

The Faithfulness Of God (Part 2)

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Today we are going to continue to look into how God perceives us, and I want us to understand that not one of us is insignificant to Him. He is faithful to us individually, even as He is to the church as a body.

In Malachi 3:6, it states, "For I am the LORD, I do not change." A truth very essential to our spiritual well being is that we know, and know that we know, that God establishes a pattern, and then He never changes from it. If He changed, it would throw us into confusion, we would have no solid foundation for a good, growing relationship. How could we possibly trust Him, and His Word, if He was changing from time to time?

Notice this pattern as it begins to develop. It was God, and Him only, who elected and called Abraham. It was God, and Him only, who elected and chose Isaac and not Ishmael, and thus Isaac became the child of promise. It was God, and Him only, who elected, loved, and chose Jacob, and thus rejected Esau. He clearly shows that in this series of choices, by doing this in the womb for Jacob, and thus nothing that Jacob did contributed to God's election of him.

This same pattern applies to everybody that He elects and calls into His church. His reasons for so doing are locked in His mind, but we can know of a certainty that He did not call a single one of us because of any good work that we had ever done. Rather, we are very much like that deceptive scoundrel, Jacob. God fully intends that now that He has elected us, and revealed Himself and His purpose to us, that our election becomes the dominant driving reality of our life. This is why Paul urges us to redeem the time, to make the most of this opportunity to know what the will of the LORD is. Time, and all of its events, is being guided toward a specific end by the one who elected us, and we must choose to go with this flow and not the world's, which is headed directly to destruction.

As my previous sermon ended, we had just begun touching on foreknowledge and predestination as it pertains to the elect, those named after Isaac (also named the Israel of God). Jesus was predestined from the beginning to be man's Redeemer and Savior.

Let us begin today in I Peter 1:

I Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The people to whom this is written are the elect, and that is us. "The elect" is a formal term that is not used all that often, but *elect* designates those chosen by God to be heirs of salvation, who are separated by His choice and His choice only to be recipients of this awesome gift.

I Peter 1:17-20 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

It is that term "foreordained", and "before the foundation of the earth," that I want to concentrate on for a little while. I also want to focus on the mention of foreknowledge, the foreknowledge of God the Father in relation to the term the 'elect.' Foreknowledge is not merely the ability to predict future events; foreknowledge involves God's sovereignty in determining and influencing His decisions in regard to His purpose. It refers to the course that He is heading, and the timing at each and every step of that purpose.

His overall purpose is to create a family Kingdom in His Son's and His image. It includes His decision to save mankind in general, but most specifically, at this time a smaller group, the children of promise. These are a people with specific characteristics, and of course I mean the church. I Peter 1:20, indicates a very important specific step in the revelation of His foreknowledge. Jesus Christ was foreordained—appointed before the foundation or the creation of the earth—to be our Redeemer and Savior.

With that thought in mind—foreordained, predestined—from here we are going to go to Isaiah 42.

Isaiah 42:1-4 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to

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be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law."

That is very clearly referring to Jesus Christ, that He was foreordained and that He was predestined to be the Savior.

Now we are going to go from here to Acts 2 and Peter is speaking. It is the sermon that he gave on that Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:22-23 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

Jesus' death, as mankind's Savior, was God's purpose from the beginning. Isaiah, Paul, and Peter are all showing God faithfully working, according to His predetermined purpose and plan. Physical Israel, which made the Old Covenant with God, was also in God's predetermined purpose. The Israelites of today, scattered in the Western world, also remain in His purpose. But the church, the children of promise, is involved in a more intensified way than either of them.

Thus, in like manner, God has also foreordained others to be part of His purpose. This will be addressed in more detail later in the sermon. This issue of predetermination, of predestination, very much pertains to the faithfulness of God to us personally and individually. Most of this sermon is going to be an expounding of just a few verses of Ephesians the first chapter.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

This epistle, of course, was written to a congregation of people in the city of Ephesus, and it was part of the church.

