

The Feast Brings Hope

The Antidote to the Pernicious Culture Wars

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As I was starting to prepare for the Feast this year, I took some time to think back on our first few Feasts. We started attending the Worldwide Church of God in August of 1966, and the Feast that year was in Long Beach, California. I remembered that I was awed by what I heard. A future was presented to me that I had never imagined. In fact, in my prayers as I was preparing this message, I thanked God for inspiring all of those early ministers.

Several years later, we had the Feast again in Long Beach, which, by the way, is the worst place ever to hold a Feast. The auditorium is at the edge of the business district, and the boardwalk is almost adjacent to the auditorium. Again, we had wonderful messages, and one could feel the Spirit of God covering the arena. I was on the sound crew on the Last Great Day, and as we were starting to shut down after services the world again started to move into the arena in the form of a hot rod show with all the noise that goes with it. I remember I wanted to shout, "Get this stuff out of here!" I did not want the moment to go away.

I hope that we appreciate that the Feast is God's way of giving us hope, year after year, as we continue to live in this world around us. I do not think that I talked to anyone this year that did not have problems. We have three members that were greatly affected by Katrina and perhaps others by Rita. Though the majority were not hit by the hurricanes, we were all subject to the pressures of this world in which we live.

I would like to quote from *The Berean* of August 27, 2005, in which Paul was stating that the Hebrews were neglecting their salvation. John Ritenbaugh commented that Jesus anticipated this by His comments in Matthew 24:42, where He said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." John continued by stating that Jesus really understood human nature, and then he asked:

Do you want to know what it is that causes people to go to sleep spiritually, so that you can be aware? It is not a hard principle to understand. It is in having to face so many difficulties, so many pressures, that one becomes weary with facing them. This is a simplification, but it is true. When people have to face so many stresses, they become apathetic and say, "What is the use?" We need to stir ourselves up and recognize that this can happen to any one of us.

Have we been under stress this year? The answer is, Yes; we have. It has been stated that we are required to make more decisions in one week than our forefathers made in one year. I think that is exactly true, with marketing, computers, technology, traffic, taxes. I am getting discouraged just announcing all of this.

The pressure under which we are is certainly more than the solving of a particular problem. That, of course, is important; but it is the pressure of the Babylonian society around us, a society that conflicts with the laws of God, that wears on us.

Daniel 7:25 He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.

I was born January 19, 1930, in San Francisco and raised in Oakland across the bay. I was raised in the tail end of the Depression; and believe it or not, life seemed pretty simple. We never had an automobile until I bought the first one when I returned from service in Korea, about 1953. Everybody on the block was pretty much in the same boat. We walked to movies, took the wagon to the grocery store, used streetcars or buses if we had to go distances.

In my early childhood, I do not recall hearing of any child being molested, though I am sure it did happen. Children would stay outside and play until the sun went down. There were no magazines such as *Playboy*; and when I was age twelve, we heard about one girl getting pregnant in all of Oakland, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Hayward, and Berkeley, California. We were stunned. How could this have happened? It was just unheard of.

When people traveled to town, which was about fifteen blocks away, on the streetcar, they dressed up. I can remember that everyone closed down on Sundays until about 1940. Department stores were shut; there were one grocery store and one drug store open; and movies opened for an afternoon matinee. Los Angeles would go broke if they shut down on Sundays nowadays. One could tell it was Sunday when they awoke, because of the silence. There was hardly any traffic; and people went to parks, had picnics, sat on the porch, talked with each other. It was neat.

We all knew and were taught by society that a young couple was not to have marital relations until after they were married. I do not know whether you have caught the latest statistics, but the number of couples living together has now passed that of married couples. We knew, as well, that marriage was between a man and a woman, but times have changed. I even heard the other day that couples that comprise a man and a woman are now being referred to as "non-same-sex partners." This all puts pressure on us, because the world that you knew, the world that you expected to be normal is going away.

Early in the month of September this year, in California, the assembly passed legislation authorizing homosexual marriages. The governor vetoed the bill, because somewhere in the neighborhood of 63 percent of the voters had voted against it earlier; but the assembly still authorized it. However, even though it was against the law, earlier in the year the mayor of San Francisco was issuing marriage licenses to as many homosexual couples as wished to marry, and he was doing it against the state law with seeming impunity. You say, "Where is common sense?"

