

**Abundant Life—Today and Tomorrow #5;
Become Teachable**

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Well, brethren, as you are aware, I've been covering with my eight messages during this year's festival, the topic of "Abundant Life, Today and Tomorrow." Because, according to the base text that I've given you—and I've repeated it a number of times—Jesus Christ said in John 10:10 that, "He came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly." That's a very simple statement that is very easy to read past, and yet, it defines the very mission of Jesus Christ on this earth at the behest of His Father. And you now understand that was the goal of His entire ministry—the entire gospel—that God gave. Everything is summed up in that statement. He came to give life, and isn't that what we hope for—eternal life in the Family of God, to live forever? But not just life—not just existence of some kind, even in misery and anguish and unfulfilled hopes. No, not just eternal life, but abundant life. And that does not just include the eternity to which we look forward—pictured by the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ—but even abundant life today, even in the midst of this time in which we live in Satan's world, in which we live under the burden, the weight, the heat of the day, of a system of government on this earth which is not God's. And, yet, even with all the trials and difficulties and heartaches and sorrows, God intended that His chosen children—His people—be able to enjoy abundant life.

So my purpose this year is to go through those principles and to try and give you at least some of the key components that God gave in His Scriptures which tell us how to have and how to enjoy that abundant life. So we want to pick up another one of those this morning.

What's the next, important, critical piece? And there are so many of them, I probably could have given you two dozen sermons on specific topics—on elements

of abundant life. And I really just tried to pick out some key building blocks—some foundational pieces that would explain the topic and the principles. But, for this morning, the principle is that those who want to have abundant life must be willing to learn and to grow. We have got to learn to be teachable. Because, brethren, there is no way you and I will ever be able to enjoy the abundance that God desires for us to have, if we are not willing to be taught—if our minds are not malleable in the hands of God so that we learn and continue to grow. You see, when we close the door on that—when we set our minds in concrete and we think we've learned everything there is to know or need to know—and we think we've got it all encapsulated in our own thinking and orientation, then we actually begin to rob ourselves of the abundance that God desires for us to enjoy. Those willing to be teachable have the opportunity to achieve much more than those who are determined to pursue their own way.

So let's go through some of those key elements now that support the fact that God requires us, as His children, to be malleable and to be teachable. Yes, God says we must be teachable—and being teachable implies the willingness to change. Now, that concept can be a negative thing in terms of what we saw in God's Church back in the 1970s when they began to espouse the need to change. So I'm not talking about the idea of changing God's Truth. No, we are talking about change of the self—change of personal humanistic orientation—not change of God at all. And I'm going to clarify that as we go along. But let's begin in Matthew 18 and verse 2. Matthew 18 and here in verse 2:

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

So here, Jesus Christ used the orientation of a little child to help us understand exactly what we have to do in mind and heart in order to be acceptable to God. Now that is not to say that children are little angels. We very often, in the vernacular, say that. But any of you who have had children of your own—and you probably don't have to have children of your own in order to understand—know that they have the same carnal nature that adults do. And that rebelliousness is built into them from the womb. And there are many texts in the Bible that prove

that God gave us that carnal rebellious nature. You've got it, and if you are a human being you had it in the womb before you drew breath. It is there. So what is Christ talking about when He is using little children as an example of what we need to become? The unique thing about a little child, which has just as much carnality as an adult, is that a little child literally will be taught—will be malleable—and will humble itself to the right kind of teaching and direction by parents. Unlike adults. The longer we live and the more we grow to maturity, the more we begin to think that we don't need to be taught anymore. Our school days are over. We've figured things out—either by our own study or our own hard experience—and we think we know the score. We know what to do and how to do it. A little child will manifest rebellion, and, yet, when corrected properly he will respond. And so it is important, brethren, for any of you who have little ones to take advantage of that time while they are young to teach them cardinal principles. Because if you allow them to get into and manifest bad habits, they will ultimately harden like concrete into those habits by the time they are teenagers—and certainly by the time they are young adults. The time to help those children and do the very best you can, is when they are very, very young. And they can and will learn. And you can take advantage of that time to be a blessing to them and to help them. And the parents who do so, then, do their children an immeasurable favor. And those who miss that opportunity while they are young, are condemning those children to a life of difficulty and hardship. You really are. You put a burden upon them, absolutely, by missing that chance to teach them and train them in the right way.

And so that's the thing that Christ is talking about here when He says we have to become like little children. We have to have open, malleable minds that will hear the instruction of a Father and say, "Yes, Lord." A little child can be very selfish and abrasive and do all manner of wrong things, but when properly corrected in love, he literally will manifest a repentance and an orientation of mind that seeks to please the parent. That little child WILL respond and it can and will be taught and will learn and will grow. But the older they get, the more you lose that window of opportunity and that hardness begins to set in. And that's the thing Christ is saying we are as adults—physically, carnally, hardened—thinking we don't need teaching. And yet, we have to be able to recapture and get that malleable orientation we had when we were young ones.

Yes, it does mean the willingness to change from what we are now, and to respond to the correction of our Father. Jeremiah 17 and verse 23. This is God's assessment of His own people—the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 17 and verse 23:

But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.

That is just another way of saying they refused to be teachable. And it wasn't just ancient Israel. They weren't those bad old people as compared to other people. The Israelites were just manifesting the same carnal traits that all human beings do—the same carnal traits that you and I have and manifest. We're just like them. So this is inherently what human beings do. And so we too, by nature, are stiff-necked. That's the description that God uses to show a closed mind which will not be taught. And it's manifested physically by setting that jaw and that neck so that you absolutely refuse to receive any kind of input—let alone direction. You will not be led, will not be helped, will not be directed. And that's the way God described the orientation of ancient Israel, and it was a prophecy for the last days and spiritual Israel—even His own church—even though they were offered the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to overcome the deficits that the ancient Israelites had. They have done the very same thing. And we've seen the very fulfillment of it in the apostasy which has taken place within the body of God's people in the last days. They would not receive instruction. 2 Chronicles 30 and verse 8. 2 Chronicles chapter 30, beginning in verse 8. God says:

Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land.

