

God, The Church's Greatest Problem

Seeking God

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In I Peter 1, Peter shows that if we keep on growing, moving forward, we will never fall. What this means to me, in practical fact, is that standing still is not really an option (at least not for very long). This is because if we are not moving forward, we will most certainly be swept backward by the influence of the world.

This morning, this sermon is a continuation of the subject begun on the first night of the Feast of Tabernacles, but it carries the thought of our need to use in our calling within these perilous times to their best advantage further than I previously have, is that our relationship with the most powerful Being of all beings, the One to whom power belongs, is established through Jesus Christ. But where does one go from there in order that one does not slide into the same condition as the people spoken to in the book of Hebrews?

The answer is supplied by Isaiah and Amos in very clear declarations of the responsibility of anyone who has made the covenant with God. As you shall see in Amos, interestingly, this appears to be addressed particularly to those who are living in the family of Joseph, as we do.

But first we are going to go to Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

I want you to notice three words there: "seek him" (a command), and another command, "return." Now let us go forward to Amos 5.

Amos 5:1-6 Hear you this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel: The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise. She is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God: "The city that went out by a thousand shall be left a hundred, and that which went forth by a hundred shall be left ten to the house of Israel." For thus says the LORD unto the house of Israel: "Seek you Me, and you shall live; but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek the LORD, and you shall live; lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

Amos 5:8-9 Seek Him that makes the seven stars and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night, who calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is His name, who strengthened the despoiled against the strong, so that the despoiled shall come against the fortress.

Amos 5:14-15 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

The first thing I want you to notice is that there is something that is of considerable importance to church members. Both Isaiah and Amos address their counsel to people who had already made a covenant with God, and that is why Isaiah said, "Return," showing that they had made an agreement with God and they had left Him. "Return to Me," He is saying.

These people addressed by both Isaiah and Amos were in deep spiritual trouble, and this is a stern exhortation for them to get on the ball. Now, there is another, not readily apparent reason why this is written in the manner that it is. It is something that I feel is not often considered by church members

and it is this: Because seeking after God does not even begin until the covenant is made with God, and whether we realize it or not, seeking God is the main occupation for the Christian during the sanctification process.

These scriptures are that jumping-off place, and so I will give you a bit of an overview of what we just read in Amos. First of all, God warns how devastating the perilous times coming will be. This was in verses 1-3. Verse three is especially important to bring the somberness of what He said: God is going to tithe the population of Israel. Where one thousand formerly lived, only one hundred will remain when He is done, and so forth. So the devastation that is going to come is pretty great.

Then He turns the instructions to what it is we are supposed to do and that is to seek God. If we want to escape this, He says, "Seek me and live." That is pretty clear. That is where life is; it is in seeking God. Then, just in case one does not know who it is that we are supposed to seek, God makes clear in verses 8 and 9 who it is. We are to seek the Creator, the One who made the seven stars, the One that will strengthen as well.

I want to make it very clear that Amos is not saying to these people to seek God in order to find Him, because at the very least they had an acquaintance with Him, already having made the covenant with Him. But the fact that He charged them with seeking Him reveals that despite having made the covenant, they really did not know very much about Him.

That is a strong indication that they (like the Hebrews that Paul wrote to), those people in Amos' day, were just drifting along with the times. Four times in this one chapter, notice the change in pronoun: "We" are urged to seek Him. Two of those times it directly says, "so that we may live." Perilous times are coming on us as well. We have not entered into the worst of it by far, but now is the time to get prepared, and we prepare by seeking God.

This charge that we are to "seek Him that we may live," ties directly into John 17:3 and its explanation that eternal life is a distinctive quality of life as well as everlasting life. But we will get to that later.

As we proceed through this message, we will see that the reason they were being exhorted to seek God was that despite making the covenant with Him,

they had stopped seeking God. And because they had stopped was the cause of their poor spiritual and moral condition and the imminent destruction at the hand of the Assyrians.

Incidentally, Amos and Isaiah were both Jews, but the message that they sent out at this time, especially in Isaiah's life, was to the Israelites, to the ten northern tribes, as was Amos' message to the ten northern tribes.

We are not left out of this in the New Testament. In Romans 2, the apostle Paul amplifies this in a letter written directly to Christians.