This year, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands have authorized same-sex marriages. To my old thinking, the question came to mind, "Cannot governments see that this is hurting the country?" Two people of the same sex cannot produce children; it is causing perversion; and it does not seem logical. Also, the commission of perverted acts between consenting adults has been held to be constitutionally legal and those that commit them held untouchable by law.

When the AIDS epidemic hit, the solution seemed simple to my 1930 thinking. To stop the epidemic, all we had to do was to quit having promiscuous sexual relations and quit taking narcotics and using infected needles. Of course, that did not happen.

We had *Roe v. Wade* that opened the way to mass abortions, which amounted to the killing of millions of babies a year—forty some million since 1974—and I understand forty-six million abortions now take place worldwide, every year. Then, when the facts came forth that the statistics of *Roe v. Wade* were wrong and that they had been rigged, logic seemed to indicate that the law would be changed—but, of course, that did not happen.

We are all concerned about the high cost of gasoline and what harm it will do economically. We have built a civilization based on oil. When that oil runs out, they have said that the least that would happen would be a 1930 Depression and the worst would be apocalyptic.

Personal debt today runs an unbelievable eleven trillion dollars, while savings for many is almost non-existent. The Chinese save forty percent of their income, while many in this country who are not involved in a company plan do not save any. Homes are mortgaged to the hilt, giving no room to pull out extra money in case of unexpected financial need. Some are even mortgaged to 125 percent of their value. This is just foolishness!

We have seen the Ten Commandments removed from public facilities. We have seen ministers persecuted in Canada for reading certain passages from the bible.

I will not go into gangs, murders, and the increase in serious illnesses, but I will mention freeway shootings: There have been twenty-eight since March, and six very close to our home. Then there are the war in Iraq, the conflict in the Middle East, and Iran and North Korea trying to obtain nuclear materials for weapons. We have pornography, which is reflected in humor, entertainment, dress, and is available throughout the nation, and also sets the moral standards of much of the world today.

I would like to conclude this portion with the family. II Timothy 3 and Isaiah 3 state that the children will be disobedient to parents and will rule over them. It could be, of course, because of so many one-parent homes in the United States, which I think, have now passed homes with two parents. It is not my purpose to list divorce statistics but to point out that in many homes, parents do not teach, control, or supervise their children. In some cases, it is because both parents have to work to make ends meet. However, in many cases, the parents want to have the "good life." They do not want to be bothered with childrearing. The schools will take care of that. I am sure that divorce contributes to this problem, as well, or that live-in partners just do not have full authority and do not rule the children either.

I think that we all know that dress reflects attitude. I would like to read you a sad but humorous email I received, written from the perspective of a grandmother.

I just spent several hours observing teenagers hanging out at our local mall. I came to the conclusion that many teenagers in America today are living in poverty. Most young men I observed did not even own a belt; there was not one among the whole group. But that was not the sad part. Many were wearing their daddy's jeans. Some jeans were so big and baggy they hung low on their hips, exposing their underwear. I know they must have been ashamed their daddy was so short, because his jeans hardly went below their knees. They were not even daddy's good jeans, because most had holes ripped in the knees and had a dirty look to them.

It grieved me that in a modern, affluent society like America, there are people who cannot afford a decent pair of jeans. I was thinking about asking my church to start a

jeans drive for the poor kids at the mall. In the winter, we could stand in doorways and ring bells for donations to buy jeans.

But here is the saddest part: It was the girls they were hanging out with that disturbed me most. I never, in all my life, have seen such poverty-stricken girls. These girls had the opposite problem of the guys. They all had to wear their little sister's clothes. Their jeans were about five sizes too small! I do not know how they put them on, let alone button them up. Their jeans barely went over their hipbones. Most also had on their little sister's top, and it hardly covered their midsection.

Oh, they were trying to hold their head up with pride, but it was a sad sight to see these almost-grown women wearing children's clothes. However, it was their underwear that bothered me most. They, like the boys, because of the improper fitting of their clothes, had their underwear exposed. I never saw anything like it. It looked like their underwear was held together by a single string.

I know it saddens your heart to receive this report on the condition of our American teenagers. While I go to bed every night with a closet full of clothes nearby, there are millions of "mall girls" who barely have enough material to keep it together. I think their "poorness" is why these two groups gather at the mall: boys with their short daddy's ripped jeans, and girls wearing their younger sister's clothes. The mall is the one place that they can find acceptance. So, next time you are go to the mall, doing your shopping, and you pass by some of these poor teenagers, would you please say a prayer for them?

