

Going On To Perfection

Striving to Be Like God

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We are going to begin in II Peter 1, which is very close to where we left off the last time. My wife remarked to me this morning, “Have you noticed how many times we have been in I Peter?” I said, “Peter was the apostle to the Israelites. Maybe that had something to do with it.” We are really wearing Peter out this Feast. And it is a good thing because he wrote a lot of good stuff, and I like to read it!

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.

Now, as I mentioned at the end of that sermon the other day, as far as this series of sermons is concerned, the most important part of those verses is, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." All things that pertain to life and godliness—*everything* that is needed by us to be prepared for whatever use God is going to make of us; whatever we need in terms of living the life that He has called us to; whatever we need in the way of knowledge; whatever we need in the way of contact with Him; the power that we need in terms of the aspects of His nature—*everything* has been given to us!

These verses do not say to what degree that they have been given. They do not say whether it has been totally given. But I think that we can understand from other parts of the Bible that God does not give us everything at once because, like little children, we would be unable to use all that could be

given to us. But He has given us enough, and He will increase whatever is needed, and whenever any opportunity comes by which we are able to serve Him, and He is able to use us, by His grace He will give us what we need.

Now, do you believe that? You had better believe it, because, in one sense, your eternal life, and especially your growth depends on whether or not you believe that. You are going to exercise your faith on the basis of whether you believe not only that God is, but that God is with you, and that God has given you everything you need to properly represent Him, and to grow.

He also says that you have been made partakers of the divine nature. That is so interesting! It is awesome in the context of what we are talking about here. Because, we began all the way back in Genesis 1, and we found that God created all the animals after their kind. We get to Genesis 1:26, and although He does not say the words, it is obvious from the flow of the context that He is saying that we are made after the *God-kind*. That is an awesome statement in itself.

But now we find that we have been made partakers of the divine nature. At first we find that we are just in the image of God, and the likeness of God; we know that we are after the God-kind, but now we know that we also are possessors of the divine nature. It is not very well developed, but it is in us. It is here. Are we going to use it?

So, the power to do what God has chosen us to do is in us already because He has given it us as a part of the divine nature.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The love of God is already there! Whenever you are given a gift by your parents, most of the time, when you were younger, it is a toy. But in most cases, whenever parents give gifts to their children, it is something that the parents use. So, whether it is a toy to play with and be entertained by, or whether it is an article of clothing we can wear, it is something that our parents intend that we use. They put it into our hands, and it is at our discretion.

God is no different in this. Only in our case, He is dealing with an aspect of His nature—the major aspect of His nature. He has already given us His love. Now, what are we going to do with it? That is the question before both God and man whenever this occurs. And the understanding is that we have been called of Him. He has elected us. We have repented. We believe in Him. He has given us His Spirit. Now we are committed in the baptism, which is a public show of our commitment, we are committed to using what He has given to us in a way that will bring honor and glory to Him, and will help to create growth within us.

So, it remains for us to seek and discover what it is that He wants us to do. Some things that He wants us to do are very clear, while at the same time we dare not presume that we are already doing them well enough, and that God is satisfied with the way that we are using them.

There is a very interesting scripture in this regard, and it is found in Philippians 3. The reason I think it is so interesting is that, here it is an apostle writing this thing! I mean, apostles—they have it made, do they not? I mean, they are already totally holy; they are glowing already while they are on the earth, right? And they just about have immortality and everything that goes with it! They do not have a problem in the world, right? They just breeze through life. They are never tempted. They never do anything wrong!

But that is not what the apostle Paul said!

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ . . .

There is the goal: to gain Christ! To come to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Philippians 3:9-12 . . . and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the

fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

He does not sound like he has is made, does it? Here he was pushing himself on and on, striving—fighting with his mind; fighting with his body; striving to overcome it; praying; studying; fasting, humbling himself before other people—whatever it took to achieve the resurrection from the dead; and to be found in Christ Jesus at that time. He did not think that he had it made by a long shot.

Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead . . .

"Reaching" means, "straining!" We began this series by saying that Christ never hid it from His disciples that what He was calling them for was going to be difficult. It was not going to be something easily achieved. What we are dealing with is not so much the effort that we would expend in muscular activity, but rather the effort at overcoming human nature—the drives of pride; the drive of anger; the drives of frustration; the drives of bitterness; the drives of impatience; turning ourselves away from gratifying the self. When the temper begins to flare because we think that somebody "done us wrong."