What a merciful and loving God, that even when we make mistakes and even when we fail and, therefore, bring upon ourselves curses—even as ancient Israel brought upon themselves curses and God allowed them to go into captivity so that they were burdened with slavery to these pagan nations because of their sins—and yet, God says, "My intent is not to curse you forever. If you will finally turn and you will change your orientation and begin to be malleable in my hands;

and pay attention to what I am trying to teach you; and stop resisting and fighting me," God says, "I will yet turn and give you favor—even among your captors—so that you can be blessed."

. . . so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

So He is ever-willing to forgive. And that's all He has ever wanted from His people—to simply respond and to worship Him in the way that He deserves to be honored and respected, and that we should turn ourselves to Him with open minds and hearts to receive His instruction, and simply say, "Yes, Lord."

Proverbs 12, verse 15. Here's the problem, though: It sounds easy—it sounds good—in theory, doesn't it? And we all nod our heads and say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." But the reality is that because of that carnal makeup that you and I have, it's very, very difficult to do. Proverbs 12:15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." And that means all of us, brethren. We are foolish by nature—carnally. This isn't just trying to pick on someone in particular and call them names. We all fall into this category of the foolish—and the foolish is anyone who is separated from God. Any orientation of mind which is not according to God's perfect Truth—His statutes and His judgements—is foolish because it comes to nothing. It's God's way that brings substance and value. And anything apart from that is absolute foolishness. And so, whenever we are separated from God, that makes us absolute fools. That's just the simple truth.

So it says here, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." And that's exactly the way all human beings are. We think we can make our own way. We think we can figure out how to do it. We think we know the keys to happiness—we can sort it out; we have the mental capacity; we have everything we need to rationalize and think out how to lead our lives and how to guide our own steps. We are very, very confident in our abilities. And God looks down and says, "Oh, if they could only see."

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." It's a cardinal principle, brethren, that a wise individual values input from sources other than his own thinking. A wise individual values counsel

from outside sources. Now, what sources? Because you have to be able to pick the right ones and not the wrong ones. How many kings, and how many leaders of nations have absolutely failed because they had the wrong counselors around them giving them bad advice? And so you might say, "Oh, I want to be wise, so I'm not going to lean just to my own understanding, I'm going to get counsel from others." But listen to counsel from the wrong ones and you still end up in the wrong place, don't you? So it's not just a matter of saying, "Oh, I'm open to all suggestions. Anybody who wants to teach me, just write on me and I'll just be a reflection of whatever you tell me to do." No, that's not going to cut it either. But the individual who is absolutely closed-minded and is not going to receive instruction from some legitimate source is not even in the game. And that's the principle here: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

In the same vein, now, back up to Proverbs 9. Proverbs 9 and verse 8: "Reprove not a scorner . . ." And this is really the orientation of one of those who has his mind closed. He doesn't need any instruction; he doesn't need any outside input whatsoever. "I've got the world by the tail. I've got everything I need. Just leave me alone." "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee." Have you ever tried to give advice to somebody who wasn't open to receiving it? Well, do you know what it's like to get your head bitten off? Yeah. "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee." You see, because for people who have the idea that they have everything they need—they are well-adjusted; they have the right orientation; they don't lack anything of value—it's really deflating to have somebody come up and try to give any kind of constructive criticism, because it's basically saying "you are not as perfect as you think you are because here is something I think you can do better." And for the individual who thinks he has it all, that's like a slap in the face.

"Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man," by contrast, "and he will love thee." A wise individual you see, appreciates well-founded, constructive criticism. Now, a wise individual still has to sift. Because somebody might come along who may be very sincere, and they may give you advice, but they might be dead wrong. Because, remember, the source of their wisdom is what? Their own minds. We are all defective. We all have the potential, then, of being led astray and being misguided in our thinking. But a wise individual has trained himself, or herself, to be open to constructive criticism and to weigh

suggestions—input—from other sources and to use that information to their benefit. The ones who accomplish the most—the ones who live most abundantly and are most successful—are the ones who actually parlay the wisdom of other sources and make it their own. You see, you and I don't have to come up with every great idea. The wise are the ones who actually use the proven tenets that others have proven, even by hard experience, and adopt them for themselves and learn from them. You see, it's an orientation of being teachable—of being open—and not assuming that we have everything we need so that we are not open to anymore. We are willing to learn—we are willing to grow.

"Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser." You see, the wise individual is continuing to learn. The wise man or woman never gets too old to learn—never gets to the point where he thinks, "Okay, I've learned everything I need and want. I'm finished learning. Now I am going to be the teacher to everyone else." The wise individual continues to learn for a lifetime—continues to grow. "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning."

So what about you and me? Do we resent being instructed? Do we resent being corrected? I do by nature. I don't want someone telling me that I'm doing something wrong. My initial reaction as a human being, brethren, if somebody gives me criticism is not to say, "Oh, thank you [laughs]." My natural, carnal reaction to criticism is to say, "Hey, wait a minute. I don't need that." Is that the way you are too? Sure. Do we resent having correction—input, instruction—OR, have we learned to be wise enough to put our own vanity aside? That's what we are talking about.