I thank you all,

Grandmother

I know that this was written in a humorous way, but the dress, the reason behind the dress, and attitude that accompanies the dress, gives us a sad picture of the millions of children who meet, at ages twelve and up, to drink, smoke, and become involved in sex, while their parents just do not seem to care. This reflects the country and what is going on. Am I saying that all who dress this way are bad kids? No, I am not.

Brethren, all of this and much more invades our thinking daily, consciously or subconsciously, giving us a picture of great trouble in this nation. It is what is produced in our thinking that does the damage. It produces what was written in the *Berean*. It causes us to have to face difficulties and pressures that are not being solved. There are problems that we cannot solve, and thus we can easily become subconsciously weary, facing them day after day. That weariness can cause us to let down, in the attitude of "what is the use?"

Why is the Feast important? It is important because it gives us a picture of a world that is going to be far different for all of mankind and a world that is going to be far different for each one of us. This Feast of Tabernacles pictures the wonderful change that is about to break forth upon this world. I would like to give you a glimpse of who you are, the future held in trust for you, the reason that we have been wonderfully called, and the event that is going to put this all in motion.

Zechariah 14:1-19 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the

city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The LORD is one," and His name one. All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king's winepresses. The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited. And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbor's hand; Judah also will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together: Gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance. Such also shall be the plague on the horse and the mule, on the camel and the donkey, and on all the cattle that will be in those camps. So shall this plague be. And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

What are the main points listed here?

1. The Day of the Lord will finally come.
2. He will go forth and fight the nations ruling over all.
3. In that day, He will make a way for His people to flee and living waters will go forth toward the Dead Sea in the east and to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. He will start to heal the waters and bring new life forth for the whole world.
4. The land will be turned into a plain for the planting of crops.
5. Men shall safely dwell there and there shall be no more utter destruction.
6. The plague that strikes the opposing armies and their animals will cause their skin to consume off their bodies while they stand.

7. There will be survivors from all nations who came up against Jerusalem, and they will be commanded to do what you are doing today: to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

This will not happen instantly; but the healing of the earth and of those so damaged, teaching, and change will begin to spread around the world. In our early Feasts, the descriptions of the "World Tomorrow" seemed so exciting. Talk of having one's own land sounded wonderful. I think that most of us did not have much of the world's goods at that time; and the thought of living in prosperity, having our own farms, and living in a peaceful village was wonderful.

I think, in reality, what we all wanted was peace from all of the problems. We wanted a respite from all the pressure that was on us. We wanted quiet and safety. We wanted what it says in Micah 4:4: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." I have to admit that it sounds pretty good today, as well. However, I hope today that though this will eventually be the environment for those coming through the tribulation, it will not be the environment for us. I hope that we really realize this.

I Corinthians 2:9-11 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

I hope that you really appreciate the fact that the veil has been lifted for you, out of all the people of the world. Those of us who have been in the church for thirty or forty years can sometimes wear out and say, "Well, what is so big about this?" What is so big about it is that you have been given the mind of God and you can see what He is doing when, to the rest of this world, it does not mean a thing.

I Corinthians 2:12-16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

You have been taught by God. I really hope that we appreciate that. Just as Christ called His disciples His friends, we are His friends as well.

What has God prepared for us?

Psalms 17:13-15 Arise, O LORD, confront him, cast him down; deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O LORD, from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure.

They are satisfied with children, and leave the rest of their possession for their babes. As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

What amazes me about this is that the commentators can make some pretty astute comments but still not get it. David is stating that, in contrast with those in the world around him that seek worldly things, he will be satisfied with the world that God has in store for him. He said, "With all of the trials and all of the problems, I am looking toward Your world." He will see the face of God, the One to whom he has been praying all his life, and he will be righteous, at last freed from the power of sin. He says, "I will be satisfied when I awake in your physical and moral likeness." David saw past the world in which he struggled. He had his eyes on the Kingdom of God.

Just what is this likeness of which David talked?

Revelation 1:10-16 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

When I was writing this sermon, I could not help but think, "What would this room be like if all of you had a face like that, and we just shone like the sun?" This is what David was looking for.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We are already considered by God to be members of His Family, and He can consider us so because He is the perfect Father and knows how to raise each of us to the potential He sees in each one of us. Albert Barnes comments,

There is enough here to animate us with hope and to sustain us in the trials of life. There is one thing that is clear, that we shall be like the Son of God, but what is fully involved in this is not made known. Perhaps:

It could not be so revealed that we could understand it, for that state may be so unlike the present, no words would fully convey the conception to our minds.