And, exerting every spiritual effort that is within us to fight those things, and overcome the fears that constrain us, and keep us from doing the things that are right, pleasing, and good in God's eyes, and would be considered by Him to be holy, and pure. That is the kind of effort that He made, and that is the kind of effort that God wants us to make.

Philippians 3:14-15 . . . I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature . . .

If I were a betting man, I would say that this is probably the same word that is translated in other places, "perfect" (*telios*).

Philippians 3:15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind [straining toward the high calling of Jesus Christ]; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

God is on the job. He loves us. In His mercy and in His good time, He will correct us; He will bring things to our attention; He will patiently work with us; He will remind us; He will make every kind, generous, and good effort on His part to urge us to go in a certain direction. Then if we will not, He will hit us with a baseball bat. Whatever it takes, He is going to do everything in His power to save us. Please do not get hit with baseball bats.

God is capable. He will do what has to be done. Look at what He did with Jonah. I will bet you that was a scary ride that he had! More scary than anything at Six Flags. And all the while he was going there, he was in the process of being digested by that great fish. That was not a pleasant experience. I bet you that when he came out of there he did not have any color left in him! As white as a ghost. And then, the embarrassment of being vomited up on the shore. The Assyrians have legends about him coming into the city. They remembered it, and they recorded it.

That was not a pleasant experience for Jonah to go through, but God had a job for Jonah to do, and Jonah was going to do it! After that, he cooperated very *willingly*. One great fish was enough for Jonah! I hope we do not have to get hit with the baseball bat, or whatever it might be, to learn the lessons.

Philippians 3:16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk [do not slip back!] by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

When you connect these things with the first revelations that God gave to mankind in Genesis 1, and especially verses 26, God established the pattern by showing that each creature was created according to its kind—fish, birds, insects, etc., each according to its kind, so that it would reproduce after its kind. Then, as with all creatures, God planned to reproduce His kind.

John 10:30-36 "I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified [speaking of Himself] and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Consider carefully the context because it removes any doubt about the implications of Psalm 82:6 (and Psalm 8:5) where it states that we are a little lower than *Elohim*. Here is our Savior saying not just that you and I are gods, but even these unconverted Jews are gods. Now, if unconverted people qualify according to Psalm 82, then what, pray tell, must those who have the Spirit of God qualify for? We are at least that high. And, certainly in that one sense, we are much closer to the purpose for which God is drawing all of mankind, because we have the Spirit of God.

We have to remember, though, that we, like they, are only the raw material. Herbert W. Armstrong used to explain how the earth was not created in a finished condition. It was created in an unfinished condition, and that Adam and Eve, like the angels before them, were to dress and keep what God had given them. The earth is filled with the raw materials that mankind can use their creative ability upon to create societies and cultures.

Man himself was not created in a finished condition. He is the raw material for the Great Creator who is reproducing Himself, and in a sense, He is dressing and keeping us toward the purpose that He is drawing all of mankind! But in this case, the raw material has to cooperate with God and His purpose in order for the goal—the purpose—to be reached. So, we are not yet God. But, we are in the image of God. We have God-like potential, and even more, now, because we have the divine nature.

There is another interesting example in John 5 that plays on this.

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father [now listen to this last clause:], making Himself equal with God.

The Jews recognized that a real son is in fact equal to his father. And Jesus agreed!

John 5:22-23 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son [now look at this!], that all should honor the Son just as [in the same way; in the same manner; to the same degree] they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

God has committed judgment to the Son for the purpose that all should honor the Son with the same respect and worship that they honor the Father with. Why? Because they are both equal as God. And God is worthy of worship.

It is not a question of authority. Jesus plainly said that, “The Father is greater than I.” It is a matter of equality in terms of both being God; in terms of both being the same kind; of the same family.

It is exactly the same in the human realm. Newborn babies are just as much human as their parents. They are of the same family, of the same kind, and they have the same potential. But at the same time, the parents are greater in terms of age, education, experience, character, wisdom, discernment, independence, and authority. And that is the way that it is going to be with us in the family of God as well.