Romans 2:4-9 Or despise you the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your hardness and impenitence of heart, you treasure up [builds up, piles up] unto yourself wrath against the Day of Wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality: eternal life; [note that, Paul says we have to seek for it. This letter was written to Christians. We cannot just float along with the times. We have to seek for it somewhat along the manner that Peter did in I Peter 1 in charging us to do this, add to this and this and so forth.] but unto them who are contentious, and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness: indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that does evil, upon the Jew first and also upon the Gentile.

This is a very stern warning to the church that we must seek God and His way, after we have been found of Him. We cannot rest on what we know of Him and what we practice because of knowing Him when we were baptized. We must go on. If God is held to be unimportant because knowledge of Him is at a very low, shallow level, what will happen? What will be the result?

I want you to consider the purpose-driven church movement that I have been speaking on during this summer. Their thoughts of God are at this time that He is interested, among other things, in membership increases and in large incomes for the churches. They believe that it is their purpose to create the

Kingdom of God on earth through doing good works. Very appealing, but their good works go hand in hand with the political forces of this world, and they believe God desires tolerance for the sake of unity regardless of truth, and that Christ's word is held to be no better than that of psychologists and philosophers, which is an utter blasphemy. And these people call themselves Christian.

It appears that they are headed in lockstep toward this man-devised New World Order, but not the Kingdom of God established at Christ's return. Why do they do these things they do? It is because of what they believe—wrongly of course—about God.

Let me make this a little bit more obvious. What about the Catholic Church's beliefs about God? They believe, among other things, in a God who promotes heaven as the reward of the saved, that Christ did it all for us, and that Purgatory will take care of any leftover moral and spiritual problems. They put great stock in tradition, ritual and ceremony. They believe they are the Kingdom of God on earth and that their leader stands in the place of Christ.

Therefore, they are deeply involved in the politics and wars of this world, while seeking for the church itself temporal power. It is they who motivated the Crusades and the Inquisition. Thus, there lies responsibility for the taking of millions of people's lives!

Is this much different from what the Muslims are doing in our time? The Muslims believe in a god who orders them to kill all non-Muslims and who wants parents to train their children to blow themselves and others to pieces in order to attain to heaven and be rewarded with seventy virgin beauties.

These are very broad and brief illustrations, but I hope that they make what I am speaking on here clear. At the foundation of the practices of the membership of these groups that I have just named is the fact that they believe that their god requires these things of them, and that they respond living life as they do because they want to please their god. They are not doing these things because they hate their god; they are trying to please their god by doing the things that they believe he wants.

This principle is true of all churches and individuals on earth. Conduct is motivated by one's beliefs, conceptions and misconceptions of their god. I hope that you can see that this is very important, that one's conception of God be as close as possible to what it is absolutely true of Him.

This is why we must seek Him! The truth is that this is as important to religion and to life as the foundation of a building, and if a foundation is not as it should be, the whole building is in danger of collapsing. Having a poor perception of God has the potential of being a very serious source, polluting, fermenting source, of serious sins.

Just before we came to the Feast, *The Charlotte Observer* newspaper published the results of a fairly extensive survey of the American public that was published after a poll taken by Gallup. Baylor University is the one who put the poll and the questions and so forth together. Gallup actually made the poll, but they wanted to know what people's perception, American's perception, of God is?

It was taken of 1,721 people and, according to this newspaper article, it was the most comprehensive in American religious history. They ask 77 questions, and there were 400 different answer choices.

The title was, "The Four Gods of America." That title ought to tell you something. The article began with this line, "The United States calls itself a nation under God, but Americans don't all have the same image of the Almighty in mind."

What the article revealed to me was that mass confusion is out there in the United States on this subject. This survey showed that though 91.8% of all Americans claim to believe in God, that most of the 91.8% are woefully ignorant of what He says in the Bible. And because they are not truly seeking God through the words of the Book that He caused to be written for them, they are making things up about God as they go along.

Some of their perceptions are extracted from the Bible, but others, believe it or not, are based on movies and television, books other than the Bible, including fiction works, dreams, visions and what friends tell them. The survey revealed that concepts gleaned from the paranormal are immensely

popular. That is their wording. "Concepts gleaned from the paranormal are immensely popular."