It may be necessary to our condition here, that no more light should be furnished in regard to the future than to stimulate us to make efforts to reach a world where all will be light. But it is clear that we shall be changed or raised from the grave in His likeness and character.

II Corinthians 3:14-17 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Before you were called, you had the veil on you. I know that when I was growing up in the 30s, we knew that the Sabbath was on Saturday. We knew about the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel; that was common knowledge. Those that kept the Sabbath were Jews. Today, nobody knows anything, but even then it still did not mean a thing. The veil was over my eyes, and it was over your eyes, prior to being called. Now God has removed the veil, and how exciting that is!

II Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The word *transformed* in this verse is *Strong's* #3339, which literally means "formed or being transformed: A change of place or condition; to form. From the word *metamorphous* [or *metamorphosis*, as we would say today], the word is used to describe Jesus' transfiguration on the mount involving the miracle of the transformation from the earthly to a spiritual form. This suggests what the bodies of the righteous may be like as a result of the resurrection of our bodies." It does more than suggest; it is the truth. The idea of transformation refers to an invisible process in Christians that takes place, or begins to take place, during their lives in this age.

What is happening to all of us is that we are being transformed. We are being formed into a new individual, one that God can use. We are going through a metamorphosis. It may not feel like it, but we are. Through all of the pressures of this age and our personal problems, it is comforting to know that in this life, with all of its difficulties, you and I are being formed by God. This is why He called you. He is our Father, and He is perfect at it.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

I used to do a lot of fishing in the ocean, and on ocean reels is what is called a "star drag." A star drag is just like brakes. If you get a big fish and he starts to pull the line out and is going too fast, you turn the little star wheel to put the drag on him. He can go, but he cannot go as fast and far. You will reel him in and he will go out again, but the drag is always on him. It always draws him, whether he wants it to or not. That is how God has called us. Over a period of time, He drew us.

John 6:45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

God the Father is instrumental in your teaching, in your growth, in your care. He is watching you, and He is disciplining you. He is giving you trials and good things that you might grow into what He wants. He has taken each one of us and is working to perfect us for His purpose—not just externally but also internally.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

"For our citizenship": our *politeuma*. It means "politics," in a sense. Because of the government from heaven with its laws that we obey, we are already considered to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul is pointing out the fact there are two governments that want our allegiance: Satan's and God's. Because we strive to obey God and His laws, we are set apart in His sight for a wonderful future; and because of this we look for the return of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our humble body that is subject to weakness, illness, and death to a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. We, too, will be able to subdue all things. Why is God working so diligently with us?

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

We have been called now to be firstfruits, to be put to use, and to be put to work to accomplish so very much. For His purposes He willed us, or brought us forth, from the captivity of this world by opening our minds to the truth, that we might be the first of all of mankind to belong to His Family. We do not think that we are much, but that is a tremendous privilege that been given to us. We have been given this tremendous honor, and we should respond to it and value it to our very best ability. We must put the big rocks in our jar first. We must get those things done that we might glorify the One who has called us. Why has He called us and for what purpose?

Revelation 20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

This is your future, the future of those whom God calls and who stay with Him through this calling and honor it. Jesus said in John 14 that He would go and prepare a place, or office, for us. As Paul states in I Corinthians 6:2, we are called to judge the world and angels, a tremendous office.

This word *judge* has the connotation of managing as well as passing judgment. Thus, it would appear that these are our thrones, designed for us individually in the areas in which God has prepared for us to be involved. Those who fight to fulfill their calling will live in their new bodies and reign with Jesus Christ for a thousand years as kings and priests. This will take place on earth, as it states in Revelation 5:10. Though it may be difficult now, God wants us to have hope in our future and these special gifts that He has in store for each one of us.

What plan has God set forth for us to complete during this thousand years, represented by this Feast that we are keeping? The overall purpose, of course, is to make physical Israel the people God intended them to be. In Deuteronomy 5:29, God exclaimed, "Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep My commandments always that it might be well with them." He knew that Israel would not do it.

We are going to be the ones that see to it that they fear with awe and respect, that they learn and keep God's commandments, that after all this time—these thousands of years—that, indeed, it might be well with them. They will, at last, be the correct example for the entire world to follow. It is going to be wonderful.