Some people are afraid to use the phrase, “Just as much God as God is God.” Well, is a baby just as much human as his parents are? Of course it is! Everybody recognizes the difference in authority; the difference of age; the difference of wisdom, and all of those things. It is going to be the same way in our relationship with God. This bears very heavily upon the goal that we are being prepared for, because there are those who are saying that we are not going to be God, but some lesser being. We are not going to be a lesser

being. You cannot be of the same kind and be less. There is no such thing! It defies the logic of the laws of this universe!

Notice, quickly, how the apostle Paul explained this. Here is the process that Jesus Christ went through in a very brief explanation, and it is the same process that you and I are going to go through.

Romans 1:3-4 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh [Here is Jesus Christ's physical generation], and declared [announced, pronounced, proclaimed] to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, [and here is His spiritual generation] by the resurrection from the dead.

Here is the *Archegos*; the Pioneer; the Author of our salvation; the Captain of our salvation; the One who is going on before. He is establishing the pattern that we are going to follow on our way into the Kingdom of God. It is what we have not attained to, but because of the revelation of God, it is what we can look forward to, and it is what we are to make our efforts to achieve just like the apostle Paul explained, making every effort, straining to reach out and apprehend that for which he was apprehended by Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

The Firstborn from the dead. If there is a firstborn, there must be others who are going to be born. Jesus is setting the pattern.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

That in a nutshell is God's purpose for all. I do not know how it could be said any more clearly, or more succinctly. "He [God] has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." What is His Son? He has been declared the Son of God by a resurrection. Jesus Christ is God. He is worthy of

worship. He is equal to the Father. He is everything, in one sense, that the Father is, except that the Father bears greater authority than the Son does.

Now, our destiny is to be conformed to the image of His Son. How can we be anything less than what He is, except in terms of authority?

“. . . That He might be the firstborn among *many* brethren.” It is obvious that God expects more to be born into His Family, and that they are going to be in the image of His Son.

I Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Well, is that not interesting? The image of Jesus Christ? Jesus is God. Jesus is a spirit. Jesus was born into the Family of God. Jesus is equal to the Father in terms of being God, but lesser in authority.

Now, here comes the *Archegos*, the Last Adam, who became a life-giving spirit. You are going to be spirit. The pattern is set.

I Corinthians 15:46-49 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

These people who tell you that you are going to be something less than God are not reading the same book as we are. Or, if they are reading the same book as we are, they are not looking at it through the same eyes and heart of understanding that we are. They do not have the same revelation that we have, and they are not walking the same path any longer as we are. They are now headed toward a different goal, unfortunately.

As a result of this, they cannot bend their efforts to conform to the image of Jesus Christ. It is a very sad state of affairs. You change the goal, you change the person.

I hope you are praying about that. We are going to be conformed to the image of what we are shooting for. And brethren, I want for you the greatest goal that there could possibly be, because you are going to conform yourself to that goal. Any kid who wants to be an athlete, such as a basketball player, conforms himself to that image by pounding a basketball on the court, on the street, or anywhere all the time, day or night, because he is going to get out of the ghetto, or he is going to do it because he is going to become a great basketball player, and so conforms himself to that image. He is going to conform himself to that he wants to become.

And that is what God wants you and I to conform to—the image of the Great God, because that is the goal.

I Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

That is so clear.

I John 3:1-3 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 [specifically] 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. [And I am aiming for this verse.] And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Do you know why John put that in there? Because that is the way that you take on the image of God that you are shooting for. In this case, it is a matter of purity. I will also insert another word here, it is a matter of holiness. The words “pure” and “holy” can almost be interchanged. The words “holy” and “clean” can be also.

Now, the word “holy” connotes a great deal more than that, but for the purposes of this sermon, it is good enough. This sermon will at least be partly on this subject—purifying ourselves so that we can strain forward toward the goal that lies before us.

I hope, brethren, that you are taking these sermons to heart. To me, it really thrills me, because we did not collaborate in any way about the subject materials this year. I did not ask anybody to speak on any single subject at all; not even a sermonette. I did make a suggestion to Richard, but it was something that he had already decided upon before I got to him. I did not say a word to any other person.

You are being taught how to purify yourself. We understand that it is not easy to do this, because we are fighting against that pride that is within us. Our egos demand a great deal of attention. It wants to be gratified at all times. But, unfortunately, it cannot be gratified if we are going to attain to the image of Christ. What it is seeking—our human nature—is seeking what is diametrically opposite to the image of God. Human nature is self-seeking. And God's nature is other-seeking.