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Ephesians 1:4-7 . . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

In verse 3, it addresses the intensified way that the church is blessed. The first thing that I want us to note are the last two words in verse 3. The blessings that Paul is concerned about, here in Ephesians (actually the entire book), come to us "in Christ." The blessings come to us "in Christ." I want you to note in your own mind, that these two words point to the way that God perceives us, not the way that we perceive ourselves, but the way that God perceives us.

My whole sermon on the weekly Sabbath, and the holy day, was to paint a picture, as well as I possibly could, of the way that God perceives us as an individual in the church. Man, He loves us. He loves each one of us individually, as much as He loves the whole. So much that Jesus Christ would have given His life for you and you alone. It did not work out that way, we know, but we have to begin thinking about the way that He perceives us. One, because it is confidence-building and faith-building, and two, because we know that He can be relied upon.

As we continue, we will see this "in Christ" is not just a cutesy, insignificant passing remark, but it is a very important detail. One commentator said it is used by Paul, either as "in Christ" or "in Him" (something of that nature), ten times in the first thirteen verses, and many more times through the entirety of the book. Another commentator said that these same verses, which we just read, most specifically verse 3-7, are the key to understanding the entire book of Ephesians.

The word "in" is used here as a preposition meaning, "held by, or within the confines of Christ." It means surrounded by Christ, it means inside of Christ, within the limits, boundaries of, or existing as a part, characteristic, or property of Christ. "In Christ" speaks of our incredibly intimate union with Him. You cannot get much closer than that. To be inside of Him, that is the way that God looks at us. Remember Malachi 3:17. He

loves us as much as He loves His Son.

Next, let us note Paul's use of the terms "blessed" or the wider phrase, "every spiritual blessing" in this verse. To be blessed, indicates "doing well toward or in behalf of." Notice also, that in verse 3, the blessings are attributed directly to the Father. This must not be overlooked in terms of both the Father and Son's personal involvement and faithfulness in relation to ours and other's lives. The Father blesses through the means of the Son, who is the One who is most directly active in Their purpose.

Let us look at a brief overview. We are eventually going to get back here again to John 3, but in this overview I want you to turn to Hebrews 1, and it is describing our Savior:

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Our Savior is "upholding" or "sustaining," as some modern translations use, and it strongly indicates personal, day-to-day concern and activity by Him. It is almost like He is keeping things going. He is not merely watching; He is actively keeping all things moving toward a predetermined objective. And, brethren, that includes us.

Matthew 5:44-45 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Notice the terms Jesus uses: "makes" or "causes" His sun to rise and the rain to fall. Again, it strongly indicates personal involvement, the making of choices by our Creator and Savior. He is not detached from His creation. Jesus said, in John 5:17, "My Father works and has been working."

I went into these two verses here because I wanted us to see, first of all, that some blessings from God are distributed to all, like the rain and like the sun to rise on both the good and evil.

However, the blessings that Paul was writing of in Ephesians 1:3—the ones that he is

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

thinking about—come only to those who are "in Christ." That is an awfully small group of people out of the billions on earth. You might recall what Jesus plainly declared in John 2, that following His death, He would become a Temple of God. A temple is for worship and thus Jesus is signifying that the true worship of God would be through Him. It becomes very personal.

Under the Old Covenant system, God was essentially closed off away from the people, but all worship of Him was focused on the Tabernacle and the Temple. In John 2, Jesus is signifying that a radical change in the worship of God is coming, and God is going to be worshipped by everybody through Him, through one Being. Only those who worship God through Jesus Christ are going to have access to Him, and are going to receive the blessings that God wants to give us so abundantly.

He is telling us why it is so important and beneficial to us that we should be in the church, part of this group that He foreordained and predestined to exist following the arrival of His Son, and how His death opens up the way for this to begin. So, when Jesus made that statement in John 2, He is telling us that it would be as though He was the sanctuary, and that He would be central to the worship that now involves us, because of our calling.