God's people were always meant to be His example to the world of how to live, but they never truly fulfilled that role. Brethren, we have been called and are being trained, not just to change Israel, but to change the entire world. God called us as the weak and foolish of this world. Through the teaching of God the Father and Jesus Christ, we will be able to fill the positions needed to do what no other person, group, or government has been able to accomplish throughout all of history. We will really change the world.

We, working in coordination with God the Father, and our Elder Brother Jesus Christ, will bring to this world peace and obedience to God's law, in the letter and in the spirit. There will be brotherly love; prosperity; honesty; right morals; contented families; right, fair, honest, truly concerned leadership; true joy; happiness; and excitement in the life that God's people have been given. They will have freedom from living Satan's way of life. People will be truly thankful to their God.

Deuteronomy 4:1-3 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor."

They will be able to see the contrast from the way that God's law says to live and the results that disobeying that law produces.

Deuteronomy 4:4-6 "But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you. Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say..."

They are going to learn, at last, that the wisdom that they have to have is God's wisdom, as we heard earlier. This is what is going to produce happiness and joy.

Deuteronomy 4:7-9 "'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?"

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren."

Will this finally take place?

Isaiah 2:1-4 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

We are at peace now, and certainly other parts of the world are not. I do not think that we begin to see the scourge of war that has been on mankind since creation. I would have to say that billions of people have been slaughtered and killed and tortured. I gave a sermon, awhile back, on war; and I was astounded to find that in World War I, 7,450,000 were killed. At the conclusion of the sermon, I talked about the two-hundred-million-man army. If you want war, I will give you war.

When we discuss this, it always seems as if it will be accomplished quickly. After all, we will be spirit beings with unlimited powers to make things happen; Satan and his cohorts will be out of the way; and God's government will be in power. A good question to consider is this: Has it happened that way with us? Has God, with all His powers, caused us to become "instantly perfect"? No, He has not. What has God been doing with us, and continues doing with us, in this difficult and trying time?

Hebrews 5:1-3 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.

This is the process through which we are going:

Verse 1: The priest is ordained or set apart to serve the people in things pertaining to God. That is what you are going to be doing.

Verse 2: Because he is taken from men, he can sympathize with the struggles through which they go. For those coming out of the tribulation, he will understand the baggage they carry with them from this world ruled by Satan. Why do you think you are going through all of this? Not only will he be able to sympathize with them, but he will be able to help them with real understanding of that through which they are going. The physical high priest was always liable to err; he was subject to temptation; he knew he must die; and he knew he must answer to Jesus Christ. Thus, his compassion and understanding for those with whom he dealt had much empathy and mercy. This is the process, too, through which Jesus Christ went, though perfectly and without sinning.

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need..

They will be able to come to the throne and to pray, knowing that we understand and that we have gone through the same type of thing and it is not easy. Brethren, this is the process through which we are going and will continue to go until the return of Jesus Christ, that we might develop the love, compassion, and understanding for those with whom we will be dealing. Would that we could have gone through it without sinning, but then we would not realize the mistakes they make.

What will be our job description? You have to have a job description in this world. In Acts 26, the apostle Paul was giving an account to Agrippa, when he told him he was permitted to speak for himself. They had all been after Paul, trying to have him killed.

Acts 26:14-18 "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'"

Paul was to be made a witness of all things that he had seen and in things that Jesus Christ would inspire him to see to be able to help those he was serving. Paul would be delivered from the hatred of the Jews that he might bring salvation to the Gentiles. The job description was to instruct them in the truth, as opposed to the lies of this world. He was to turn them from the darkness, utter ignorance, and superstition of pagan teachings to light, from the power of Satan's influence over them unto the one true God. Why? That they, at last, may repent and receive the forgiveness of their sins and be able to grow that they might be admitted into the Family of God. That is the job description that each one of us has.

Based on this, what are the lessons we will need to learn and grow in, despite what is taking place around us? There are many, but I have just listed five:

1. To know God's law. How can we govern if we do not know God's law? If we are going to be kings and priests, we have to emulate what is given here:

Deuteronomy 17:13-20 "And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously. When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself,

nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

We are to keep the law. To judge righteously as a king or priest, we must understand the law, which is the mind of God. He had to have the same law that was before the priests and Levites.

Psalm 119:97-106 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments.