Turn to Luke 12. This is Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount.

Luke 12:32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

God is not against us. Even though the way is difficult. And fighting against our pride, and being willing to really open up ourselves, and being the kind of person He wants us to be—child-like; humble; kind; good; generous; not always so defensive; not flaring up and trying to protect ourselves all the time; but actually opening ourselves up to more pain by being kind, generous, and merciful. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It's His will that we be there, and so He is going to be working with us, and helping us get there.

What we are talking about, brethren, is not salvation, but rather it is growth, and a greater and greater likeness and image of Jesus Christ. God has set His mind on saving us, and we are going to have to fight awfully hard against Him for us not to be saved.

But isn't it much better to cooperate with Him? Look at how much greater life is going to be the more that we are like God! That is why the encouragement, admonitions, and exhortations are given in the Word to be like God, because it makes life better. He just wants to give us good things!

Luke 12:32-34 . . . for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where the goal is that you are trying to conform to, that is where your heart will be. That is where you will make the efforts to attain to; where your energies will go.

Here we find ourselves in the time at the close of an age. And so there are a great number of exhortations, especially from Jesus regarding the times, and how we are to make the most use of those times while we have the time. The context continues in verse 35:

Luke 12:35-40 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Who would have ever thought that the thief that He speaks of, here, would be Satan the Devil, creeping into the church, and stealing away truth! It happened! All of us, including myself, were asleep for quite a period of time. We watched it happen, and wondered and fretted and worried about what to

do. We did not want to walk away from family. We did not want to walk away from friends. We did not want to walk away from a job, or whatever it was, and it was not an easy decision to make.

It sounds crazy, but it was not an easy decision to follow truth, rather than money, friendships, or family. But we have done that. It is probably not appreciated by very many people that you did it, but you did it.

Luke 12:31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

In the context, He is talking about material things. But if you will reflect back on what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3, he said that even though you do not fully understand, God will even reveal that unto you.

If we are seeking the Kingdom of God, not only will God take care of our material needs, He will also—because He loves us, and because He is working toward His purpose, and because we are yielding unto Him, trying to seek His Kingdom as best as we possibly can—add what we do not know. He will provide for us. Remember II Peter 1:2? He has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness. He keeps adding to it, and adding to it.

And so, if we are seeking the Kingdom of God, we can be sure that because He loves us He will keep adding to all that He has given us.

A man was telling me before services that when we hear a sermon, we hear some things that are old that we already knew. But in almost every sermon, it opens up something new, too, something that he had not understood, or noticed before. It is almost like a can of worms. You do not always know what to do with it. So you fish around with it until you catch hold of something, and then you go off on it.

That is the way God is sometimes. I can give a sermon, or any one of these other men can give a sermon, or a sermonette, and you will not hear the whole thing, because it is very likely that in the midst of that sermon or sermonette, you are going to hear something that never quite made sense before, and now the lights comes on! That is God! He is revealing what you

did not know before, and adding a little bit more of the image of Jesus Christ that you get to work on, and make a part of your character.

But you know what? It only happens to those who seek Him.

I was explaining to another man how that this seeking or becoming like God comes in two parts. The first part is something that only God can do. That is part of His revealing Himself. No matter how hard or long we seek Him, as we saw in Ecclesiastes, no man can ever find out what is going on, and it is confirmed in I Corinthians 2:9-15 or so, where we have had this revealed to us by God's Spirit. It is a mystery that is not difficult to solve; it is a mystery that is impossible to penetrate.

God, by a miracle, opens up our minds to it, and that is something that only He can do, and something that you need to take a great deal of correct type of pride and awe and sense of wonder about, because He chose you! You had nothing to do with it. It had nothing to do with the kind of person you are. It had nothing to do with your qualities. It had nothing to do with how great you were. It was completely an act of mercy on God's part for His purpose.

That is something that is completely beyond our control, but after that we play a very important part in this purification process. Jesus has established the priorities: "Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Here is where the effort for purification comes: We are to seek. Now the word "seek" normally brings to mind the thought of searching for, especially for something that is lost or hidden; but it also means to strive for (look it up in Webster's); it means to try to get or obtain; we use it in the sense of a person's seeking attention. They are striving—seeking to attain it.

In this case, it is the second definition that applies, because we are involved in something that has already been revealed. God has revealed Himself, but now we have to seek after, that is, we have to strive to attain, the Kingdom of God.