One more: Psalm 143 and verse 10. Psalm 143 verse 10. Here's the orientation of the Psalmist before God—the orientation of a little child that He is looking for. And what does he pray? "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." You see, *there* is somebody who is definitely open and ready to receive the instruction of a wise parent—who isn't hardened as a typical adult, unwilling to hear or to bend, but is seeking, now, the input of His Heavenly Father saying, "Great God, teach me to do thy will." That's exactly what God wants to see in all of us. That's the principle, brethren, that I want to focus on this morning. If you want abundant life today and tomorrow, you have to force yourself to learn to be responsive to the instructions

of our Heavenly Father. He's out there in our daily lives through all the experiences that you and I are going through. He is trying to teach us, and He teaches us through many different avenues, including trials, challenges, problems that we run up against day by day. The question is, do we have open minds? Are we looking for the lessons, or we just saying, "It must be bad luck." Or else, "Maybe God is against me. Why is He being so mean to me? Why can't God just give me a break?" And yet, we're having one bad thing—one challenge—after another and you can hardly get through one before something else comes up. Isn't our natural orientation: "Just give me a break"? When really what we should be doing is getting on our knees and saying, "God teach me. What is it that you want me to learn? What is it you want me to see and how do you want me to respond based upon these experiences?" It's those with malleable minds, who are open to the instruction of their Heavenly Father who, then, will learn and continue to grow and can expect, then, to enjoy abundant life. As I've already told you, don't define that abundance as smooth sailing without any problems whatsoever in life. If that's your expectation, you are going to be sorely disappointed.

The abundance that God is speaking of, yes, is to provide everything we need physically, but most importantly, everything we need spiritually to grow and to accomplish—to grow closer to Him and to feel satisfied, to feel fulfilled and enriched. And that you can have—even in the midst of physical trials in this world of Satan. You see, when we learn to put all of the pieces together—to have total and absolute peace of mind even in the midst of tumultuous circumstances in the world—then we are going to have it figured out. And that's what God is teaching us.

We have to keep our minds open to instruction. But if you shut down and say, "I don't need to learn anything else; I just need other people to do what they are supposed to do," or "I need God to give me a break and if that happens, then I can be happy." If that's our orientation, we are not going to experience the abundance that God desires us to have. God is continually trying to reach out to you and to me and to have us hear and to respond—to learn and to grow. Don't shut it out, brethren. Don't decide you don't need that lesson. "I'm going to close the book on that particular lesson and go on to something else." Pay attention to what God may be trying to tell you.

Are we satisfied with our current level of abundance? Do you have all the abundance in life that you need or want? If so, maybe you don't need any more training. But if you would like to be a little bit more blessed in one or more aspects of your life, if you would like to have more abundance in your life today—more abundance, more joy, more satisfaction, more peace of mind—if you have room for more abundance, then the other key, brethren, is to be teachable; be willing to hear and respond to what God wants you to see.

Here are a couple of principles that I learned in the corporate world before I came to help Mr. Raymond Cole in serving the church—and I've used these in sermons in years past. I went through all of this management training, and as a young person it was really valuable, and I was able not only to get book learning in management principles but to be able to put them into practice on the job. And I really was able to verify the validity of a number of principles because they are obviously rooted in spiritual principles of God. But here are a couple of them: "Unless things change, they remain the same." Now, that almost seems stupidly simplistic, doesn't it? Well, of course. It either changes or stays the same—one or the other. Well, how do you apply it? If you're not happy where you stand right now, if you are not content with your current circumstances, it's not going to be any different or get any better unless something changes, right? Now, if you are happy where you are and you are content with your current level of abundance in life, don't change a thing. Stay just like you are. Lock yourself into that current orientation of mind and say, "I don't want anything to change a bit." But if you are not totally satisfied with yourself right now or your circumstances; if you are not totally happy with the control of your mind; if you don't have total satisfaction and fulfillment and peace that God says we can and should have, then what needs to happen? Unless things change, they remain the same.

The other principle is: "We are perfectly organized today to get the results we've been getting." We are perfectly organized today to get the results we've been getting. It's really another way of stating the same principle. How did I use it in the workplace? The companies that I worked for would actually send me in to take over operations of corporate offices that were not running well—either because the service to our customers was abysmal, and was damaging the company reputation, or else the cost of doing business was causing us to lose money, or usually a combination of both. Losing money and providing poor customer service is a formula for failure. So they would send me in to do these

kinds of operations to take it over and to try and fix what was broken. So you can imagine how popular I was when I arrived on the scene [laughs]. It can be very, very scary, and especially when you've got an office full of employees that want to do a good job, but it's not organized and things are not put together in the way to allow people to be successful. But an organization that's been failing, then, has a tendency to destroy itself from within and to implode. But invariably, I would come in and I would spend X number of weeks just learning what they were doing and how they were doing their work. I didn't come in with a bunch of ideas on how to make changes overnight. The first thing you have to do is diagnose what's going on. And so I would watch and listen and get to know the personnel—not only the rank-and-file employees, but especially the managers and supervisors. It was really, really interesting. I would sit in on management meetings with the leadership and I'd ask questions and everybody agreed that they weren't happy with the results. They wanted better results, they wanted lower costs and they wanted better service to the customer, and yet, when I started trying to pin it down and ask, "Well, what do you think we need to change in order to accomplish this?" And very few were willing to change anything—especially if it was going to affect their particular area. Everyone was very, very defensive and it's a natural human tendency. And so you go around and try to find out, "Okay, how are we going to turn the ship around? What about this? What about that?" "Oh no, no, no, we've always done it this way—can't touch that. It's a sacred cow." Unless things change, they remain the same. If you don't like the results you're getting, what are you going to do to get a different result? You're perfectly organized today to get the results you've been getting. If you are happy with the results—if your customers are happy and your upper management is happy—don't change a thing. Keep doing what you're doing. But if you're not happy—if you are actually on a downhill slide on your way to oblivion, then you had better change something.

