

**Coming to Know and Trust God #3;  
The Character of God, Part I**

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Alright, this morning, brethren, we want to pick right up with this series that I began on opening night of this Feast. My overall theme is "Coming to Know and Trust God." What does it mean to really come to know and to trust God?

And, again, as I mentioned to you, it can seem rather superficial, like, "Well, yes, of course that's very simple. It's automatic." And we can nod our heads and say, "Yes, we know God and we trust God." But I really want to delve into what it means, according to the Word of God, to really come to know Him, and then, to trust Him. And there are a lot of ways that you and I can test ourselves concerning the extent to which we really have our minds in the right place and are doing those things that are pleasing to Him.

And so, we are going through the fundamentals right now of what it means. I've given you the commands that show that God told His chosen people, "You must come to know me." It's important to Him, and He repeated this many, many times: "that you may *know* that I am the Eternal." So, it seems to be important to Him, which means it should be important to us—whatever it means to come to know Him.

But then, as we saw yesterday, it's not enough just to know Him—to recognize His power. Oh, you must start with that, and so yesterday morning we went through the attributes—the capabilities—of God, and what it is that He can do. And so I rehearsed for you the three primary characteristics of God that we learned so many years ago through Mr. Armstrong: First, the fact that He is omnipotent—which means that He has all power; nobody is bigger than Him; nobody can contend with Him in any way; He can do what He wants, when He wants, and how He wants. And that's exactly what He is doing. He has no equal. Secondly, He is omnipresent. And

what does that mean? He is present everywhere. You can't hide from Him. And, then, thirdly, He is omniscient—which means that He has *all* knowledge. There's not a single thing that He does not know—past, present and future. He is the sum total of *all* knowledge and wisdom.

But those are still just descriptions of His power and His ability—what He can do, His capabilities. Is that enough to get to know God? No, that's really more like the beginning of His resume—just the beginning. And what you and I have to do is to take that information and go on and look at something that is even more important: that is the character of God. And as you saw, I struggled yesterday to try and keep from getting into, speaking about, His character, His behavior—what He is like, what is important to Him, what are His values. But that's exactly, now, what we want to begin to cover this morning, and it is going to take me two sermons to do it—this morning, and tomorrow afternoon.

So let's start in Hebrews 11 and verse 6—the base text for this overall theme that I gave to you: "Coming to Know and Trust God." Hebrews 11 and verse 6—the sum total of our responsibility in obtaining salvation: "But without faith it is impossible to please him." So faith is everything—the sum total of what we must achieve. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. But what are we talking about when we say "faith"? The beginning of the chapter, of course, tells us. We are talking about something invisible. It's the "substance of things hoped for." It is not something that you can put your hands upon. You certainly can't prove it to anyone else, and you can't borrow it from someone else. It's something that you must develop yourself before God, in your relationship with Him. It is a trust and a confidence in Him. And here's how it is defined:

. . . without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, *and* [furthermore] that he *is* a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. [emphasis added throughout]

That He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. And what is that second requirement really focusing upon? When God made promises to reward you and to give you a Promised Land—to offer you salvation in His Kingdom for all eternity—then the question becomes, do you believe He is really going to do it? Do you take Him at His word? You see, He may be powerful, which He is; He may have unequalled power in the universe, which He does; He may have all

knowledge; He may be ever present; but that doesn't necessarily mean that He is a good God. He might be just a big, powerful tyrant. How do you know you want to live forever in a Kingdom—in a Family—ruled by that God? Do you just take it for granted? Do you assume? Or, do you have confidence beyond a belief that He exists and that He created all things, and that He has all power to do whatever He wants? Do you believe that He is a good God? Because if He's not a *good* God, why would you want to spend eternity with Him? Have you ever stopped to think about that? Are you *sure* you believe that He has character that makes you gravitate toward Him, and to love Him?

Again, it's easy for us to say, "Oh, yes, I believe that God is good." Do you really believe that? If you and I *really believe* that He is a good God, do you know how we are going to prove that? We are going to have faith in Him—which means that we are actually going to trust Him in all things, and we are going to do those things that He commands us to do, even when it is incredibly difficult and, most importantly, when it is scary. And when we don't trust Him—because we are afraid—what we are saying is that we are not confident that God is really going to do what He said He was going to do. It calls into question His very character. That's why faith is necessary. Because, when you are introduced to God, and He calls you and opens your mind, and gives you a chance to come to know Him, but then you do not gain confidence and trust in Him, what you are basically saying is, "Well, God, I know you said you were going to do these things, but I just cannot trust you enough to step out in faith. For my self-preservation, I have to take care of myself the way that I think I need to do it."