Now, there is another aspect of this work that appears most frequently in the Old Testament, and it bears heavily on our understanding of what it means to seek for something. Turn back to Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while He may be found . . .

Notice that! While He *may be* found. He has already been revealed. We know from the New Testament that He cannot be found unless He reveals Himself. He has already revealed Himself to the Israelitish people. And so the advice and admonishment to the Israelites is:

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

I hope you can tell from the context there that "seek" in the context in which it is used (this is most of the time in the Old Testament), with the understanding that God has already revealed Himself to the Israelites. He did not reveal Himself to the degree that He has revealed Himself to you and me, but He did reveal Himself sufficient for His purpose for them, for something that was merely material. But for us, the revelation has been much greater, because He has revealed Himself to us for spiritual purposes, that we might be born of Him into His Family.

So, the revelation to us has been much greater, much clearer. And what that puts on us is greater responsibility. To whom much is given, much is required.

But we have a lot more to work with too. God is very fair. He deals in justice. He has given us sufficient of the divine nature to do whatever it is He will call upon us to do. He is very fair. He goes overboard in being fair.

In actuality, then, understanding that God has already revealed Himself to us, "seek Me" means "turn to Me." That is explained right there in verse 7:

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; . . .

Is that not clear? That is what “seek Me” means.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .

"Seek . . . righteousness" by turning away from what? It is not said, but everybody knows that it is iniquity. You turn away from sin, you turn toward righteousness. You turn away from sin, you turn toward the Kingdom of God. You turn away from sin, you turn toward God.

It is not a matter of just turning. I think you understand that what it is figuring or picturing is becoming like, or doing like God does. This is how the purification takes place. It is not complicated, though it is hard to do. It is a process, and simple to understand.

Amos 5:4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live."

With that understanding of what the word “seek” means, what is He saying? Turn away from death. Turn toward life. What is it that causes death? The wages of sin is death. What is it that gives life? God gives life. Christ became a Life-giving Spirit. Turn from what you are doing, and turn toward God. Seek God and live.

Amos 5:5 But do not seek Bethel . . .

Do you know what they were doing at Bethel? It was very likely that they were keeping some form of the feasts of God. Bethel was a shrine associated with Jacob, where he had his encounter with God. Jacob called it "the house of God." It was a scary place to him, because God was there. Jacob was quite carnal then. God is everywhere. But, that is where he had his encounter, and so he called it Bethel, and it became a shrine, and they held their festivals there.

But in reality, it was not to the true God. It was to Baal. That is why God told them to turn back to Him and live. Do not turn to Bethel.

Amos 5:5 Nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing.

Amos 5:21-23 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

He said not to enter Gilgal. That was another shrine. He said not to pass over to Beersheba; that was another shrine. That is where they held their feasts. With that thought, go through chapter 5, and as you get toward the end of the chapter, verse 21, it has all the earmarks of keeping a festival, of keeping a feast. He says, "I hate, I despise your feast days." He talks about sacrifice, and the giving of offerings in verse 22, and He talks about singing songs in verse 23. He said He does not want to hear any of it. But rather, "turn unto Me and live!"

Their offerings were not acceptable to Him, because the people's lives did not match the image of God that He had set for them to live up to.

Amos 5:6 Seek the LORD and live . . .

Why could God say these things?

Amos 3:2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth . . .

He had revealed Himself to them! Turn to me and live.

Amos 5:14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you . . .

It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom of God. Seek first the Kingdom of God, turn to God and live.

Now, those who do this are, of course, going to live. And "live," I think we are beginning to understand in the biblical sense, has two qualities. First is eternal life, and that is the one we think of most. The second is equally important, and it is a quality of life, the way that God lives. Eternal life would only be beneficial to a person if they are living the quality of life that God is living. You would not want to live eternally as a demon. They are absolutely miserable.

So in order to live happily for all eternity, we have to begin to practice His way of life now. But, we are never going to do that perfectly. I do not think God expects that. God is, in one sense, very tolerant and patient. But, He wants us to have the attitude, and to show it in our lives that we are going to strive with all our might to be that way—to reach for perfection. And when we do not make it, and we become so frustrated, and full of guilt, He does not want us to have that. If we are like that, we have a problem understanding God. There is a bit of God's mind missing.