So how do you and I apply that spiritually, brethren? Are you happy—are you totally satisfied with where you are right now in mind and heart? Are you confident that you measure up to the fullness of the image of Jesus Christ? And are we really receiving and enjoying the fullness of the abundance that God said He wants us to have, both physically and spiritually? And if not—if not—what are you and I going to do to change? How are we going to get where we want to be if we are not happy with our current state? Unless things change, they stay the same.

I can't help but think about some of the examples that Mr. Raymond Cole used to give—because he would talk about trials. You know, when you have one of those trials in life, whatever it might be, and you feel like at the end of the day you failed it—you were faced with this challenge, and because of where you were in thinking at the time, you hit the panic button and you did the wrong thing; you disobeyed rather than obeyed God. You tried to save yourself through some backdoor method and it didn't work out well; and you were not happy with the outcome; and you feel guilty over it and you've asked God for forgiveness; and you want to get back on the horse. And do you know what God typically does? Somewhere in the near future he usually gives you an opportunity to repeat that trial—maybe in a different way. And, you see, we interpret that as, "God, please lighten up. I've already been through this crisis; now here comes another one." Well, you can either look at it negatively or else you can say, "Well, if I failed the first exam, God in His mercy is giving me an opportunity for a makeup exam." He is a benevolent teacher. Rather than giving you one exam and when you fail it, He says, "Oops, that's an F. That goes on your permanent record—no mercy." But, you see, our God—who is a wonderful and benevolent teacher and wants your success and my success above all else—wants us to get passing grades. So if we fail an exam—let's say a faith trial—it is very, very likely that we will get a makeup exam. Now, if you look at it negatively that means it's another trial—you have trial after trial after trial. But if we keep failing and failing and failing, we are going to keep getting the same results we have been getting, right? When are we going to learn that defaulting to our own human wisdom instead of simply saying, "Yes, Lord" and obeying the Law that He gave us, will result in a curse—whether it's physical or spiritual, or whatever it may be? And as long as we continue to respond in the same incorrect way to our trials, we will continue to pay the price with results that are not good—we will suffer. And so, again, brethren, unless things change—and the answer is not God changing: "God, if you will only give me smooth sailing." No, God is saying, "I'm trying to get all of you to learn to change *your* behavior and *your* responses—to be obedient rather than disobedient." And if you change your orientation and step out in faith, instead of trying to save yourself, and you do it the right way, then you and I will get a change in results—instead of getting the curse we will get the blessing. Instead of the emptiness and the guilt, we will get the fulfillment—we will get the abundant life. But, you see, the change has to come in us—our response away from carnality toward faithfulness and obedience to God's perfect Law. That is the key. Those are the changes that we are looking for. When we make those changes in

our response to trials, then, you see, we will also have a change in results and we will like the outcome, and we will be blessed and we will be satisfied as never before.

Again I ask, brethren, when I am talking about being willing to change, am I talking about accepting instruction from just anyone who claims authority to teach us? No way. And there's a lot of that going on in God's last-day church today. How many do we have? Three hundred, four hundred groups out there that came out of our parent organization 35 years ago, all claiming to be legitimate representatives of Jesus Christ to teach the people of God. And so it's like a bunch of merchants out on the street, yelling: "Come into my booth over here! I have what you need! I'm selling the real elixir of life! Don't pay any attention to these other guys selling the snake oil! Here's where the real deal is!" And it's as if they are all screaming up and down the boulevard, and the sheep—the people of God—are absolutely confused.

How do you tell them apart? God has promised that there is a faithful ministry that is going to last until the return of Jesus Christ. I've covered it in years past. It's not my intention to go into it this morning. But I think most of you under the hearing of my voice accept that premise, and one of the reasons you are in this fellowship and one of the means by which you found this remnant body, is that you believed there was and must be a vestige of a faithful ministry proclaiming the words of Jesus Christ somewhere, and it was your mission to find out where that was. Now, by contrast there are very many out there who do not believe that's the case. There are many out there who don't believe they need a ministry. They have been so undermined and shot into because of the failure of so many ministers, they have become very hardened and certainly unteachable. And I certainly understand why. And I do not blame them for being reticent to accept the instruction of any ministry today. Just look at the history of the way the ministry behaved. Instead of being the benevolent servants of Jesus Christ to pour themselves out for the benefit of the people, they merchandised the people—they took advantage—they set themselves up as lords to be served by the people. They did exactly what Jesus Christ told his disciples not to do by using a gentile form of lordship which was never the manifestation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the one who—being Master and Lord—got down on his hands and knees and washed the feet of his disciples. He wasn't one who said, "Let me sit on this throne while you wash my feet and take care of my every need." He did exactly the opposite.

And yet, look at what we saw happen to our parent organization which we accept was the legitimate, the true, Church of God— because through that last-day servant, Mr. Armstrong, God did inspire and reveal the Truth which I think—in my mind and yours—is undeniable: Those teachings which fit with the Bible like no other set of doctrines which exist on the earth today. They make the Bible complete and full—from Genesis to Revelation—and unfold a master plan which describes exactly what we see happening on the earth today and provides the hope of the promises that are proven in the Bible are going to take place. And so we believe those things are true. We believe it was the Church of God—notwithstanding the problems that surfaced within that body, including a misapplication of leadership that set in over time, and more and more began to be manifested as a hard, burdensome administration which took advantage and absolutely destroyed the faith and the confidence of the people.

