen** walls; not stone walls, but bronze ones against the whole land. And then He specifies what He means by "the land" which meant the kings, the princes, the priests, and the people. Here was Jeremiah standing virtually all by himself, and everybody was against him. Now maybe not every single person was against him, but when we look at it in the overall picture, it looked as though Jeremiah was standing all alone. Maybe against millions of people, for all you and I know.

All were his enemies, and he was being required by God to stand in the face of the assaults and all the chiding, and all the denigration that those people would do to his character, and eventually to his reputation. They would throw him in prison, put him in the slime, and treat him like he was dirt, refuse, that was just supposed to degenerate away. But God required that of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 1:17 You therefore gird up your loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command you: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound you before them.

God surely expected Jeremiah to do his part. "Gird up your loins." Do you know why that is the way it is written there? It's a battle cry! "Get ready for war!" is what God is saying. God was going to be Jeremiah's overall protection, and He would intervene no doubt in specific times, and He would inspire Jeremiah's words, but Jeremiah had to summon up the faith and the courage to stand up in the face of this. It is a parallel of what God tells you and me in Matthew 24: "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

In I Peter 1:13-16 we are told basically the same thing, only we're pointed in a little bit different direction.

I Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

"Girding up your loins" is specifically pointed to the mind. "Being sober" means we're not to be intoxicated with all kinds of mental and spiritual riff-raff. In other words, "Be focused in your thinking." Peter is directly speaking of personal discipline for the time in which we live.

Let's go back to Matthew 24 and look at that scripture a little bit more broadly as we review the kind of times in which we are called upon to live and act.

Matthew 24:4-5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.

I want you to think about what we're reading here, focusing on the time. What Jesus is saying here is "**end time**" specifically. In a general way, it's what's going to happen from the time He says it on up *into* our time, but it's specifically aimed at the times that you and I are living in.

Matthew 24:6-9 And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: [Isn't that one true!] see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes in different places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

That statement couldn't be true until the end time, until there were satellites, until there was television in order to broadcast things all over the world, and all nations could hate the people of God.

Matthew 24:10-11 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. [That's talking about you and me—those who have the truth.] And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

To the world they aren't false prophets. To you and me they are false prophets, because we know the truth.

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Iniquity has a force to it. It is persuasive. It puts pressure on us to conform to *it*. And unfortunately, we can conform, because that's the way human nature

wants to go. It hungers and thirsts to go in that direction, because there it's at home. It feels good doing iniquity.

Matthew 24:13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Now how do we build a wall, and become a wall, and thus stand in the gap in the face of the onslaught of iniquity in these perilous times? How is this accomplished? Well, there is nothing mysterious about how it is accomplished. It is accomplished in us in the same manner that Jeremiah became a wall. He became a wall by submitting to God's will for him. If he had not submitted, he would not ever have been a wall. There's nothing mysterious about that. He submitted to the will of God for him. In like manner, if the people of Jerusalem had not submitted to Nehemiah, no wall would have been built around Jerusalem.

Let's turn to another familiar scripture in John 17:17. In Jesus' prayer to God for you and me, He asks:

John 17:17 Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth.

It is obedience to truth that erects the wall and separates us from Satan and this world. The primary use of the word translated "sanctify" is to set apart, or to separate. That is the way it is used, but the root of that word is just a little bit different. The root of that word means "to cut out," and it indicates *difference*. That's why you "cut out," like a cowboy would cut out a calf away from a herd. You see, he is setting that calf apart as *different* from the others. Maybe all he wants to do is to brand it at this time, but it becomes different because it's cut out; therefore it is sanctified. That's all that word means. It means "different."

We look at one another and we see in our faces that we are different; therefore we are sanctified from one another. We are set apart because we look different. Apply this to Christianity. We are saints. We are set apart by the very fact that we conduct our lives and have different attitudes from everybody else around. Our perspective is godly. It is not worldly. Our attitude is spiritual. It is not carnal. Our conduct is moral, not immoral.

While the rest of the world goes running with the herd, we have been **cut out** , because we have chosen to believe in, and then to obey the truth of God, and those acts set us apart. They sanctify us. That is what Jeremiah did. He obeyed God's will for him, and he became **set apart** . This is what **made** him a wall.