In analyzing the survey, Baylor University group titled the four gods as, "the authoritarian God," "the benevolent God," "the critical God," and "the distant God." In any given situation the true God is all four of them and much more! But they found that most people categorized Him as one thing, and that dominated their thinking regarding Him.

I think that you can see that these terms are very broad and it leaves people a great deal of wiggle room to guess about what they think that God will do in any given situation. The reality is that these terms are extremely vague. They give no indication of any other specific characteristics of God. There is no indication in the article published that God is actually doing anything. Do you catch that? The people who were polled did not think that God is doing anything, other than the very broad saving people. That is all.

I want you to compare this, while we are in the book of Romans, with a man who did have a vibrant, dynamic relationship with God.

Romans 4:13 For the promise that he should be heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Romans 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be given by grace to the end that the promise might be made sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

Romans 4:19-21 And not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

With that thought in mind of verse 21, turn with me to Hebrews 11. You are going to see that Abraham *knew* God. He was not guessing.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called," accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence he also received him, in a figurative sense.

I want to draw attention to that word "accounting" in verse 19. It indeed is an accounting term. Abraham added up what he knew about God. He knew this. He knew that. He knew another thing and on and on. He added it all up and analyzed the promise that Isaac was the promised seed. He reached a conclusion and acted because he knew God would either have to resurrect Isaac or provide a substitute; it was going to be one or the other. He chose to trust the One who had that power and whom he knew to be faithful.

Can you see that Abraham's faith had a rational, not a guessing emotional foundation to it? He knew God, and since Isaac was the promised seed, therefore he knew that God would respond in one or the other way. I do not mean to say that his emotions were not involved at all. They certainly were. Of that I am very sure. God chose to respond by providing a substitute. Isaac did not die because he was the promised seed and, therefore, Abraham knew that Isaac had to have children in order for the promise to be fulfilled. You see what it means about adding it up? He knew God.

So what if, like most Americans, Abraham was just guessing because there were wrong conceptions about God in his thinking? A right conception of God is a Christian necessity, because a wrong conception is the very foundation, it is the starting point, for idolatry. In brief, the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.

God makes this very clear at Mt. Sinai. After making the covenant with Israel and then giving them His law, what took place of course in Exodus 32, when Aaron made that stupid golden calf to rescue them from what they perceived as their dilemma? Aaron, and the people then in doing so, revealed that their false concepts of God remained after making the covenant. You see

there is a parallel here for all of us. We make the covenant with God and wrong conceptions of God remain in our mind.

God had it immediately destroyed as an example for our learning because it was absolutely, totally blasphemous to think that God was in the form of a bull. But the sin was, in a way, far more serious, because what Israel was attempting to do there was to define the nature of God on the basis of their own reasoning, and God felt so strongly about what they did that many thousands died in a demonstration of God's wrath. You can see that gets Him excited in a way that we do not want to get Him excited.

The Israelites of today, this survey showed, are still at it. Modern Israelites are fantasizing about God. The idolater simply imagines a conception of God and then he acts as though those conceptions are true. He is deceived, and he does not know it.

Since God has already sought out those that He makes the covenant with, those sought out ones (us) are to seek Him to understand more thoroughly what He is like, because at the time of making the covenant, we most assuredly know really very little about Him. And, like the Israelites, what we do know is in very broad terms. So now we are required to seek out the intimate details of what God is like.

So besides being powerful, what is He like? What are His attributes? What is His character in any given situation? What does it take to please Him? How may we glorify Him? How may we become like Him? How can we show Him that we love Him? How can we show Him that we glorify Him? How does He live life? That last question is very important.

Ezekiel 33:7-8 So you, O son of man, [God is speaking] I have set you as a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore you shall hear the word at My mouth and warn them from Me. When I say unto the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die,' if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand.

I want you to see from these two verses the weighty responsibility that was put on Ezekiel's head and shoulders. It was like he was going to be held

responsible for these people who were going to die unless he told them what he needed to tell them.

Ezekiel 33:10-11 "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?"' Say unto them: '**As I live**, says 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?'