In addition, God clearly shows us elsewhere how He perceives us, and therefore how we should perceive ourselves in our relation to the Father and the Son. So our being "in Christ" is central to the way that God perceives you and me. In a sense, if we can make it kind of crude, He looks at His Son and He sees us too.

I cannot over-estimate the importance of this to us. This is why I went through so much, in the previous sermon, about how God perceives us. We are valuable, like jewels, special and precious. His concern for our well-being is intense. He is in no way disinterested. So please be confident in this.

Our union with Christ is so tight that we spiritually become a part of Christ's body, and therefore we are perceived by God as "in Christ." I know that you know this, but we are going to look at it anyway. You can begin to see how these things tie together, and why Paul wrote the things that he did.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He [Father] put all things under His [Son] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

A better understanding of that last phrase "who fills all in all" is that the church (the members of the church) fill out Christ's body and make Him whole, so that He is not perceived by God as a disembodied head, but rather the whole rest of Him is there and that is us—we are 'in Him.'

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

So, we are not only part of His body, we are also part of Him, in the sense of a Temple. Just like He said in John 2, "I am going to be a Temple," and there we are. So whether the risen Christ, the Head of the church, is portrayed in human form or as a temple picturing the center of worship, we are part of Him. Being "in Christ" is not superficial. It indicates a major change in the worship of God. "In Christ" is a special designation given to very few people on earth.

I John 4:17 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.

Mark this down, this is the way that God looks at us. "As He is, so are we in this world." That is a blessing that comes because, and only because, we are 'in Christ.' One cannot be a Christian without being "in Christ." Because of these designations, we come to share with Christ virtually everything He was, is, did, and will do. Remember, this is a spiritual "in." There is no physical location involved in these metaphorical descriptions; they are all spiritual allusions.

We are crucified with Christ; we die with Christ, and we are raised with Christ. When we are baptized, and we receive God's Holy Spirit, we are born again, and adopted into God's family. We, with Christ, are then in God's Kingdom. Think about this. Was there ever a time that Christ was not in God's Kingdom? Since we are in Him, we too are in it.

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

What this statement is saying is that we have been taken by God from one realm and

put into another. We are given citizenship in that Kingdom; we become ambassadors for Jesus Christ. We become coworkers with Him in the building of character, and in preparation for kingship and priesthood responsibilities.

II Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Are you beginning to see what is building here? In Him, "in Christ," is the source of every spiritual blessings. Perhaps topping it all off is that we are co-heirs with Christ. What He inherits, we inherit—everlastingly!

A very, very great blessing is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is imputed to us for justification, that we may come into God's presence when we believe and repent.

I want to pause on this point to expand on this very special blessing that comes to us because we are in Christ.

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

There are at least two understandings of Paul's statement in verse 4, which says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." Some have gone so far as to say that it means we no longer have to keep the law, that it has no bearing on God's purpose. That is absolutely wrong, because Christ Himself says that we are not to think that He came to destroy the law and prophets (Matthew 5:17). In addition Paul asked, "Do we make void the law through faith? Most definitely not." He said, "We establish the law."

Here is an alternate, and I believe a correct, understanding of this verse. This is a translation that appears in another Bible, and I forgot to write it down, but I think it is really perceptive. "Christ is the end of the law, that there may be righteousness for

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

everyone who believes." Remember, this does not do away with the law at all.

The first of the two true meanings is that Christ is the goal or the object toward which the law leads. This is the one that was taught most frequently in the Worldwide Church of God, under Herbert Armstrong, and it is absolutely correct. Christ kept it without sin; thus, He personified the law's purpose, which is righteousness. He is the goal.

But there is another meaning that is also correct. In this one, the term "end" is the synonym for completion, or fulfillment, of the law for righteousness. This thought does not do away the law either.