You know very well with your own children, how quickly and easily you forgive them their shortcomings. You do not want them to stay that way, but at the same time, you still love them, and you want them to grow, you want them to overcome, you want them to become greater and better at everything than you are. God put those feelings and understandings in us so that we can understand the way that He deals with us.

He is not looking to boot us out of His Family, but yet He wants us to strive for perfection—to grow and overcome, and increase in the image of God.

In Jeremiah 29 there is an interesting insight:

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

Now we might think that under such conditions as the aftermath of the tribulation that God would take it easy on them. Let us take a look again.

Jeremiah 29:12-13 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Even then.

God is not a parent who spoils His kids by giving them everything they want without conditions. God measures His blessing out to us so that it will not spoil us.

Remember I mentioned in the sermon the other day that God designs trials for us, or He allows us to fall into trials that He did not necessarily design, but they are there; and He arranged it so that we are faced with putting forth the greatest amount of effort to overcome it. When we go through that, and go through it successfully, we understand two things: 1) We never would have made it without God's help. And, 2) because we put forth every bit of effort that we did, this thing is now written on my heart, and it belongs to me. It is part of me now.

When something is given to us without qualification, we have no respect for it. We do not really feel that it is a part of us. In fact, we get to the place where we think it is owed to us. Unfortunately, an awful lot of people in the United States and Canada now feel that way. They think that life is owed to them, and they have developed a welfare mentality. I do not mean that everybody on welfare are the only ones with a welfare mentality. Even people who are working can have a welfare mentality.

But God does not raise children that way. So, He makes us put forth a great deal of effort. "Narrow is the gate, and strait the way that leads to life." And the reason for that is, when we are done, what we are is going to truly be us. God will be able to entrust us with the power of un-ending life, because He knows that we will never depart from what is written on our heart.

The reason we have such difficulty now, is because what is written in our hearts is not what He wants to be part of our character. You can see how difficult it is to overcome these things. Even a simple thing like wanting

people to call me by my first name, John; how hard it is for some to overcome that? All our church lives it has been inscribed within us that my first name is “Mister.” I know you mean well. It just comes out that way.

That is the way it is with the rest of our character too. The temper just flares, but something has to be done to hold it in check. The mouth just lets loose with its gossip. We know better, but it comes out, and it needs to be repented of. It needs to be held in check.

You see, when we hold it in check, that is when we are seeking the Kingdom of God. That is when we are biting our tongue, to hold that nature in check. When our mind is finally getting to the place where we think before we speak. It is hard to come by. As James says, the tongue is a flame that sets the world on fire. Such a little member, but, boy, it does cause the division.

The tongue, though, is just the instrument. The problem is the pride. Understand that. That pride is seeking to elevate the self over somebody else. That pride is seeking to take control of the situation. That pride is seeking to justify actions, but the tongue speaks the words.

I dare say that the last thing we will overcome will be pride.

When that pride acts, we have to be very careful that our pride does not react with someone else’s pride in a wrong way. It is not easy. When you do those things, we are seeking the Kingdom of God.

We saw the example of Christ, who let His life be taken away before He would strike back. He let the resurrection vindicate Him. There was a Man who had humility! All the power of the universe was at His fingertips, and all He had to do was speak the word, but He controlled Himself.

To me, the most impressive miracle that Jesus did was when they were on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus was asleep during the storm. The boat was pitching and tossing, and they were frightened terribly. “Lord! Save us! How can you sleep?” And Jesus spoke the words to the wind, and it stopped. He spoke to the waves, “Be still,” and it stopped. What kind of power is that where even nature obeys? That is the kind of power we are going to have, but it is going to be given to those who, like Jesus, have control of their pride.

Now, if I was to ask you which of the foundational doctrines listed Hebrews 6 has the most written about it, especially in the New Testament, which one would you say? Let us review that.

Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

There are seven listed there. Which one has the most written about it in the New Testament? What would you say? I will tell you. It is the one that is very rarely ever mentioned by name, but it is also the one that is in the foreground of every sermon given. And not only that, it is the only one that the other six does not directly play into this question. It is the first one mentioned: *Let us go on to perfection* .

Brethren, what we are to seek God for now is what He has revealed of Himself in His perfection. We are to seek His perfection.

The Protestant world has correctly broken down the conversion process into four major categories.