You will notice if you looked at that while you were reading, that in the King James Version, there is a comma after the word "God" in verse 11. I, and some commentators, believe that it is wrong. The grammar is wrong there. It should have a period there. "Say unto them: '**As I live.**' says the Lord God." That is the way to live! Do you not think that is the right way to live, the way God lives? God does not want people to die because they are living the wrong way. "Follow me," God says. "Live the way I live and you will live." Is that not what Amos said? "Seek me and live." You will not lose your life, as it were, if you are following right behind me."

As we go further we begin to see that God is intimating that we are not merely to walk in His footsteps, but we are to walk in His shoes. That is even closer. Walking in His footsteps is fine. That is good. I am not saying that it is wrong, but so much more is attained. It is as though we are walking in His shoes.

The when the One who said these words in Ezekiel 33:10-11, when He became a man, He lived the way God would live when He became a man. He lived it, setting us an example that at the very least we are to follow in His footsteps. But the closer we get to God, the more we know about Him, the more we can walk in His shoes and not just in His footprints. In His prayer Jesus said:

John 17:3 And this is life eternal: that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

One of the keys to understanding what Jesus meant here is to grasp how He used the word "eternal." We normally think of it in terms of an endless length of time and that, in most situations, is not wrong, not at all. However, William Barclay's commentary on this verse, has a simple and meaningful difference of opinion about that concept and how it is used in this verse. Check this out in your study and in your meditation later on.

Barclay says that Jesus is speaking here of something that is very good, very much to be desired. But living forever is not necessarily good unless the quality of life lived within the eternity is good. Would you like to live forever like Satan does, angry, destroying, upset, intensely competitive, always trying to get somebody? Would that not be fun? It would not be fun. It would be a miserable curse.

So "eternal," therefore, is not only indicating length of time but the quality of life God lives endlessly. Knowing God and being able to follow His example is very important to our living as He does. What Jesus is implying is that if one truly knows God, one will live that way too as a result of the intimate relationship, and coming to truly know God creates one of the most difficult and continuous problems for church members. In fact, one commentary called it, "the church's biggest problem," and that is where I got my title.

Coming to know God is the church's biggest problem. It is what sanctification is all about—coming to really knowing His righteousness, His character, His attributes, and putting them, by cooperating with God, into our lives. It never ends. It is always going on.

Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

There is confirmation from Paul that this is one difficult task. We might even go so far as to say that it is all but impossible as a responsibility, and it requires much searching, evaluations, adjustments, and meditation on our conceptions. All but impossible, yes, because His mind is so big in terms of what it contains; it is so great that it is massive beyond our thinking.

But we must seek anyway. Because what Jesus is saying in John 17, put together with what Paul says here—it does not say that we cannot succeed in learning a great deal, does it? So we have to set out on this quest. We come to grasp and understand as much of the mind, the knowledge of God as we can, and there are so many opinions, conceptions and misconceptions about Him that a unity of true belief and understanding of Him is very difficult to arrive at.

I am not about to tell you that my conceptions are perfect, but this I know: that the foundation for my conception began a couple of years before I was converted, and the start of it came from a small book written by the man who was the main translator and editor of the *Phillips Translation* of the Bible. The name of that book was *Your God is too Small*. The book had less than a hundred pages to it, but I will tell you, it stirred my imagination as never before, and it laid a foundation for when I was converted a few years later. This book has long disappeared from my library. I have looked for it but never found it.

His complaint, the reason for writing the book, was that he said he found in his ministry that in most cases people had a one dimensional god, and he titled these one dimensional gods as the resident policeman. Others, he said, perceived God as a kindly, soft-touch, big grandfather in the sky, and others an absent-minded landlord; others saw Him as a disinterested professor, and still others believed in His existence, but their conception was so vague as to amount to nothing more than the eternal ethereal nothingness.

There were a few more conceptions but I have forgotten them. Just the general theme is there. But in between reading that book and my conversion, I continued to seek out a firmer conception. But I did not find very much, and a lot of my conception came through the teachings of Herbert Armstrong.

Though I have been thinking about this subject longer than I have been in the church, I do not think that this is unique to me. I think that it happens to most of us, and I have learned through this forty-seven plus years that developing a more concrete and truer sense of what God is like is a continuously evolving process. In Psalm 10, David made an insightful comment:

Psalm 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; [Notice that. They will not seek after God. Then he adds something to that:] God is not in all his thoughts.