Now the word **holy** comes from exactly the same root as *sanctify*. The only thing is that the word "holy" carries with it is an additional bit of information, because it indicates **CLEAN** . It indicates "set apart and **clean** ," meaning, like God. It means *set apart and undefiled; set apart, and not filthy; set apart, and ready and willing and doing the will of God.*

What Jesus is saying here is a basic principle. This is what causes us to be holy, and the holiness that is produced **is the WALL** that stands between us and them. It **is** the wall, as we will see a little bit further on in the sermon.

We're going to go now to Ecclesiastes 9:10 to pick up a verse you are familiar with.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither you go.

Solomon is saying, "Do all you can right now, because eventually it's going to end." The Apostle Paul's play on this was to say, "Redeem the time, for the days are evil." "Make the best use of." "Don't let things slide by." "Be girded up." We're seeing all kinds of ways of approaching the same thing. Little bit different words, but all essentially meaning the same thing, that we only have so much time and we have to make the very best possible use of it.

So applying what Solomon is saying here: the zealous determination in which we obey determines how much of our wall is going to be built. If we merely believe, no barrier is built.

Nehemiah 4:6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

The wall was built because the people worked. The same principle applies to us. If you follow the string of my thinking, from the time of John 17:17, and you go to Solomon, to the reference I made to what Paul said, and then apply it to the major subject here about building the wall, the same principle applies to us. Our wall will be built because we work, and it is a spiritual work. The major difference is that we aren't building a stone wall, but a spiritual wall, and our labor is spiritual. But the labor is nonetheless costly. It has already cost the life of Jesus Christ, and it requires our lives as well.

What I am saying here about building a wall is a matter of developing our relationship with God through learning more of God's truth, and of course prayer, overcoming sin, and resisting the influences of the world. It is a matter of growth in love, in making practical godly use of love in our relationships with each other, in our families and on our jobs. It is being patient, honest, and humble. It is being kind, thoughtful, caring, concerned, sacrificing, generous of spirit, bearing one another's burden, encouraging, forgiving, and not holding grudges. It is a brick-by-brick, stone-by-stone process of overcoming human nature's self-centeredness. It is a matter of letting the world see the witness of our lives in everyday matters.

I want you to go to the New Testament once again to I Peter 4:1.

I Peter 4:1 Forasmuch then, as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Notice the word "arm" in I Peter 4:1. That is another battle term. You will see battle terms all through this sermon from time to time. It was just like God said to Jeremiah. That was a battle cry by a general telling his troops, "Gird up yourself and get ready!" Here's Peter saying the same thing. We're in a war! There are beings out there who are manipulating human beings, and they want to destroy us because they know we are the heirs of what now they possess and rule.

I Peter 4:1 Forasmuch then, as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. [That is he who is paying the price for overcoming the sins of the flesh stopped sinning.]

I Peter 4:2-3 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. [This builds the wall.] For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles [the unconverted], when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.

We can see here a list of things that have to be overcome. It's the junk that stands in the way of building the wall.

I Peter 4:4-5 Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

Now did the people in Nehemiah's day think it was *strange* what the Jews were doing, and dangerous to them who were on the outside of the wall? Yes they did. Did they chide them, and persecute them as they were building the wall? Of course they did. With you and me it's the same thing. The same principle is at work, except that they cannot literally *see* a wall being erected, but they do notice the *difference* between you and them, and you are being separated from them. You see, because "the carnal mind is enmity against God," we become an enemy simply because we are obeying God. The carnality in them rises up to persecute us.

I Peter 2:11-12 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles [the unconverted]: that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Again Peter adds that people will not understand until the time when they are called, and then they will know. But in the meanwhile they will notice that you are separate, you are different from what every body else is doing, and that the attitudes you display are different. You can expect that in some way, in some manner, to some degree, they will resist you.

The people in Nehemiah's time were building a wall under some pretty intense conditions. Now can a wall be built sitting down? In preparing this sermon I could not think of any construction activity shown in the Bible in which the builders were sitting down. It is something that someone must do on one's feet—standing and actively moving about. The idea is activity. The idea, you see, is being ready—being ready to build.