So I understand, brethren, why many hardened themselves and are no longer teachable. You can place a great deal of accountability at the very feet of the ministers that God called and used to teach them and to care for them. Isn't that what Jeremiah 23 and other chapters in the Bible absolutely say was going to take place? The very shepherds are the ones who scattered and destroyed the sheep. So it *was* prophesied to happen. This isn't something that happened accidentally: God kind of got taken by surprise by it: "Oops, now I've got to go to a plan B, because things did not work out the way I planned." No, He knew it was going to happen, and in fact He allowed it to happen because it was necessary for the people of God to go through those experiences. For what reason? To learn from the mistakes of the past, to learn how to sort out and to put their faith appropriately and confidently in God, not in man. Because, here's the problem, brethren: If that ministry had been faithful, had been consistent, had done everything they were supposed to do, would not it have been very, very easy—likely, in fact, absolute—that the people would have put their confidence in men? If the ministry had never failed, the people would have had every reason to expect Herbert Armstrong and those other evangelists to get them into the Kingdom.

Do you know what the best way was for God to teach us how to discern and to prove that we loved His Truth—His divine revelation, and never to look to a human being—no matter who it is? The best way to have done it was to allow those very servants through whom we learned the Truth to themselves fall into apostasy and to be swept away, because that put you and me on the hook to

determine what we really care about. Are we out just to follow a man no matter what he says, or do we have a real love for the Truth that was revealed? What's most important? The only way to really test that is to have them separate. As long as the man and the Truth stay together, what are we following? Are we following the Truth or a man? You can't tell. And I don't think any of us could even tell in our own minds, because I remember growing up in the church and hearing it said, "Oh, well, we love the Truth. We are not really following a man." But what were we doing? We were following a man. We *were* following Herbert Armstrong, the man, and we thought, "He will never fail, and all we have to do is watch and do whatever he does and we have it made with God." Come on, we did think that, didn't we? If we are honest—those of you who were back there at that time—we would have to say that is exactly true because we never imagined that Mr. Armstrong and those other men through whom we learned the truth might go astray. It was just not in our thinking that it was possible. We didn't anticipate it—we didn't prepare for it. And the only way God could teach us that cardinal lesson and to prepare His people for the return of Jesus Christ was to have a separation take place to make us choose. Because when the men and the Truth separated on two different courses, then we were put at a crossroads. Now, which way are we going to go? Are we going to follow a man, or are we going to keep following the Truth? They went on divergent courses and we were forced to choose.

Now, the majority of the church followed men—they followed the physical organization and I understand why. There were strong pulls to do so. The only evangelist of the 15 or 16 at the time back in 1974 who refused to accept the compromises on Pentecost and Divorce and Remarriage was Mr. Raymond Cole—the only one. He was the only one who refused to compromise the Truth in spite of his deep love and regard for Herbert Armstrong who was his mentor from the time he was a boy. And I don't think we remotely understand what it must've been like for him to have to follow the fork of the Truth as opposed to that of following the man. What trauma. And none of the others were willing to do it—not a single one. Well, there was one other man—though he was not an evangelist. He was a local elder in Switzerland named Jean Aviolat who didn't even know what Raymond Cole was going through over in the United States, but he knew that when those changes were announced in Pentecost and Divorce and Remarriage that there was no way he was going to change. And he was the only one, by himself, over there in Europe who stood up and said, "I don't care what the

penalties are—I don't care what it costs me—I am not going to compromise that which I accepted as having come from God." What a blessing when he found out months later that Raymond Cole also had done the same thing in the United States. And because they both had a love for the Truth, you see, they were immediate partners in the service of this remnant body.

So, I think most of us in this fellowship accept that God did miraculously preserve a faithful remnant. And we're not saying that we are the only ones—we have never put a fence around ourselves. We just say that if there is another organized group out there that is holding on to the original Truth first taught by Mr. Armstrong, we don't know where it is. Now, we do believe that there are, minimally, a whole lot of individuals out there in the woodwork, around the world, who still have a love and regard for those original truths. We're not aware, however, of an organized group with a ministry—outside of this one—that is proclaiming and teaching that unadulterated Truth. Maybe there is—we leave the door open for the possibility.

Again, we're not putting a fence around ourselves, but as Mr. Raymond Cole used to say, "We *are* putting a fence around the Truth." The Truth is the standard—that revelation is what we care about. It cannot change and we know what it was. Go back and define what it was that God taught through Mr. Armstrong at the beginning. You can do that. I've done it and you can too. So there is no reason you shouldn't *know* what the revelation was on all those major points.

So, do we have a means to discern from whom we should be instructed? Should you be left in confusion, walking up and down the boulevard listening to all of the barkers, pitching their snake oil and telling you, "Come over here and buy from my booth"—all the confusion of voices out there which came out of our parent organization, with their own groups, who set up shop and hung out their shingles and now they are trying to entice you to come and to be taught by them? Yes, you have to be taught, you have to have an open mind to be teachable, but who will you select as your teacher? Therein lies the difficulty. Notice John 10 and 1. John 10 and verse 1:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door . . .

That's the authorized way to enter a building, isn't it? You don't sneak in through the window or a weak place in the roof. This is an individual who has authorization to walk through the door. That's the proper way to enter a building.

He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.

That's who they respond to—that's to whom they say, "Yes, Lord, we will be taught by you. We will open our minds to receive your instruction and we will be responsive to you—the proper, authorized shepherd." "The sheep follow him: for *they know his voice*." And, do you know what, brethren? This is one of the things that the apostate ministry tried to pervert in the 1970s. They tried to tell us that we didn't know His voice. They tried to tell us that they—as the ministry—were between us and God, and we couldn't hear the voice of God except through them, and that we had no way to discern the difference between true and false teaching except that we must just dutifully do what they told us to do. That's what I was told at Ambassador College as a freshman. I didn't have all the pieces put together, but I knew that was wrong. I didn't know what I was supposed to do at the time, but I was absolutely rebellious against that. I was rebellious against a lot of other things too. But they were telling me, "You just do what the ministry says, and even if the ministry is wrong, God will hold them responsible, but God only holds you responsible for doing what the ministry says." What a bunch of garbage. Do you really think that makes sense if God is training us to hold offices of incredible responsibility as kings and priests in His Kingdom when Christ returns? And, yet, He is not going to make us judge and make choices now? We are to just be little automatons that say, "yes, yes, yes," to whoever this minister is? It doesn't fit, and besides that, it is contradictory to what Jesus Christ said here: "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." The sheep know not the voice of strangers—they recognize the difference. And if you are one of those called out of this world and begotten by the Holy Spirit, brethren—if you are a member of true Israel, the Church, you need to be able to discern. God requires you to discern. He's going to be holding you accountable for the choices that you make. You and I are not going to stand at the judgement and be able to point at some man and say, "Well, I just did what he said because he was the minister. And he said I would get into