So David declares a significant difference between the godly and the ungodly, and the difference he states lies in the way each thinks about God and how often he thinks about God. Now the fundamental differences lie in how important God is to each and how accurate their thoughts are about Him.

Arriving at a truer conception of God is not easy, and it can be said with some degree of honesty that God hides Himself, but this is only true to a small degree because the Bible states clearly the much truer picture.

In Romans 1:19-20, a very interesting connection is made here by the apostle Paul. Notice this first sentence.

Romans 1:19-20 because that which may be known of God is manifest [It is evident. He is saying there that God may hide Himself to some degree but not completely.] in them, for God has shown it unto them. For from the creation of the world the invisible things of Him are clearly seen [creation is evidence and indeed really, if the mind is open, proof of Gods' existence], being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and [that abominable translation] Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

That translation is absolutely wrong. It should read "His divine nature." Even His divine nature can be seen from the creation and understood. How much is available just about one of His attributes, His providence? How much is available to any clear-thinking person about God's nature in how He provides for what He has created, you and me? That is why God says that they are without excuse to know what I am like to a good degree. So they are without excuse. So God declares that at least some knowledge, a basic foundational knowledge, is clearly available to everyone with a normally intelligent mind. Now, a very interesting and dangerous process begins to unfold beginning in verse 21.

Romans 1:21 For when they knew God [notice the people about whom Paul is speaking were acquainted with God, they knew God], they glorified Him not as God, [they did not give what He deserved because of whom and what He had done.] neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Even as the people addressed by Isaiah and Amos had a true knowledge of God, it is clear that the people in Isaiah and Amos were not honoring God, neither did these people about whom Paul is speaking honor God as God. Their knowledge was not put into action in submitting to God. Instead, they let their imaginations run wild, and they began worshiping things apart from what had been revealed of God by Him, and their imaginations lead them right into idolatry. Let us follow the context here.

Romans 1:22-25 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

They let their imaginations run wild and they began worshipping things apart from what had been revealed by God and their imaginations lead them right into idolatry. Are you beginning to see some steps unfold here? Just like in Isaiah, just like in Amos, God said, "Hey, return to me. You have drifted away. Seek me and live." But they were not. But if the process is not stopped, then the next verses begin applying.

Romans 1:26-32 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men, working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And

even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not proper [Please remember, because they did not like to retain God...why do you think we have to continuously seek God? To keep Him in mind and expand our understanding of Him as we go along, not make things up about Him.], being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity. They are whisperers [sounds just like main street in America], backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affections, implacable, unmerciful. And knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them.

You see the process there. When one gives up something about the knowledge of God that is true and right, the first thing that we can see that is lost in this process here in Romans 1 is their sense of awe and respect. Their fear of God begins to degenerate. The majesty of God leaves their mind.

That is what He means when He says they became vain in their reasoning, and the result was that their former high standards regarding virtually everything began to slip. Corruption of their former concept of God gives birth to perversion and this slippage affects—it begins with things like the way people dress, exposure of more and more flesh becomes what is done. Exposure of the breasts, exposure of the thighs, tight clothing that is form fitting. Language becomes filthy; crude, rude, entertainment becomes base.

When I was a boy, in a movie you never even saw a husband and wife in a movie scene in the same bed. How things have changed! And it has come directly from the people losing the majesty of God and reverence for Him and His law in their minds, and over two generations the way people dress has changed so much.

I remember back in 1961 or 1962, Raymond Cole came through the area and he gave a sermon and he said in this sermon, "The day is coming when you are going to see women go down the street bare breasted." It is coming. God

uses polite language in some ways in Isaiah 3, but He is talking about the women walking around with their jingling ankles and so forth. But what is He showing by that? They are doing things to attract attention to themselves in areas where they know that men will look.

You women—I do not know whether you realize it— are victims of perverted men who are designing clothes that will appeal to men's lustful desires. What we have to do is watch that our reverence is for God, knowing His mind, and wear those things that He would approve of.

Ultimately, do you know where this is leading? It starts with things like clothing and language and so forth, but it is heading exactly where Satan wants it to go. It is going to destroy the family. That is what happens, and that is what he wants to do.