That's why a lack of faith is synonymous with a loss of salvation. Because it has to do with our respect for God. It's not enough just to believe a Superpower in the universe exists—one who created it all, and has all power. Because, remember, I gave you that quote from the book of James in which the Apostle James says, "the demons believe and tremble" too. Oh, they believe in that God—they know He exists, and they know He has all power—but that's not enough for salvation. We have to come to value and to *love* this God who has all power, and that's really what it's all about.

So, this morning let's look at some of the character—behavioral—attributes of this God. Number one: God *is* perfect. God *is* perfect, without exception—always. He is always perfect, without exception. And, again, is your first reaction, "Well, yeah, duhhh"? You may think it's simplistic, but again, if you

test yourself and your own mind concerning some of your reactions when you are going through trials and difficult circumstances, you may find the seeds of doubt—doubts that may cross your mind like they did with Job, who obeyed God, yet, when he was sorely tried with the loss of all of his substance, and the boils on his body, he began to challenge whether God was good, because he felt like God was not hearing his prayers and giving him a fair shake. So don't assume you believe God is perfect. We are going to test that today.

We are going to start this morning with the statement: "God is perfect." God *is* absolutely perfect. Let's notice some proofs of that from the Bible. Let's begin in Deuteronomy 32. Deuteronomy chapter 32, and verse 4: "He is the Rock, his work *is* perfect." There is no qualification to that—there is no "except when He wakes up and has a bad day; when He doesn't get His coffee." No, His work *is* perfect—period.

"[F]or all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity." What is iniquity? Sin. What is sin? 1 John 3:4: the transgression of the Law. God is never guilty of sin. He never makes a mistake—ever. "[A] God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." That's the God who created you and gave you all of your capabilities, and all of the promises, and your hope for the future. He is not only a powerful God, but He is a perfect God. "[J]ust and right is He."

2 Samuel 22 and verse 31. 2 Samuel 22 and beginning in verse 31:

As for God, his way is perfect [as for God, *His Way is* perfect]; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? God is my strength and power: and he maketh *my* way perfect.

This God is not only powerful, He is perfect all of the time; everything He does is right; everything that He *allows to happen* is right. That may be a harder one to accept, because a lot of bad things go on in this world, and you and I have all experienced bad things to one degree or another—things which are painful, which cause heartache, and sorrow, and misery, and anguish. And we cry out to God, and we say, "Oh, God, please save me and help me." And what happens when God doesn't help us immediately, in the way that we want—the way we would like to have it, and maybe, down deep inside, the way we think we deserve?

When it doesn't come to us that way, what is the natural reaction? "God, why aren't you being fair to me? Why aren't you listening to me? I know I'm weak; I know I make mistakes, but you are supposed to be a God of mercy, compassion and love. Why are you far away from me?" What we are really saying is, "God, why are you exercising poor judgment in this particular instance?" You see, that's the way our human minds work. It's like, "Well, God, I know you are perfect, and I know you are great, but in this one instance, you must not be paying attention and seeing my plight, because I have this real need. And if I could just tug on your coattail enough to get your attention, I know you would do something you haven't done yet. You would intervene in a way you haven't done as yet." That's what's going on, without saying it in so many words. Can you identify with feeling that way in your mind?

What I am trying to do is to get all of us to connect in our minds with the fact that what we are actually doing when we allow our thoughts to go that way is that we are accusing God of being less than perfect. We are challenging the rightness of His Judgments. But if you really believe that this Creator God is perfect and righteous, and that He never makes a mistake, when those thoughts cross our minds, we have to jump on them right then and lead ourselves in a different direction, with the power of His Spirit.

Alright, Psalm 19. Psalm 19, beginning in verse 7, and we will read all the way through verse 11: "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul." Now, how many people in the world, do you think, believe that—that the Ten Commandments, and the statutes and judgments of God are perfect? No, the majority of those today who call themselves Christian believe that the Law that God revealed was defective, and they pick on certain statements in the New Testament and take them out of context to try and prove that. And it is not true, at all, because the Law of God is Holy, it is righteous, it is spiritual. He made that Law perfect, and it is good for man. It is not a burden. Oh, it's a burden to us because we are carnal and we don't like it, and we are rebellious by nature. But that Law is perfect, and it is good for us, if we could only understand it.