This can be paraphrased thus:

By teaching, I understand my responsibilities in this life. I am wiser than my enemies, not because of natural ability; but because You are the perfect instructor, and Your laws teach me. I have more understanding than my teachers and the ancients, because they just understood the things of men, but You teach the things of God. I have been blessed by walking the way of Your law, because I have avoided much of the world's ways; and because of obedience to Your law, I build Godly character.

Psalm 119:165 Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.

I know that when I am down or frantic, Bible study helps to calm me down.

II Timothy 2:15-16 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

I have had people read this and that, and I have told them that it would take them aside from the truth. I was told once, "You cannot tell me what to read." I said, "You are right, but it is my job to warn you." Adam Clarke says, "Endeavor so to cultivate and improve your heart and mind that you will not be a reproach to Him that commissioned you. Learning to rightly divide the truth is learning to cut straight; rightly and skillfully teaching the word of truth; being able to properly adapt God's word to the circumstances and needs of the people."

In short, learning to use God's word properly in the circumstances that you face is the same thing as going on to perfection. You may not know every scripture or every verse, but you will know principles. God wants you to be able to apply His word and use it. We must be showing love, kindness, and mercy.

2. To love God. Deuteronomy 11:13, 22; 13:3 and Joshua 22:5; 23:11 all state that we are to love God with our whole being and cleave to Him. Combined with what is written in the New Testament, in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27, we are told that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, might, and mind and to continually serve Him, walking in His ways and keeping His commandments. That means, certainly, to love your neighbor as yourself, including your wife or your husband and your children.

I John 4:10-11 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

That is a given. We are not to fight, not to be selfish and angry, but to love one another.

I John 4:12-17 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

If we are like God and have God's love, when we stand before Him, we will be thrilled and not worried so much.

I John 4:18-19 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

In spite of our not loving God, He did love us. He wanted us, and He sent His Son to be a sacrifice for our sins. Based on this example, as the two great commandments dictate, we should be extending our love to one another and our fellow man. If we do this, then God lives within us. Why? Because we reflect Him in the way that we live and conduct our lives. We all know that we dwell together because He has raised the veil, revealing Himself to us by the giving of His Holy Spirit.

Are we just to love God because He first loved us, or does God expect our love to be far deeper? He expects it to go far deeper. God expects us, through study and the application of God's laws in our lives, to reveal the excellence of God's character in us. As we are told in John 17:3, to know God—the way He thinks, the actions that He takes, the decisions that He makes, the mercy that He shows—is eternal life. As we see the perfection of all that He thinks and all that He does, it will build a depth in us of the true love of God. This will show that we truly appreciate our calling, thus preparing us for the future that God has in store for us. As we grow in this, we will be able to teach it, explain it, and encourage others with it.

3. In addition to knowing God's law and having love toward God, we must have the quality of forgiveness. This is a big one.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice

One who is called by God should not have bitterness of the Spirit, judging others in condemnation, because this causes much harm to the harmony in the home and in the church. We are not to have wrath that precedes wrong actions or anger that causes wrong words to be spoken, followed by wrong dealings; or evil speaking or blasphemy, that tends to hurt and possibly destroy those against whom they are spoken. We are not to have malice or continual hatred with the idea of revenge. That should not be in any of us. Sometimes you want to get even, but that is not right. We are to forgive one another as it states in Matthew 6:12, even as God has forgiven us for every offense for Christ's sake.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

We are to forgive one another, as God has forgiven us every offense for Christ's sake. God does not want a hollow forgiveness, but a true forgiveness. God insists upon it, as we can read in Matthew 18.

I am going to touch on something that I have touched on in the past. During WW II, though many may not remember, there were many concentration camps where terrible things were done to prisoners. Horrible, perverted atrocities were performed. Satan had a field day in producing hatred and in destroying God's people. Forgiveness is something that you and I will really have to understand. The guards and the camp leaders will no doubt quickly and deeply repent when they finally realize what they have done; but the Jews, Poles, and other prisoners that suffered may well have a very difficult time. They had their wives skinned alive and turned into lampshades or impregnated with twelve or more eggs to see what would happen. They saw their families gassed and burned in the ovens. They may find forgiving very difficult. This is not just World War II.

How can we teach forgiveness from the heart to those and the others that have been so mistreated unless we first understand and practice it ourselves? Again, I would heartily recommend you read all of Matthew 18, since this is a serious issue with God.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

In other words, you forgive forever.