In Genesis 3:9-10, those two verses give us a truer, overall picture of why there are so many false conceptions of God. Once Satan and sin entered the course of man's being, what happened after they sinned? They hid from God. It is not God who is hiding. It is man who is hiding from God by shutting his mind to the majesty and the purity and the requirements of God, and using his own imagination, making things up as he goes along, and fitting them comfortably into his mind so he fills good about what he is doing, rather than looking in the Book and seeing what God has to say about it.

You can add to this Revelation 12:9. You know what that verse says, and because it suits God's purpose, He permitted Satan to continue what he began in the Garden of Eden. One of the things that this episode tells me is that despite the fact that Adam and Eve saw God—and I mean literally saw Him—one of the major reasons they sinned is because they did not know Him. They knew He was there, and they knew He was their Creator, but they really did not know Him. And because they did not know Him, they most assuredly did not love Him.

To know God intensifies loving Him because we begin to really understand His mind and His character and His love for us, and if we are converted we will respond and start living like He does. Why? To please Him! Do you not try to please those who you love? Absolutely! It is such a simple formula, and that is why knowing God is eternal life. There is a connection between

the two. True love motivates response, and that is why we have to come to know God, so that we will love Him more than we ever did before. And because we love Him, we will strive with all our being to do what we can to please Him.

For those who do not know God, it is impossible for them to worship Him. God is looking for a people who will worship Him in spirit and truth. The people who do not know God, they have no truth. To get close to God, to come to know Him, is also to increase truth. All of these things are working together to produce a quality of life so that we can live forever eternally in happiness and productivity.

I hope you understand that when we get into the Kingdom of God, we are going to work, and we are going to work with people that we love to work with. If any of you work in a place where the employees are really rotten, it is not as much fun working with them as it is working with somebody that is really a joy to work with. In God's presence there is joy evermore. We are going to work forever. Those of you who do not like to work, bye-bye. Working is important and seeking to do the best that we possibly can.

What I am saying is that seeking God is the most serious challenge of our life, and it will never end as long as we are human. So set your mind to that because we are never going to be filled with enough about God, because there is always more and more and more that we can learn about Him.

This is interesting. One of the Baylor University people who made up this test and conducted this analysis, and so forth, is a man named Christopher Bater. It says here, analyzing the survey results, "You learn more about peoples' moral and political behavior if you know their image of God than almost any other measure. It turns out to be a more powerful predictor of social and political views than the usual markers of church attendance and belief in the Bible."

Let us go back in the book of Jeremiah to chapter 9. This verse will let us know how important our having the knowledge of God is!

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not

the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glories glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight," saith the LORD.

Tie this thought together with John 17:3, and what God says here gives us a concise thought of how important knowing God is from God's point of view, and His evaluation of the relative value of things ought to be of great importance to us. Carnal men look to their riches as their glory, and riches can be understood as anything one has achieved through natural means, be it money, athletic, artistic or academic achievement.

Glory, as it is used here, indicates that which brings them honor, acclaim, and therefore a strong sense of well being, understanding and confidence and, thus, from God's point of view, of knowledge of God Himself and what He is doing is far and away man's most important glory. That is going to help to give us the glory of the Kingdom of God.

One of the important things that one can extract from this verse is again that knowing God leads to lovingkindness, justice and righteousness in our lives. I want to go to another verse now that I think to me is so inspiring in II Corinthians 4:5-7. Paul says,

II Corinthians 4:5-7 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the Excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

The breathtaking element in all of this is that this glory is available to any of us, even though we are the weak of the earth. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American philosopher and essayist, had this interesting insight when he stated, "It behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshiping we are becoming." And what he says is true.

Why is it important that we come to know God? To make sure that we are worshiping the right thing, because what we are worshiping we are

becoming! Did I not say at the very beginning of this sermon that people conduct themselves according to their beliefs and their conception of what they think God requires of them? So it is essential that we have as perfect of a conception as we possibly can.