Now "standing" is one of the most frequently used metaphors in the Bible. According to *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, "to stand" and all of its cognates, like the word "stood," are used over 600 times in the Bible. Most of them simply indicate location, such as "the city stood on the hill," or "the Temple stands in Jerusalem." But many times it is used to indicate a character quality as being present at a given place. Most frequently it indicates an attitude of worship when it is used in this manner. Go to Psalms 122:2 to see a very brief mention of it here.

Psalms 122:2 Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem.

What it is indicating there is the anticipation of something good. They were looking forward to standing in the place that is in the city that was the home, as they were looking at it, of God Almighty, who was residing in its Temple.

Nehemiah 8:1-5 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day, of the seventh month [which was the Feast of Trumpets]. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand: and the ears of all the people were attentive

unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose: and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaijah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, **all the people stood up.**

This is one of the most moving moments in all of the Bible, and it was moving because of the *reverence* and *respect* that these people had for God at that time. All Ezra had to do was open the book! Oh to God, that we had that kind of respect for **Him** , because that's really what it was for. They were so moved by the fact that the word of God was being restored to them, and that they were now privileged to hear it. It was something that they were not privileged to hear in that kind of a context for 70 years and more. Actually by this time it was almost 100 years. So they stood up and listened to what Ezra had to say out of it. It shows then the deep respect and reverence for God Himself.

Brethren, we Americans treat God so casually. Even in His services we treat Him casually, and we are very careless in paying attention to Him. Sometimes we think we can't even go through a whole service without a cup of coffee.

Maybe this doesn't belong in this sermon, but I'll tell you that when I was going to school, if you so much as chewed gum in class, you were probably at least made to stand up, walk to the waste basket and toss it inside before all of your peers, and be embarrassed. If you were in a parochial school, like a Catholic school, it is very likely that the nun came back and wrapped you on the knuckles with a ruler because you were chewing gum. Now what was that done for? It was disrespectful to the teacher and her office.

Now compare that to our attitude toward God. We have a lot of growing to do in *seeing* God, if you understand what I mean. He is the **awesome** God, the **Great** God, and He wants our respect, because it's good for us.

I want to continue this a little bit more with "standing." Actually it's a major part of the remainder of the sermon. We're going to go to II Samuel 2:25. I just want to pick up the principle here of what is said. The circumstances were that the Jews were chasing after a group of Benjamites because Abner was among them.

II Samuel 2:25 And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of a hill.

Warfare was going on again, and the Benjamites (one of the tribes of the northern ten) took their stand on the top of a hill. What this is saying is, "We are going no further backward. We stand right here!" It of course led to the settlement of the disagreement here, because the Benjamites took a stand and quit running. Another way then was found to work out the difficulties. Well brethren, there are times when we have to take a stand and guard the truth, as Paul admonished Timothy a number of times.

This is interesting. Paul was a Benjamite, and it says about Benjamin that "Benjamin shall raven as a wolf." It seems as though there was a spirit of warfare, a bit of wildness in them as pictured by the wolf, almost as if very difficult to tame, to domesticate.

Let's continue this theme (of standing, or stand) with the following scriptures Paul wrote.

II Corinthians 1:23-24 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith **you stand**.

Romans 11:20 Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and **you stand** by faith.

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be as it becomes the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that **you stand** fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for; my joy and crown, so **stand fast** in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

II Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, **stand fast**, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

These are just a few actually of many similar verses. They do not in any way indicate that one has been retreating. There may be some elements of this within the context, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they were retreating like the Benjamites were. But I think on the other hand, that in our meditating on these things, and in our meditating on our own life in regard to the circumstances in which Paul said to "stand fast," we need to think about whether or not **we** have been retreating before the enemy, and maybe like the Benjamites there comes a time when we've got to stand and we say, "No further! I will not let the world, I will not let the demons determine whether I am going to lose. I'm going to win (through Jesus Christ, of course), and here I stand!"