the Kingdom on his coattails if I just obeyed everything he told me to do." In that day, brethren, Christ is going to say, "Sorry, that was never the plan or the intention."

"The sheep follow him: for they *know* his voice." The sheep *know*—which means, brethren, you have the means to discern, and you have the obligation to discern, and you and I are each—individually—being held accountable for making the right choice. How are you going to do it? All of these voices out there barking for your attention and saying, "Come and follow me! I'm a legitimate servant who is holding on to the faith once delivered in the wake of the destruction of the Worldwide Church of God." And they're all singing that song. How are you going to choose? Well, a lot of them haven't chosen. A lot of them have chosen not to choose—they have decided not to choose. They have simply said, "I don't think any of these ministers are speaking in the name of Jesus Christ. I think they're all a bunch of charlatans and a bunch of crooks. So I am just going to resist the whole thing, and I'll just serve God myself at home. It's just you and me, God—these men are all corrupt and not a single one of them can be trusted."

A whole lot of people have done that, and I understand it—I understand why. And I can guarantee you, brethren, if it hadn't been for specific events that happened in my life, I would have been one of them. No, I wouldn't have been that good. I give credit to the individuals who are confused and don't know where to go—who have been so abused and taken advantage of by an apostate ministry that they have just washed their hands of men, but they are still trying to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, as best they can, on their own. I have a great respect for those.

I highly believe that I myself would have been one of those who cast the whole thing out and gone back into the world, and probably would have made an absolute mess of my life. I don't think I would have had the strength to hold on to any part of it. For me it was probably going to be all or nothing. So I am incredibly thankful that God saved me from that and pointed me to a remnant led by a particular evangelist who had the fruits to demonstrate that he really did care most about the Truth and was not just trying to make a name for himself—trying to take advantage, financially, of the brethren for the sake of making a little power play. I am very, very thankful that God pointed me to that servant in Raymond Cole. I was incredibly cynical. Oh boy, you don't know—well, some of you

probably do if you knew me back at the time that I first came into this remnant body at the age of 19. I had a long way to go to get my thinking squared away—I surely did. Raymond Cole was very, very patient with me. I look back on it now and I am very amazed at the way he handled me and just gave me time and gentle guidance. But it made a huge, huge difference because it was the first time I felt like I was seeing the example of a minister who actually lived it—and for the right reasons. And after all the hypocrisy that I saw growing up as a child—and especially concentrated in Pasadena, California at Ambassador College—I was incredibly cynical, and gave vent to my natural carnal rebellion in many ways. And I was one of those who decided, "I am not going to pay any attention. I am not going to be taught by these men. I will sit in class and I will nod my head, and I will put a smile on my face," but in my mind I was as hard as a stone and I was not going to be taught.

Thankfully, I did change, and I did open up and become malleable, because I found a servant who really did reflect the voice of Jesus Christ. That's the decision I made. For me, personally, as a sheep—a member of that flock—I feel like I did hear the voice of Jesus Christ. It was still being manifested through a human servant because God has always used a human ministry—find an example in all the Bible where He didn't. He always chose particular individuals and then He sent messages to Israel through those prophets and through those kings. That's the way He has always done it—just like He did in the New Testament era church. He always used those disciples—who became apostles—whom He sent out to raise up those churches. It was always through a human instrument. So, brethren, we can be upset at the abuse that men have committed in this era of time; we can say, "I am not going to submit to that anymore," but then we are just going from the frying pan into the fire because we are rejecting the very means by which God said he was always going to deal with his people. The alternative is to believe and to acknowledge that God is true, and in spite of all the chaos, there is a faithful ministry out there somewhere which can be depended upon to give you the Truth—someone who is, in essence, worthy for you to open up your minds to and to receive instruction and to put away the hardness and the cynicism.

Now, am I telling you to give yourself over and to do whatever that minister—or group of ministers—tells you to do, like an automaton? No way. Hopefully, you have learned the lesson: You have the means to judge whether or not you are hearing the voice of Jesus Christ. How are you going to do it? John 12 and verse 49.

John 12:49: "For I have not spoken of myself." Here are the words of Jesus Christ. Now, He came as an ambassador of His Father—did He not? What was His mission—how did He conduct His ministry? "I have not spoken of myself." Well, isn't that interesting? Because Jesus Christ was God—He was God made flesh, wasn't He? If anybody has the authorization to speak his own words, you would think it would be Christ, wouldn't you? I mean, doesn't God get to say what He wants? Doesn't He get to make the rules and decide what He is going to speak? So I would think that Jesus Christ—if anyone—would have had the authorization to speak His own words, and, yet, He didn't. He said:

I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, *HE GAVE ME A COMMANDMENT, WHAT I SHOULD SAY, AND WHAT I SHOULD SPEAK*. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak [emphasis added].