I used to believe what Herbert Armstrong stated when he said, "The most common sin is ingratitude." Ingratitude is indeed very common, but I no longer believe it is the most common. To me that place of dishonor belongs overwhelmingly to idolatry. It is not even close to any other, and I offer you as evidence the fact that five of the ten commandments directly tell us how to avoid this sin. It is true, as we just saw in Romans 1, that if we do not keep those first four commandments, it will lead us directly into all of those other bad things that we see going on in the streets of America today.

Let me show you an astounding verse in Romans 3.

Romans 3:9-11 What then? [Paul says] Are we better than they? No, in no wise! For we have before proved that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth; there is **none** that seeketh after God.

Do you believe that is absolutely true? Nobody seeks after God! It is true. Satan has done his job so well everybody is so confused. They have to do what Aaron did and make up their own god. That is what happens. We have all done it. This is why we have to seek God once He reveals Himself. The only people who can really and truly seek after God are those who have entered the covenant with Him and then apply themselves to use their time to seek the truth about Him.

Before that, people—very religious people, nice people, good neighbors, friends, all of us—have all sought after a god of our own imagination. That is how well Satan has deceived mankind. Romans 12:9 says, "Satan has deceived the whole world." It is absolutely necessary for God to seek us out. Jesus said, "No man can come to me unless the Spirit of the Father draw him."

This is one of the things that really separates the church of God from most organizations—we believe that is true. Most of the churches believe salvation is open to anybody. God is not really running the show. That just shows you how much they know about Him. It is not that He has everything organized. It is all engineered. There are plot lines. There are time dates that He has set and that are completely in His control, and He is putting this plan together as He sees fit. The Book says nobody can come to Him unless He gives the okay and begins working a miracle on a person's mind.

Here is the job. From now on you are going to seek God as never before. I want you to go back to II Chronicles.

II Chronicles 15:2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, "Hear you me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you be with Him; and if you seek Him, He **will** be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.

Again remember, Azariah is speaking to Israelites who had made a covenant, the Old Covenant with God, and so God had sought them out. There was an agreement there, an acquaintance with God, and that is why he uses that kind of language. Just think, though, as if Azariah is speaking to you and me. We have the door, the way is open to us to seek God because God has sought us out and we have made the agreement with Him and now we are part of the New Covenant. Now in verse 12, I have to tell you that the Jews really took Azariah seriously.

II Chronicles 15:12-15 And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul [look how serious they were], that whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. And they swore unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with their whole desire, and He was found by them; and the LORD gave them rest round about.

The people repented, and I mean seriously, with their whole desire and God responded. He will do the same for us as well. There is a reciprocity required. He has already sought us out and now we have to respond by seeking Him out.

Seeking God is what all of us absolutely must do. We cannot have eternal life unless we do because eternal life is directly tied to knowing God. And we cannot know Him unless we seek Him—that is, seeking to be like Him. Would you marry somebody you did not know?

One of the beautiful things about this is God's eager willingness to respond to those who seek Him. He really does deeply desire to help us. I want you to turn to Haggai.

Haggai 2:1-9 In the seventh month, on the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is this not in your eyes by comparison with it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work, for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts. 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you. Fear you not.' For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place will I give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

There is a similarity between the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles, though one is in the first month and the other in the seventh. Each begins on the fifteenth day and it is seven days long. Each is counted inclusively, of course, and thus each ends on the twenty first.

Tishri 21 is the day that is given in verse 1. That tells you what was happening on that day when God spoke through His prophet Haggai. It took place on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

One of the questions in this chapter is on the similarities and differences between the Tabernacle and the Temple. We must also build and work, do not drop out, marry, have families, and seek the peace of the Lord. That is the subject in chapter 2.

Verse 4 admonishes us to be strong and to work. In verse 5, He says, "My Spirit is with you. You can draw on My power." In verse 6, He says that soon He is going to shake heaven and earth and fill what He is building and what we are working on with His glory. In verse 7, He is saying Christ is coming. The Desire of all Nations will be here. In verses 8 and 9 he says, "I will give you peace." As we were told in Charles Whitaker's message, we are to seek the peace of the land.

Now I think that we should deeply consider this message from Him to us, because He has surely given us peace here, as well as this message to carry out away from this place and not leave this place empty.

We are to seek Him! Let us leave this Feast with the message of Haggai. Let it be our guide and seriously seek God as we never have before!