They don't really indicate one has been laboring or retreating, but we must see them as calls to commitment, to be firm, to be unwavering, persevering and dedicated, and courageous. They are calls for us to go forward from this time forth. These are calls for people to stand in their own personal gap.

We all need to examine ourselves where we are retreating. Are we drinking too much? Where are we using justifications that give us excuses and reasons for why we do certain things, or fail to do certain things? You know, or you should know, what they are in your personal life. There are times we have to draw a line in the sand behind it, and we don't say, "I'm going to be pushed backwards over that." No. "Here I stand! I will not allow myself to be pushed backward any further. I'm going to take control of my life." That

is what God wants us to do. He wants us to control our lives by and through His strength and power, and to stand and make whatever sacrifice, to deny ourselves what it takes to make that stand.

The people in Nehemiah's day, while aggressively building the wall around Jerusalem, had to be ready at a moment's notice to rise and defend their position for their own lives, and for the lives of their families. Remember, Nehemiah positioned those people where they were building right in front of their families' homes.

Not only that, the guy who had the trumpet was standing beside Nehemiah, wherever Nehemiah happened to be on the wall, and if there happened to be a call go out that the wall was being attacked there and a breakthrough was occurring, everybody had to be ready to rush to the defense as soon as the trumpet sounded. So those people went forward under their leader Nehemiah (who was a type of Christ), standing and working at the wall which was separating them from the world, and was at the same time, as it rose to its permanent height, providing them individually, and the Temple (a type of the church) with evermore protection.

All the while, they were ever on guard and ready to defend whatever they had built. It is in this manner that we become a wall, and that we will be ready and willing to stand in the gap in the defense of the Church of God, and its brethren, and the name of God.

Let's go back to the book of Exodus, chapter 32—the "golden calf chapter." We're going to look at this after Moses had come down from the mount.

Exodus 32:25-28 And when Moses saw that the people were naked: (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies;) [In the Bible, nakedness means they had no spiritual clothes on. Everything was open to the gaze of everybody else.] Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp [It's like he was standing in the gap, as if anybody who tried to escape had to come past him.], and said, Who is on the LORD's side? Let him come unto me. [It's the same as saying, "Take your stand beside me."] And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Put every man

his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.

Now Aaron, who should have been the one who stood in the gap, and who should have been a wall so that calf was never built, fell short that time in Moses' absence, and so Moses called on anybody—volunteers—to stand in the gap and do the dirty work in the face of this sin. This is one of the Levites' finer moments. They rose to the occasion, and they did the dirty work. This is what I mean about standing sometimes in the gap, that it is hard, and requires sacrifice. I don't think it was easy for them to execute their fellow Israelites, but executioners they were, and it was dirty work.

Numbers 16:43-48 And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation: and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And **he stood between the dead and the living**: and the plague was stayed.

This time Aaron redeemed himself, and he rose to the occasion. He stood in the gap, and he became a wall of protection for the great bulk of the people at that time.

Let's go back to the New Testament once again, to Ephesians 6:10. Here comes the "warrior call" once again.

Ephesians 6:10-17 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that

you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all to stand. [Do you see any sense at all of retreat here?] Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness: And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

That is pretty all-encompassing! All those things form the foundation of our resolve, our commitment. These are the things that enable us to stand. These are the things that enable us to fight. These are the things that enable us to overcome, to conquer, and grow, brick by brick, stone by stone, putting them all together with mortar that will really hang together.

I mentioned one time Paul teaching Timothy about certain things. Timothy was a minister and was responsible for a congregation of people. He was a man who happened apparently to be hindered somewhat by timidity. I don't know what all the causes were. There is enough in Paul's writings to Timothy to give the indication that Timothy was a fine young man who was strong in many areas, but for whatever it was, he was somewhat timid about pushing himself forward and taking the responsibilities of his office. And so Paul says to him:

II Timothy 2:3-4 You [Timothy] therefore endure hardness [austerity, difficult times], as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars [Are you making war? Yes you are!] entangles himself with the affairs of this life; [He's talking about the environment, the spiritual environment that is around us that we find ourselves in.] that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier.