What is He saying? Even Christ—who was God in the flesh—did not presume the right to speak His own words—or *His* ideas or *His* concepts. He was strictly a messenger of the Father. The Father told Him what to speak, and He came as a dutiful agent of the Father and gave only those precise words. He didn't stand up before the people and say, "Now here's what I've come up with: I have such wisdom and experience in all of these gifts that will allow me to come up with pearls of wisdom that I drop before you, and you are supposed to pick them up and fawn over them." That is not what He did. He said, "I am a humble messenger of my Father who is greater than I, and I am only delivering the mail." I've used that example before and I've not come up with a better one yet, so I am repeating it. The messenger doesn't write the letter, he simply delivers the mail. And that's what Christ did—He delivered the mail from the Father. Now that's the hallmark of Christ and a faithful ministry. So if you want to cut through all of the competing voices out there, the first thing you can do is to figure out which ones of them are only delivering the message which didn't come from them—which doesn't make them look good. Find the ones who are simply delivering the mail that has already been written by someone else and you will rule out many of these major groups right off the bat—the groups that have self-proclaimed prophets leading them who are coming up with all kinds of new ideas that have never been taught in the church of God before, and they claim that the people have to accept that. And where is their authority to do so? They are *writing* the letter, they are not delivering it. Christ simply delivered the mail from the Father.

What else do we know about that Truth—that legitimate gospel message? Malachi 3 and verse 6 says, "For I am the Eternal, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." What is the hallmark of the character of God? He is consistent; He is absolute; you can trust in Him never to change; He doesn't redecorate the Gospel. He doesn't decide to come up with a new color scheme to improve upon it because He gets tired of the old one. He made it perfect to begin with. It is absolute; it is unchanging; and if the character of God is unchanging, and if you believe that we received the Truth through a faithful servant in Herbert Armstrong in this era of time, then you had better find someone somewhere who is proclaiming the same message that came from the beginning, because it is the only reflection of the character of God. And so, just use that yardstick, brethren. And it has two elements: Find a ministry which does not keep coming up with new, contradictory concepts, but which proclaims, not that which *they* came up with, but that which came through the original servant that God used in this age; and find a ministry which believes that God does not change. If you apply just those two elements, you are going to rule out ninety-nine percent of all of these hawkers out here in the streets—you are really going to cut down on your choices. And that's what I did, personally, and obviously I am here in this body because—as I say—I was a part of this body for many, many years before I was ever tapped on the shoulder, if you want to call it that, and drafted into the ministry. So I am not part of this group because I was seeking out a place where I could hold an office in the ministry and lord it over God's people. And there are people who do that. There are many men out there who literally go from group to group until they can find favor in a particular place in order to gain some ascendancy. Well, brethren, I have been in this group since 1981 and I wasn't ordained until 1997, so I was simply a member of the body sitting out there among all of you as a young man and beyond—and in this very hall, by the way—for many years at this Feast of Tabernacles. My reason for being here is that because I believed my salvation was at stake, I had to find out where Christ was really preaching, and I saw the fruits in this body and that's why I'm here still. In fact, holding this particular responsibility as a minister to preach to you and teach you is secondary—less important—than me first and foremost making sure I'm in the right place at the right time to keep the Feast. So if I am wrong in my analysis and my decisions are not accurate, in the final analysis, at least believe they are sincere. I am not here to take advantage of you or to try and get you to look to me. I don't want you looking to me. I want you to learn, like I did, the lesson of looking at the fruit which comes from Christ concerning where Truth really is revealed. And you hold on to that Truth and you don't let anybody take you away from it.

If even Jesus Christ could not speak His own words, how much more so men who are called to speak in the name of that same Christ? Not a single one of us has the authority to speak our own words, and that's why, brethren, I will say—to try and at least substantiate my legitimacy so that I'm not treated as one of those hawkers on the street— I am not giving you things that *I* came up with. There is nothing for which I can take credit because all of the things that I'm proclaiming to you are the things that I learned from the ministry of Mr. Herbert Armstrong and of Mr. Raymond Cole. I take no credit. The things I am giving you do not give me an ounce of fulfillment or reputation personally. I didn't come up with them. God did not reveal them to me. I was not, and am not, an apostle—one who receives divine inspiration of new Truth. I am only delivering the mail. You can go back and trace the things that I'm teaching from the pulpit to the things that are written and recorded in the oldest literature—the *Good News* and the *Plain Truth* magazines; and in the sermons and the *Monthly Letters* that we have on our website; and in the archives of the Church of God, The Eternal from the last 30-something years. You can go back and verify whether or not I'm teaching the same things. I am so happy we have that history—you can verify it. And you will know if I begin to change and all of a sudden begin to say, "Well, I know we used to teach this, but now I have new knowledge, new revelation, which says instead of white it is now black." You will know if that happens. You should know if that happens. And do you know what, brethren? You, by that means, can know whether you are hearing Jesus Christ or whether you are hearing a thief and the robber who sneaked up the wrong way to get in amongst the sheep—that is your way to discern. You are in control, and you are being held accountable for your salvation.

If those teachings are part of the faith once delivered, then we must accept them and then we must respond with a teachable orientation of mind. That's the point, brethren. I understand why so many have become hardened and they don't intend to hear the charlatans out there. It's easier just to close your mind and say, "Well, I'll just reject it all. I'll just keep it myself at home—forget all of these ministries out here. Who can know?" But if you believe, if you have come to the belief that God has promised to preserve a faithful remnant even to the very return of Jesus Christ—a place from which He will be teaching and feeding His sheep (because He is a dutiful Shepherd, He is not going to leave them to starve to death)—if you believe that is true, then you and I have a responsibility to find out where it is. Because, you see, we can never be okay just shutting ourselves down

and deciding we are not going to be teachable—which is what many have done. We *have to* be teachable, we *have to* receive instruction in order to grow, but we have to make sure that we are being taught by the true shepherd and not by one of these counterfeits or impostors.