"The law of the [Eternal] is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the [Eternal] is sure, making wise the simple." The testimony—which means His Word and His honor. With His words, He puts something out there and He states that something is true. Isn't that how we understand testimony? If you are called

to give testimony in a court of law, you are stating the facts, and you are putting your own reputation behind that statement. You are saying, "This is what I saw; this is what happened; this is what I did, and I stake my reputation upon it. This is my testimony." Well, God gives a testimony, as well—He puts Himself out there, and He makes statements, and He says, "These things *are* true and right." And He backs that up with the authority of His own character.

. . . the testimony of the [Eternal] is sure [you can count on it—not just sometimes, but all of the time], making wise the simple. [Then verse 8:] The statutes of the LORD are right . . .

They are not just the law of the land because He has the power to make them so. This isn't a tyrant, like we talked about yesterday: the eight-hundred-pound gorilla who can do anything he wants—who gets to make the rules because there is nobody bigger than him. But then his law is defective in some way and is harmful to human beings and against us. Not so. *God's* laws are a reflection of His own character, and He is perfect—which means His Law is perfect.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean [A proper fear and respect for God is clean. It is refreshing, it is renewing, when our relationship with Him is correct.], enduring for ever: the judgments of the [Eternal] are true and righteous altogether.

These are simple statements, but packed with incredible meaning, if we will think about them and meditate upon them.

. . . the judgments of the [Eternal] are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned.

Not only is the Law of God good for us, it teaches us right from wrong. It is not just a bunch of rules that God set up to make us jump through hoops, just to see if we will. He gave us the code that tells us what behavior in this universe—in the realm in which we live on this earth—will result in good things, and what

behavior will result in bad things. And He wants us to be blessed, not cursed, so He gave us the rule book so that you and I can function within it, and so that we can have good things and avoid the evil. That's what the Law is for. It's not against us. Our carnal minds, that is what's against us—that's what we fight against.

"Moreover by them is thy servant warned." Oh, yes, because He said to Israel: "Here's my Law. If you do these things you are going to be blessed." And then He said, "But if you violate these laws, be warned: you will bring curses upon yourself, and you will suffer, and you will be miserable, and ultimately, you will die." Now, to human beings, to be warned, and to be told "no" is indicative of a bad thing. No more so than when a loving parent corrects a child because he doesn't want that child to suffer. So we raise children and teach them the way the world works. Why? So that, hopefully, we can help that child to discern between behavior that will lead to happiness, versus behavior that is going to lead to sorrow and misery. And we don't want them to be miserable and suffer, so we teach them to discern, and hopefully to make good choices.

Now, how often does a little child feel that his parents have his best interests at heart when they tell him, "No, don't do that; stop and go the other direction; be quiet; do this"? "Ohhh, Mom. You're just trying to get your way and make me do what you want me to do. Why can't I just do what I want to do sometimes? Let me be *free*." Except that loving parents understand that the exercise of certain "freedoms" outside the Law of God are going to be harmful, and he is going to regret it. God is our loving Father. He gave us His Law as a reflection of His perfect will, that we might be happy. And, so, He warns us: "Take it seriously." Not because He wants to be mean to us, but because He wants us to be happy and blessed. That's why He gave it. "Moreover by them [these commandments, these judgments] is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." In keeping of them there is great reward—for our good.

So He is a perfect God. You can take that to the bank. Always. His judgments are never faulty. There is never a decision that God makes that is suspect in any way. It's the right choice, even when He chooses not to intervene. Because, you see, sometimes there are acts of God that are either commission or omission. Either He chooses to act, definitively, to do something, or, many times, He chooses *not* to do something. Those are all judgments. Regardless, God's actions—His judgments—are the right, perfect choice, every single time. Every single time.

Alright, next, what else can we know about the character of this God? God is kind, gracious, merciful and longsuffering. And, again, not just sometimes, but all of the time. *All* of the time. He is the personification—the epitome—of love, mercy, kindness, and longsuffering. And, again, we can nod our heads and say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." But then, many times, based upon what we experience, we think, "No, no, no." But He is always all of these things, without exception.