In other words, a soldier is dedicated to that One who has drafted him, called him into His service, is paying his way, is supplying his needs, giving him

food, clothing, shelter, ammunition, or whatever it takes to fight the battle. We can examine ourselves, think, meditate, because we find ourselves really in this same position whether we're a minister or not, because in this metaphor we have been called to be soldiers. So He's saying, "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war!"

Now there is a section of scripture that I think we can learn some of the pitfalls that may befall us from time to time. We're going to go back to the book of Judges, chapter 7, and to the occasion of God's calling of Gideon to rise and defend the Israelitish people, and the name of God, and the worship of God. In Judges 7, we are beyond Gideon's actual calling and his proving of God.

Judges 7:1-7 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod [which means "trembling"]: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. [Incidentally there were 135,000 arrayed against them.] And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, My own hand has saved me. [That is, they would take pride in their victory.] Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand: and there remained ten thousand. And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down into the water, and I will try them for you there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto you, This shall go with you, the same shall go with you; and of whomsoever I say unto you, This shall not go with you, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that laps of the water with his tongue as a dog laps, him shall you set by himself; likewise everyone that bows down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites

into your hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

The reason I mentioned to you about Harod being "the well of trembling," is because it's another one of these somewhat humorous occasions in the Bible. It's hidden from you and me, but to a Hebrew-speaking person it would not have been hidden from him. It perfectly pictures the mind-set of the Israelites in that circumstance. It says really that the well was a trembling well. That's the way the Israelites were, facing these people across the valley, because ***they were frightened! They were trembling!***

All too often, brethren, our minds, our eyes are focused on the seeming size of the difficulty, the immensity of it that we have to face, and we tremble before it because we feel it's far too big for us to overcome. But God was going to teach them a lesson, and God is going to teach you and me a lesson because God wants to show us that with Him numbers don't matter at all. They are insignificant. They mean nothing to Him, as one man with God is a whole army! If we would read the entire story here, you would find that those 300 men who went with Gideon never even had to lift their swords out of their sheaths, because the invaders killed each other. How's that for winning a battle!

Of the first group of people (the twenty-two thousand that left at first, that brought them down to ten thousand), it says that they were fearful. That was their weakness. Are you ever fearful before your problem? Are you already planning your justification before you even need it? Now I think these people were. So what Gideon did, at God's direction, was to follow a command that is given in the book of Deuteronomy.

This command is, that when you go into battle, the first thing you want to do is find out if there is anybody there who is fearful, and to let them go. There is a good psychological reason for that, because fear is contagious, and when people begin to run in retreat, then it makes everybody else fearful too, and so the timid will follow the ones who are retreating. So God said "Excuse them." "Let them go." The people went without shame, because God would allow it, but it does show their weakness.

Of the second group, God does not tell us any specific characteristic that He had in mind regarding those who lapped like a dog as compared to those who laid down on the belly and maybe sucked the water out of the stream, and so we are a little bit free to speculate here. There is I think a pretty fair speculation of what these people's weakness was. What you need here is maybe a little bit of background as to the location of the well of Harod.

On the north side was the Midianite army, and on the south side was the Israelite army. They were eyeing one another across this valley. They were separated by about five miles of distance. The well of Harod was right in the middle. In other words, in order to even get a drink of water out of that stream they had to advance half the distance in front of the enemy. When they got there, then most of the people did what? They lay down on their stomach and sucked the water right out of the stream.

Can you see what a position that would be in warfare? First of all, you are totally and completely vulnerable. Secondly, it is showing you that these people's only concern was to take care of their bodily need. They didn't care about their brethren, about protecting them. They didn't even care about protecting themselves. They just indulged themselves by taking the drink the way they did.

Those who lapped like a dog knelt down, but they were still on their feet, standing, reaching down into the stream with their hand, cupping a little bit of water, bringing it up to their mouth. In the meanwhile, they were alert to everything that was going on around them, and ready to fight. They took their stand! The others took care of themselves, unwilling to deny themselves, unwilling to look beyond and see the bigger picture of what was going on.

Let's look at what Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-25.

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, ...