In this understanding, we must know that there was a large religious issue at stake in Jesus' and Paul's day. Believe it or not, brethren, it continues right up into our day. It involves the issue of "legalism," a charge that is laid against the church of God by others outside, because we insist, rightly, that we must keep the law.

I hope that I can make this clear to us. The truth is that Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly, on our behalf. Not so that we do not have to keep it, but rather because without Him as a perfect sinless sacrifice there would be no Redeemer, and thus there would be no means of forgiveness. This is what the justification that leads to righteousness is all about.

The Jews' misunderstanding led to creating a major problem for them. They were, in many cases, very disciplined, self-controlled people. But their reasoning was that the righteousness had to be earned by their works of law-keeping. All those battles that Jesus had with the Pharisees, especially, over their traditions and rules that they manufactured, came up with, put out, and sincerely believed in. They thought that if they just kept them they would be accepted by God, they would be admitted into His presence as a result of that. Again, notice what Paul says in Romans 10:3:

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

So what was the problem that tripped them up? We will go to the Old Testament and we will see one example:

Leviticus 18:5 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LOORD.

The Jews took that "live" to mean that if they just kept the law, they would be abundantly blessed in their present life. They thought that it was the way to wealth, to riches, to honor, and to glory within the community. But they took it another step further. They thought that if they would keep them, God would was then going to guarantee that they would live eternally. And in one sense, they did a good job of keeping the law.

Like I said, they were disciplined people, self-controlled people, and even in their communities the Pharisees were the ones that were respected by the people because of these things. But can you see the flaw in this? It is such a simple flaw. Brethren, all anybody has to do it is break the law one time and the law claims its penalty of death. All Adam and Eve had to do was to break it once and they would be out of the presence of God, and cut off.

Do you see what Paul is saying back here in Romans 10? It has been shown by all of history that nobody can keep what God said there, and everybody thus disqualifies himself. But you see God's righteousness can come to those who are 'in Christ.' What a valuable gift.

He did keep the law perfectly, and by doing so He was righteous. He qualified to be our Redeemer, and the One who is thus able to pass that righteousness, which He did in our behalf, on to those who have faith in Him and His blood. That is God's righteousness. It is really awesome: The sins are wiped away, not because of anything that we did, but because of what Christ did. And being in Him ensures that they will be wiped away.

In order for justification to occur before God, the person has to be in possession of God's righteousness, and so therefore everybody's works are unqualified. You can see why Paul is preaching so hard on this subject of justification by faith, because only those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and His blood, are qualified to receive the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that is acceptable to God, and allows us into His presence.

So, our justification by which we stand or fall, in the sight of the Holy God, involves two corresponding transactions. On the one hand, if we are believers, our sins are transferred to Jesus Christ, and punished in Him when He was crucified. In the other transaction, His righteousness is transferred to us, with the result that we are now accounted as being righteous in Him. How precious is that in terms of a blessing? Are you beginning to appreciate how God perceives us?

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Brethren, the law was never made to produce a righteousness that saves us from death. God made it for us as a guide. The righteousness that saves is the one that is imparted by God as an act of His grace, and because of faith in Christ's sacrifice. Brethren, even that faith is a gift of His too.

Those of us in the church of God who believe—rightly so—that we must keep the law, just like Paul and Jesus said, we must be careful that we do not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that our law-keeping adds to our righteousness towards being justified, even though that is required by God. Consider this as to why. What could possibly be better than having the righteousness of Christ? There is no comparison between His and ours.

Our law-keeping helps ingrain the habit of obedience; it also helps write God's laws on our hearts and minds, and it may even earn us reward, but it in no way earns us salvation, or increases our righteousness. It does glorify God. Christ is our Savior, and that we must always hang on to that. It is not the preacher, it is not the church, it is the relationship in, and through, Christ. What kind of blessings are there?

Colossians 2:3 In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . .

Colossians 2:8-9 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

A better rendering of that word "Godhead" is "divine nature." Every blessing of Christian life comes in, and through, Jesus Christ.