First, there is the initial calling, which leads to faith toward Jesus Christ, and repentance toward God.

Second is justification, which is the effect of faith toward Jesus Christ, and repentance before God. Justification is the state of being right, or cleared of guilt before God, and therefore, accepted by Him. Much of what is written in Romans and Galatians covers this important subject; it was one of the major issues of the first century church, a thing they had to face, because God revealed to them that being cleared of guilt, being justified before God, was not something that any person could ever do by work. Keeping the law would never suffice because the offering of the persons was already dirty, and defiled because of sin.

The only thing that could clear a person would be a perfect sacrifice. And, that was the work of Jesus Christ. We are cleared of guilt, we are justified, we are accepted before God, not on the basis of our works, but because of God. His grace grants the life and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—His blood—be the means of forgiveness. Therefore we are in a state of justification.

Third is sanctification unto holiness.

Fourth is glorification by means of the resurrection from the dead, the transforming of our mortal bodies.

Now, of the four stages, it is the third stage which the overwhelming number of us are in, and it is the one that is the most time consuming, and personally difficult, and in one sense, the most dangerous, because it is in this area that we are most likely to lose our way through impatience, discouragement, loss of vision, or some other thing. But the emphasis in the Bible—emphasis in terms of the messages, exhortation, admonishments, instruction that are in the Bible—is overwhelmingly on the third stage, sanctification.

The Bible is filled from one end to the other with ethical advice, moral advice, and spiritual advice that pertains to this third stage. It is all given with the third stage in mind, leading to the fourth! It is in the third stage that the greatest amount of transformation and change from the glory of man to the glory of Christ takes place.

Here is a definition of sanctification that comes from the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

The realization or progressive attainment of likeness to God for God's intention for men. It may be regarded both as a status conferred by divine grace, and as a goal to be aimed at; as a biblical doctrine, it belongs more to the New Testament than the Old Testament, but it presupposes the fundamental Old Testament conception of holiness.

This is the real preparation stage for the Kingdom of God! This is the stage in which the transformation takes place, because from the time of

justification all the way to the person's death is taken into consideration within the sanctification stage.

In my case, I have been in this stage 33 years. I know of at least one other person here who has been baptized longer than I have, back in 1957. She's been in that stage at least two or three years longer than I have.

God has allowed us a long time to be transformed to the image of His Son. So, it is sanctification, but it has an aim unto holiness so that we can be glorified. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God is holy, therefore we should be holy (I Peter 1:16).

Now what we have here is a doctrine that is called by three different names in the Bible. It is called, "Going on to Perfection;" it is called, "Sanctification;" it is called, "Holiness." But, it is also loosely referred to as growing, changing, or overcoming.

Now, I have been concentrating on this third stage since the beginning of the Church of the Great God, because I feel that it has either been largely neglected, or misunderstood. The result of this was that the focus of attention became on what the church leader was doing, rather than what God was doing with us. The notion generally being that as long as one is supporting what the leader is doing, everything else in the person's spiritual growth will be taken care of. But, if that is so, why is so much written in the New Testament about this doctrine stressing the individual's responsibility to God?

In my last sermon that I will give in this series here at the Feast, I am going to play just a few minutes of a tape of Herbert Armstrong, and you will be able to tell from this tape that he was an old, old man. Unfortunately, when he spoke this, it was not dated. But you can tell by his voice that it was quite late, and you will be surprised at what he says about why you were called. It was a sermon he gave in the Auditorium in Pasadena. They then broke it down into two or three radio broadcast messages.

The preaching of the gospel is only indirectly the work of God. Preaching the gospel is part of the church's overall responsibility, and that responsibility is loosely divided into feeding the flock, and preaching the

gospel. And of the two, the feeding of the flock is exceedingly more important. Why is that?

Because the preaching of the gospel develops out of, grows out of feeding the flock. If you do not feed the flock, you kill the golden goose. We cannot get the cart ahead of the horse.

Now, the years we spent in the Worldwide Church of God were well spent. I do not mean in any way to put it down. It did prepare us for what has taken place to some degree. We need to go on, and pay some attention to this, so that we are prepared for the next push that God makes. And He will make another push. He will use us in whatever way He desires, and I want us to be ready, and I want us to be ready because we are holy. And if we are holy, God will use us in a way that will be effective, and will stand this world on its ear! Do you understand that is what made the first century witness of those people so powerful and effective? So much so, that the Gentiles said these people turned the world upside down! It was the spiritual state of the people.