Matthew 18:23-30 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on

him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

The man had forgotten that he had just been forgiven. He went right back to his old ways, his old nasty attitude.

Matthew 18: 31 "So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Forgiveness is from the heart; and that is what we have to learn, that we might teach it.

4. We must develop patience.

Romans 2:1-4 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Do we ignore the rich goodness of God and the restraint He exhibits in His slowness to anger? Do we, with our backgrounds, appreciate the restraint that He has shown toward us? When we were called, did we realize that we had deserved death for the life we had led? Instead, God has been patient and merciful with each of us. What did that produce in us? It produced gratitude, thankfulness, and love for His forbearance.

II Timothy 2:24-25 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

This is one of the attributes that we must develop.

5. Though there is much more that could be discussed, the final quality I would like to mention is overcoming or self-control. We have to know how difficult that is so that we can have patience, mercy, and love towards others.

Jesus Christ was tempted with great intensity, and far greater and far more often than we can imagine. His life did not include a life of sin, as did ours. He brought no wrong lifestyle into His position on earth. When we were called, we brought baggage and the way of life from twenty, forty, sixty years of living in a world ruled and influenced by Satan. With us, we have to fight not only the temptation the world sets in front of us, but we have to fight the wrong way of life that we lived in the past. Paul states,

Romans 7:22-24 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

He says that he is thankful that it is Jesus Christ.

Overcoming is demonstrated, as Mr. Armstrong stated, by the exhibiting of self-control and the building of godly character. Mr. Armstrong wrote:

Godly character is the attainment of the ability in a separate independent entity of free moral agency, to be able to discern right from wrong—the true values from the false—truth from error—the right way from the wrong, and then make the right choice or decision even against self-desire, impulse, or temptation; plus the will and self-discipline to resist the wrong and do the right.

That is what overcoming is all about.

It seems to be human nature to look down on one with a problem that we do not have. We see someone that is overweight, and we say to him, "Well, all that you have to do is stop eating." We see someone who drinks too much, and we tell him to just stay away from the alcohol. What is your problem? You are into pornography. Do not watch that stuff. There, that solves your problem. We do not realize what it is like, in many cases, with some of the things that people have to fight.

I had a man come to me once, in the Worldwide Church of God, and he asked me to anoint him. He came into the room and began to sob his heart out. I thought that he was dying. He said, "I cannot stop smoking." He had been struggling and struggling against this, and he just could not do it. He said, "Would you anoint me, please, that I could be able to quit smoking?" Overcoming is no small thing. It does seem to be human nature to just take other people's trials lightly.

Brethren, we can see why God insists that we as His firstfruits overcome. Could we ever rule with understanding and empathy if we did not understand the difficulty of working to control the self? The denying of oneself of the things that he or she desires is one of the most difficult areas of Christian growth. We fight against what this world features as an everyday way of living and what we have brought from the past: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

God has placed all of us in the church in this most difficult time to be taught how to govern and rule. He has placed us here for a much greater purpose than to be saved. The care that has been given to us is to prepare us to exercise the knowledge of God, the love of God, the patience of God, the forgiveness of God, and the self-control of God with those coming out of the tribulation and all through the millennium.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

You have already had some revealing today of the glory that is coming to you and what the brightness of your countenance would do to this room. It is just marvelous what God has in store.

Romans 8:19-25 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 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? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Brethren, that is what our job is to do. The entire creation waits for God to be formed in each of us. It will be God's people, called to be the firstfruits, who will set the character and standard of God throughout the entire world. This character will permeate every mind and will produce what has never been accomplished in this world since man was created. That is righteousness, peace, happiness, and much more.

Isaiah 61:1-3 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

Zion means the church as well as Mount Zion, given a crown for ashes, great joy instead of mourning, and praise of deep gratitude for heaviness of a spirit weighted down, and they would be called the trees of righteousness. You are the first planting of the Lord. The others that come out of your teaching and grooming will be a people distinguished for their righteousness, a people shown to have been God's planting, and a people who with their calling will glorify God.

This, brethren, is the hope that we are to have, and the future that we have to look forward to!

Satan understands that, indeed, the facing of the many difficulties that this world presents does cause us to become weary. However, as John has brought out, the facing and overcoming of these difficulties, with the hope we have been given, strengthens us. Let all of us not allow ourselves to become sidetracked, losing the hope that is set before us. Instead, really work to develop the characteristics of God now and to be look forward to receiving the awesome reward that is reserved for each one of us.