Notice Galatians 5:22. You will remember that this is the listing of the fruits of the Spirit. Whose Spirit? God's Spirit—the Holy Spirit—which is the power by which this God does all of His work, the Spirit from which His power emanates. What are the attributes of His Spirit which He gives to His chosen people? Through the acceptance—through baptism—you receive a down payment of that very Spirit. What Spirit? God's Spirit. And what are the attributes of that Spirit? Galatians 5 and beginning in verse 22:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith [verse 23:], Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

He's saying that whole list of attributes—every single one of them—is good, and there is not a single law of God that makes any of them bad. And every one of those attributes is absolutely a personification of God. He does them perfectly, all of the time. Everything He does is a manifestation of love. And, again, that's hard to reconcile in our carnal minds.

Remember the message that I gave to you during the Feast of Trumpets that I called "The Warrior King"? There are all of these texts about Jesus Christ's coming, and He is basically going to dish out vengeance and judgment upon this evil world, and He is going to vanquish His enemies. With the vehemence that is described in the Bible about what He is going to do, it's hard to reconcile the fact that, at the very same time He is doing these things, this Being is always the personification of love—that all of those acts, as He executes them, *are* love and mercy. Well, that doesn't seem merciful—vanquishing His enemies—but it is. When we have a problem with understanding and reconciling those things, what does it mean? It means you and I have not yet come to acknowledge what real love is, in the hands of a perfect God. So, when we have a problem with it and say, "Well, that doesn't seem like love, mercy, longsuffering, and kindness to me."



What we are saying is that we don't yet know God. We don't yet know Him, let alone really value Him. That is the goal that you and I want to carry away, hopefully, from this Feast of Tabernacles. We need to recognize where we need to get in order to value Him, because the problem is not with God, the problem is always with you and me. We've got to come to know, trust and value Him, and get to the point where we can say with a full heart, "Thank you, God. I do love you, and I do value you and your perfect judgement in every way." But all of us fall short of that to some degree, which means we all have a lot of work to do. That's the process of coming to know and to trust Him.

But those are the characteristics of His Spirit. He always uses them, without fail. As I've mentioned to you before, one of the hardest ones that I have difficulty in reconciling is that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is meekness. Just think about what meekness is. It is mild—it goes hand in hand with temperance. God, with all of this power, is a consuming fire, as we've already seen, and yet, at the very same time, He is the epitome of meekness. Can you reconcile that? Meekness, with power, and might, and majesty in the application of the Law—even as a Warrior King who is going to take possession of His Kingdom and establish His government on this earth by force, which is what we are celebrating at this Feast of Tabernacles. And all of the while, He is the perfect personification of meekness. Now, if you can figure that out, and get that into your mind, then you will be a long way down the road toward coming to know this God. I'm working on that too.

Psalm 145 and verse 8. Psalm 145 and beginning in verse 8, and we will read through verse 13. Here's what He is like:

The [Eternal] is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy [slow to anger, and of great mercy]. The [Eternal] is good to all.

Do you believe that's true? He allows all of the evil that's going on in this world right now—the misery of so many human beings taking place right now; wars and famine, and illness, and abuse. There is all kinds of abominable behavior going on right now, and God, who has all power, is allowing it to happen. Human beings are suffering *en masse*, right now. But, the Bible says that "the Eternal is good to all"—every one of those human beings, even as they suffer right now. David says God is being good to them. Do you believe it? Can you

reconcile that? Only if you understand the master plan which is signified in the keeping of these Holy Days.

That's why the rest of the world has a disconnect. They can't get it, and their big question is, "*If* there is a God, and *if* He is supposedly a good God, why does He allow such evil and misery on this earth?" You see, they don't get it, because they don't understand how He is bringing salvation to human beings. The answer, as you know it, is that through their difficulties and their suffering, they are learning lessons that are going to help them in the day that they are called. It is a part of their training ground. And the maximum suffering that any human being will endure is not even a blip on the timeline of eternity. What they have in store, every one of them, is the hope of eternal life in the God Family—a Family that will enjoy peace, and love, and harmony, and unity, forevermore. And the small sliver of time we each live upon this earth, within which we suffer, is as nothing. And, yet, it is the instruction period that God gives us to help us achieve that ultimate glory in the God Family.

You see, there is no way that you and I can get that unless we back up, *way away* from the issue, and look at it from the perspective of the master plan as God is working it out. We have to get out of this nearsighted vision, according to which we think, "Well, if God were good, He would give me a blessing *now* that would solve *this* problem in *this* way." That's the way human beings think. "*Right now*, God." But God's plan is to say, "No, I have your best interests at heart for all eternity. I want you to be in my Family forever. And allowing you to suffer *right now*—as terrible as it seems to be to you—is part of that *good* process." The world is not going to understand that.