Gideon could have said this. Where do you think these principles came from? They were to follow Gideon. "If any man will follow me," Gideon said. Now here Christ is saying this, because we're going into battle.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man 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: and whosoever will lose his life for *my* sake shall find it.

That is a pretty plain and clear picture.

We're going to go to Romans 1:16 as we begin to bring this to a close.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Our preparation consists in building the wall of separation, and the wall that separates us is holiness. The foundation for all of this is found within the gospel. Now is our time to get prepared. The good news, if believed, is so powerful in its motivation that it can carry a person all the way through the grave and into the kingdom of God. I know that you believe this, or you wouldn't be here, but what are you doing about it?

Remember this always, that it is faith in the gospel that is the driving force. Are you allowing your daily life to be overcome by inertia—an inertia that is induced by this world or human nature? Inertia is that property, state, or condition of continuing either in a straight line, or at rest. The strength of the use of the word "inertia" is in its sense of continuing, or remaining.

But you see, God has called upon us to change the direction of our life, because otherwise it goes into the grave, and there it is. He's called upon us to always look beyond the immediate, to change the quality of life; otherwise we become fodder for the ills we see so clearly in the news that we hear each and every day.

This is what those religious-sounding words like "repentance" and "conversion" indicate. Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart in relation to God, and life in general. Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish." It is repentance that precedes and precipitates conversion.

Now conversion is to change in form, character, or function. Conversion is an adaptation or transformation into something different. Holiness *is* different. It is different as God is different, and God is calling upon us to change our attitudes and conduct into those that are in the image of His Son.

Let's go back to a scripture that I used earlier in the Feast.

Ezekiel 33:10 Therefore O you son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus you speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

These are the kind of times that can make a person pine away because they are so wearying. They are so intense in the kind of pressure that they are putting on us just meeting the needs of everyday life, and hearing bad news all the time. Something has to counter that and give us hope. It's the good news of the world tomorrow. It's the good news of the Kingdom of God. It's the good news about the way of salvation. And so God says, "How should we then live?"

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, **AS I LIVE!** says the Lord God.

Does this give you any understanding of why Jesus said in that prayer in John 17, that eternal life ***IS to know God*** . And when you know God, you know the way He lives. He of course wants us to conform to the way ***He*** lives. When we are conformed to the way He lives, to His satisfaction, creating in us the image of His Son, then we will be ready, prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways: for why will you die, O house of Israel?

As we finish, I want us to turn again to II Corinthians 6:11. Brethren, it is the gospel that gives us reason—explanation of details that fills in all the gaps in our minds and arms us with the kind of instruction, knowledge, understanding, hope, faith, confidence, and trust that we need to grow, overcome, and endure.

II Corinthians 6:11-18 O you Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. You are not straitened [or constrained] in us, but you are straitened in your own bowels. [Paul is saying, "The problem is in you."] Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children—[as father to son]) be you also enlarged. Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God: as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

II Corinthians 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves [There's our part. There's God's will for us. Jeremiah had his job, we have our job, and our job is to cleanse ourselves. What from?] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, [aimed in what direction?] perfecting *holiness* ...

That's what God is. He is **HOLY** . And so this paradox exists. God makes us holy, but that holiness that He gives to us at the beginning of our conversion is only a legal state that we are put in, because the righteousness of Christ is applied to us. It's real, but it is not yet part of our **character** . This is why we have to **become** holy. Holiness must be perfected. It must be completed. What is started by God through Jesus Christ is then completed by us in our lives, using the power of the Holy Spirit administered by Jesus Christ to you and me as we repent, and as we yield to His ministration to us, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We're going to go now to a series of verses. First to Revelation 21. You are going to see here that the Holy City (New Jerusalem) is coming from God down out of heaven—the wall is mentioned five times! In Isaiah 60 or 61, God even says "Those wall are salvation."

Revelation 21:10-12 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal: And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.

Revelation 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations.

Revelation 21:17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits.

Revelation 21:18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper.

Revelation 21:19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.

Revelation 21:24-27 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it [that is, the city]: and the kings of the

earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it [inside the walls] anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

We have to become a wall. We are a wall. Holiness is the wall. Holiness surrounds Jerusalem, and all those who will be in it will be holy.