The Faithfulness of God (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

II Corinthians 5:20-21 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This is the very righteousness that Paul said in Romans 10:3, which the Jews knew nothing about. They were ignorant of the righteousness of God. That righteousness was displayed through the life of Jesus Christ, and it is available to those who are 'in Him.' Without Christ, we not only can do nothing, brethren, we are nothing. We are dead men.

He has no assistant; He is the only channel; there is no second name given under heaven. There is only one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Every aspect of our relationship with the Father is through the Son and to us too, because we are "in" the Son. Let us expand on this even more. The Bible is full of it.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the fountain of blessing in the beginning, and the blessings at the end of our salvation. That includes all of the blessings in between too. Without Christ, we can do nothing, and we are nothing.

II Corinthians 3:5-6 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

This is how we receive the gifts of God. They come through Christ, by means of His Spirit. We just read in II Corinthians 3:6, about being given life, and these verses in

Ephesians 2 connects to that.

Ephesians 2:1-2 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,

The gift that he is talking about in this verse, when connected to II Corinthians 3:6, is where we are given the Spirit and made alive. That is a spiritual resurrection from the dead. What it is describing here, brethren, is the new birth. The receiving of God's Spirit is the new birth, and it is this gift that raises us from spiritual death in our sins, and from Satan's bondage. This being made alive is the birth from above.

The gift of His Spirit also creates faith, and it is this gift that enables us to believe God and thus to live by faith. And, as Paul later says, in Hebrews 10:38, "The just shall live by faith." That is a statement of fact, which implies a command to do so. Salvation is by grace through faith.

Without living faith, there is no salvation. This faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, is the spiritual gift that enables us to overcome, grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to make proper use of all of God's other gifts.

What we need to understand is that this tool, faith, has already been given to us, but we need to believe that it has, and to make use of it. It is already there. I was pleased that Mike Ford gave his sermonette ["Dog Soldiers"], in which he covered the command to "Quit you like men." Unless you have the Spirit of God, you cannot follow what that command says. God would not give a command if we were not already enabled to do it, and we are.

Our fears so often overcome us, and sometime it is our ignorance as well. But, I hope that you will understand that this is the way that God sees us, and we can do it because He is on His throne. He has enabled us to do it, and He will not allow something to come into our life that is over our heads as it were. He loves us too much to risk losing us in a case like that, and so we can do that. So, when God says, "The just shall live by faith," He is actually commanding us to do that.

It is God's Holy Spirit, and the faith it generates, that leads to our union with Jesus Christ that we might receive grace upon grace, as the apostle John said, and that we might be changed from glory to glory as Paul put it, from the glory of man to the glory of

God.

It all comes through our relationship with God, in and through Jesus Christ. Notice one additional feature in Ephesians 1:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Paul says that we are blessed in heavenly places. It is good to understand this, because this relates to our citizenship and being an ambassador.

What this is telling us is that true Christianity is a heavenly religion. Christianity is not of this world. I think that we can agree with that. This world is not operated on Christian principles at all. And from where is the election of us into God's church made? Well, it has its source in heaven where the Father and the Son dwell.

Are you beginning to see what I am drawing a picture of here? Everything in our life is directed from heaven. They are observing us, They are working toward the end that They have in mind for you and for me. That is why Paul begins to say here that we are blessed in heavenly places. This should cause some changing of our thinking in relation to this world, actually in the way we perceive virtually everything.

II Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Now let us begin to make this practical.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The Christian is to live his life in this world all the while focused on the "other" world. We must be guided and activated by faith, not by sight. The Christian's mind, his hopes, and his ambitions, are to be focused on where his spiritual citizenship is, not on where he currently resides. His standards of conduct and attitudes are set by that nation, for in

this world he is an alien. He cannot allow his conduct and attitudes to conform to this world's, but he must be transformed into the image of those in the other world, who are the Source of our perceptions.