You can see it in the book of Acts; you can see it especially in the writings of Paul; and it becomes absolutely vivid in the writings of Peter, John, James, and Jude. The further the church got from their beginning in 31 AD, they began to lose their spirituality, and the witness became weaker and weaker until it was not even there. And sin took over the church.

When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, 31 AD, Jesus Christ had prepared a church and it was holy! And God responded to the degree that His people were. So much so, that when they prayed, the walls shook. That is being close to God. There is no reason we cannot be that way too. There is no reason why we cannot conform more and more unto the image of God, and then let Him decide how and where He is going to use us.

We should be of the same mind and attitude as the apostle Paul, who even with as much growth as that man had, he wrote in the book to the Philippians that he was still straining with all his might that he might obtain. That is a high calling. Not everybody is going to be an apostle Paul. But all of us can do better than we have done in the past.

I feel strongly that God wants the witness to be made by those who truly reflect His image and likeness.

Think about Israel: Why did they fail? They failed because they did not bear the likeness of the God who made the covenant with them. It is a lesson in tragedy. God knew it would occur. But it should not occur with the Israel of God, because He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. He has given us His divine nature, and we can do much better than we have ever done in the past. I think that the witness shall show it.

We could go on to other things, which I will only just mention here in passing: There is a very real danger in focusing on what the leader is doing. I do not mean that there should not be some of that, because there should be some—because you have to follow a leader. Paul said to follow him as he followed Christ. But when we focus on what the human leader is doing, there is a tendency to forget what *we* should be doing. So we have to look at what the leader is doing in relation to what we should be doing.

But the real Leader is Jesus Christ, and so we have to be working always to live up to His image. I think that church history shows us that what occurred is it lulls the individual Christian into forgetting about his own responsibility to go on to perfection. I do not want that to happen.

Remember these things from Jesus' preaching. In John 8, the people said that they were Abraham's seed. That was where their security was placed. If we could put that into modern vernacular, they thought they were going to be saved because they were Abraham's seed. Jesus came back at them and said, "If you were Abraham's seed, you would be doing what Abraham did. Abraham never tried to kill Me." They were not in the image of Abraham. Were they reflecting the qualities of Abraham's life? Of course not.

So, who were they witnessing of? Jesus told them that their father was Satan. That was the image of their lives. But, their security and confidence was that they were Abraham's seed.

Go back to the Old Testament in thought. In Jeremiah 7 God spoke in the first person, “Do not say anymore, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’” The modern equivalent is, “I’m in the church!” That is where their security was. God said, “Hey, cut that out! Amend your ways.”

See? That is what happened to us in these last ten to fifteen years. We slipped away from that. That is why Herbert Armstrong said at the end of his life, “Get the church ready.” He knew what the problem was, but he lacked the physical vitality to do it anymore. I think God inspired that. The church was not ready, and He knew it, because the focus had been in other directions.

Brethren, we have had good preparation. The teachings through Herbert Armstrong were right on—those things pertaining to doctrine, morality, and ethics. We are not going to go wrong following those things. They were right.

But during these last 15, 20 years, we slipped away from the church’s main responsibility: A shepherd, and that includes Herbert W. Armstrong, the first thing you do is take care of the sheep. When the shepherd leaves the sheep to do some other job, what is going to happen? What happened when Mr. Armstrong left Pasadena? It is written all over our history.

We have had a witness, so we ought to understand where we all have to make our efforts. We need to do what it says in the book of Jude, to get back to the faith once delivered, because we are going through a form of what happened in the first century church. Men have come creeping in unawares, and are destroying truth from within.

We have to begin to work on purifying ourselves, called in the Bible, sanctification; called in the Bible, holiness. It uses both terms, and it might surprise you, they are both the same term from the Greek (*hagiasmos*).

But the English word, sanctification, has a slightly different meaning than the English word, holiness, does. The translators decided that if the context called for it, they would use the word holy or holiness. Otherwise, they would use sanctify or sanctification. Holiness draws a person’s attention to purity; cleanliness like God is clean and pure. Sanctification draws attention

to being set apart for a specific use. We are sanctified unto holiness; purity of character. Unto the pure, all things are pure. But to the defiled, nothing is pure. They see dirty things in everything.