Think about a couple of things to support that: There are a couple of problems for those who have decided that they are just going to do it at home. Do you know what they are? How are they going to deal with certain commands like attending the Feast of Tabernacles and the Sabbaths and Holy Days God commanded? You cannot keep the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days properly unless you convoke before God in a place where He has chosen to place His name. I don't have the time to read it. You read it yourself in Deuteronomy 12, verses 5–14—there is the command. God said very specifically that you and I don't choose where and how we are going to worship Him. He says, "You come to the place that I have designated, and you appear—a command performance—before me. *There* you bring your tithes and offerings and *there* you worship." Now, how are you and I going to do that unless there is some authorized representative of God still on the earth today to assign the appointed place? Otherwise, what you are left with is trying to keep a Feast in your own home. And, yet, God says, "Uh-uh. Don't think that you can sit at home and make your offerings. Don't think that you can erect your own altar and put a burnt offering on it and think that I will accept it. You come and you offer where I have placed my name," and that means it requires the execution of authority in some way to organize an assembly of people to come together. The Apostle said, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, even more so as you see the day approaching." That means as we get closer to the return of Christ, those convocations—those assemblies—are more important than ever before. And how can you have an authorized assembly before God unless you have an authorized ministry whom He is backing up? There is something to the fact that Christ said to someone—to those apostles: "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." Now, we understand that that's not doctrine. They were not given the authorization to bind and loose doctrine. God revealed the doctrine and that doesn't change—it is a reflection of the character of God. But to what does it apply? It applies to something. It applies to administrative decisions, including the assignment of Feast sites and Sabbath service convocations. And that's when God says to the faithful ministry who is proclaiming the Truth, "I will lead you and I will guide you, and where you assign it, I will back it up in heaven, and that's

where I will be, and that's where the people must come and meet if they want to come into my presence and appropriately keep those Sabbaths and Holy Days."

Now, if you reject the existence of a faithful ministry today and you say, "They're a bunch of charlatans," how are you going to fulfill the command to come into a place where God has placed His name? Is it because you are going to pick the place? "I pick my living room. God, I have the authority. Come into my living room and authorize my observance of the Feast of Tabernacles." And thousands of people are out there doing just that and God says, "I don't accept that sacrifice at all."

What about anointing? What about health and healing? What is the method that God gave the New Testament church for receiving divine healing when we are sick and when we are injured? He said you go to the ministry and they will lay hands upon you and the prayer of the faithful will provide that healing, and those physical sins will be forgiven, and you will be restored. He didn't say that the method for the church is just for each one of us to pray. Yes, it is appropriate and necessary for each one of us to ask, independently, in our prayers: "Please, God, heal me. Forgive my sins—physical and spiritual." But, if you want divine healing through the broken body of Jesus Christ, God gave the procedure, and it is that you go to the ministry and you have hands laid upon you and be anointed with oil. Now, if you don't believe there is a faithful ministry today, how are you going to do that? How are you going to have access to divine healing if there is no faithful ministry that God expects you to recognize? You see, there's a problem there, isn't there?

What is another one? How about tithing? There are many people out there who absolutely still believe in the necessity to tithe, but if you reject the ministry, to whom do you pay your tithes? Well, I guess you can build an altar and burn up the bills and let the smoke waft up to heaven [laughs]. I say that jokingly, but there is probably someone out there doing it. They are doing all kinds of things according to their own rationalizations today. I have to stop being amazed. But you have some people—because they do not accept that there's a faithful ministry; they refuse to be taught by anyone—who have a real dilemma when it comes to tithing. So do you know what they typically do? Either one of two things: They either have a bank account where they're putting all of their tithes and they have been stacking away all of this money for a long time. (Well, they haven't paid it to

God. It's not being used for the purpose of God's work—wherever you believe that is. It's just sitting there). Or, the other alternative is that they kind of parcel it out and give it to a whole bunch of different groups. They may send tithes this week or this month to one group, or they'll send a little over here and a little over there and just sort of spread it all around. We receive some like that—from those who are not members, but every once in a while we get a little contribution from here or there. But it's a real dilemma for them.

How are you going to fulfill the command to tithe if you don't accept that there's an authorized ministry feeding the sheep in the name of Jesus Christ today? Tithing; divine healing; Sabbath and Holy Day observance; these are a problem if you reject the fact that there is a faithful remnant. But if you accept that there is one, and you've taken the responsibility to evaluate; you know what the voice of Jesus Christ sounds like because you know how to compare it to the faith once delivered through the end-time servant of God; and you recognize the fruits of those servants who are not speaking according to their own wisdom but are giving you what they were taught, and it is consistent with that original teaching; then it becomes yours and my responsibility to open our ears and to be taught. It's not easy, brethren, because we are hardened and by nature we don't want to be taught. I understand it as well as any of you. It's the way I am. But, I guarantee you that if I had not been willing to bend my own will and to allow God to teach me through the ministry of Mr. Raymond Cole, I would have washed myself right out of the church, and right out of a relationship with God. I am so thankful that I was willing to put away some of my own personalized concepts and come into compliance with that which God has taught. And how blessed I have been personally. But, do you know what? I am not happy with my level of abundance yet. I need to be much more abundantly blessed in mind and heart—in peace and in confidence. I have a long, long way to go. But, I still believe and I'm trying myself to practice the concept, "Unless things change they remain the same." But I hope, like you, I can say, "I am not going to try and change God's Truth. I am going to continue to be malleable in the hands of God and to change the self through the power of the Holy Spirit; and I'm going to take that instruction and keep working at hammering out the carnal mind that is against me; and to put on more of the mind of Jesus Christ; and to be teachable; and to be responsive; because I want that abundance." I want it and I know you do too. That is the abundance which God promises to give—both today and tomorrow.