Christians are, as James Moffatt termed it, a colony of heaven. The spiritual reality is that we are coworkers with God, and ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As a result, a Christian's attitude toward this world always has to be one containing a healthy measure of detachment. Do you understand that we are here, but we are not here? We have to live here, but we are not part of it. God expects our not being a part of this world to be a reality. That should always be the beginning of our thinking about what we are going to do, and what are we going to choose? How does this conflict with where my citizenship is? What are Their standards, and what are this world's standards?

Rick Warren is, as most of us knows, the leader of one of the largest, most active groups of Evangelicals here in the United States. Rick Warren has this idea that the way you get conversion and the way that you become a Christian in this world, is that you go out and you dig wells in the Belgian Congo, Syria, wherever it might be. So the people dutifully do that, because they feel that it is their responsibility, and that their good works are to be in this world.

I wonder if they are reading the same Book that I am? Jesus said this so simply. He said, "The poor you always have with you." Who did He mean by the poor? That is subject to interpretation. I am going to give it the broadest interpretation. When He said poor, He did not just mean those who have low incomes, those who were destitute, He meant everybody who is poor, and they are poor spiritually. He was there for one main thing, and that is to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and to this was assigned to Him by His Father.

I can show you right at the beginning of the book of Acts, that Jesus came into Capernaum where Peter had a home, and one of the major reasons that they went there was because Peter's mother was sick, and Peter asked Him to go there and heal her. He went there and healed her. The healing was noised—spoken about—immediately, and the first thing you know, there were people all over who wanted to be healed.

Okay, Jesus took care of it, He healed those people. The next thing that He did was to get out of town as fast as He could. They went looking for Him, and they found Him and said to Him, "Why did you not hang around?" He told them, "*My job here is to preach the Gospel, I am not here to heal people left and right.*" Even though He was kind enough to do it when the opportunity arose, but as soon as He was free He got away, and began

doing His assignment from the Father again.

There is no end to what people could do for the poor in this world, but it is like dropping a coin in the ocean, nothing ever changes. This is what Jesus said—as long as the way things are, no matter what we do, nothing will really change except momentarily. You may have the opportunity to do good things, I am not saying that is a bad thing to do. I am only saying that it is not our first responsibility; it is not highest on the list.

We are other-worldly, and if you want to do something for a charity that is fine, no problem at all, but understand that that is not what God holds as your highest responsibility. The highest responsibility is to make yourself ready for the Kingdom of God.

So, He expects us to have a healthy measure of detachment from the world. We sorrow for it. We may agonize over it. What is happening here, especially for those of us now in the United States, as we see things that we have had liberties to do all of our life, we are seeing those things now just being wiped away in the last six or eight months, like they never existed before. We grieve over that, and we hate to see what is happening.

Are you other-worldly? That is where our hopes reside.

The spiritual reality is that when we were baptized, and received God's Spirit, we surrendered our earthly citizenship rights; we are neither conservative nor liberal. We are a pilgrim passing through. Our loyalties are heavenly because we are in Christ.

Therefore, the blessings that we receive from God, even though some may be temporal, their primary use must be focused toward the heavenly.

It is a very great shame that many preachers in this world have promoted Christianity as a materialistic, get-rich-quick plan. That should tell you something. Those preachers are focused on this world.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

You can see so clearly where Paul says that our attention needs to be focused.

Colossians 3:2-7 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is

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our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

God's blessings are given in order that we can choose, by faith, to apply ourselves to what Paul calls "heavenly places".

A statement or two that truly contrasts what we are compared to, even those saints of the Old Covenant, is this. Very often in the Old Testament one will see this statement: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

In the New Testament this is replaced by: The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was not of this world. He was not a rich man. He said He did not even have a place to lay His head, and His Kingdom is not of this order of things.

Whether we like it or not, any blessings given "in Christ," are in some way going to be attached to the "other world." In the same manner, any chastening given, is also to be seen as given because of the "other world."