So, there is a reason that God says the sign between God and His people are those Sabbaths, because the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days (Sabbaths) tell that story and give us perspective for understanding how and why God is doing what He is doing upon this earth. If you understand that Master Plan, you see, you can get the vision. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Only the chosen, who are called to understand, and to have that Way of Life, have an opportunity to see it. The rest are going to accuse God of being unfair—unmerciful, unkind, unloving—until the day that they are called and given that opportunity. "The Eternal is good to all." That is a true statement. He is good to every human being, every second of every life, no matter how much misery and how much suffering they experience.

"The [Eternal] is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." And every human being upon this earth is a part of the work of His hands. The whole thing is His work.

. . . and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O [Eternal]; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts [not just power for ordinary acts, but mighty acts, righteous acts—the *good* actions of a loving God], and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

Notice James 5 and verse 11. James 5, verse 11—the text I read to you on the Feast of Trumpets, in a different context: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful . . ."

Now, the world looks at that word "pitiful", and they really think "pitiful." They think of the little baby Jesus in the manger. That's their concept of the Savior—this little pitiful individual. And they think of Him as a pathetic individual—weak, always pictured as hanging limply on the "cross." That's their idea of the Savior. Yes, He did die as a sacrificial Lamb, but He is going to return in power and in glory. He's not "pitiful" at all, and this word, in the Greek, is not "pitiful" anyway. In the Greek, it means "extremely compassionate"—this God we serve. It says, "[T]he Lord is very"—extremely—" [compassionate], and of tender mercy." Of tender mercy. That's what this God is like: compassionate, and of tender mercy—always. He never has a bad day. He *never* has a bad day. You don't have to wait and catch Him at a good time. No, that's the way *we* are. You don't want to approach somebody you know, or a loved one, when they're in a bad mood, when you need something from them. It's like, "Well, uhh, they're having a bad day, so I'm going to wait. I'll hold off." But God never has a bad day. You can always depend upon the fact that He is compassionate, and of tender mercy. Anytime you need Him, you can approach Him, and you can be sure that this is how He is going to receive you.

Deuteronomy 32 and verse 9. Deuteronomy 32 and beginning in verse 9: "For the [Eternal's] portion is his people . . ." Does He care for Israel—His chosen people? You bet He does.

For the [Eternal's] portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the [Eternal] alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

God compares Himself, in essence, to a mother hen. That's how He cares for His little chicks—His beloved children. He is incredibly protective of them. He loves them, and He proved it by giving His own life for them all.

John 3:16–17—we've read it once, but it confirms what we are talking about. John 3 and beginning in verse 16: "For God so loved *the world* . . ." Again, not just one little group of people. Israel was only a type. Spiritual Israel—the Church—is only the Firstfruits of His work. The goal, the master plan, the *big* picture, is to offer this salvation to the *whole world*—*all* peoples of *all* nations. And, as you heard Mr. Litz speak about it yesterday, *all* of those nations are going to become spiritual Israelites through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, regardless of what their physical genealogy is. That doesn't matter. What matters is the call, and what we do with the call from the time we receive it. And, then, we come under the sheltering wings of God, if we will go along with His program.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That's the goal He wants us all to live—not just to persist in life, but to have a quality of life, a glorious life in His Family forever.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world [His purpose is not to stomp us out, which is what we deserve]; but that the world through him might be saved.

Because this is a good God. This is a *good* God. This is a God who deserves to be thanked, and to be praised, and to be honored, and to be hallowed, and to be worshiped, at all times. And, it doesn't matter what you are enduring. At the height of your suffering—physical or mental—whatever He may allow you to experience and to endure, He loves you, and it is His desire for you to have that

ultimate reward forever in His Kingdom. And all He is allowing is part of that perfect plan and His righteous judgment. Do you believe that's true?

Many times, it's hard for us to believe it, because we get caught up in the battle—the emotions, and all of the things that hit us from all sides—and we just think, "God, why me? When is this going to end? Can I not just get a let up—just a little one?" But do you recognize that entertaining that thought—allowing that thought to take root and to grow—is another way of saying, "God, I don't believe you are a good God. I believe you are a powerful God; I believe you are real, and that you created all that exists; I believe you can do anything you want, but you sure aren't being good today. Because if you were a good God, you would behave differently toward me." Now, you've never said that—or I doubt that you have—even in your own thoughts, when you are alone, but look behind the thoughts a little deeper and tell me that you haven't felt that way. Have you?

Romans 5 and verse 5. Romans 5 and beginning in verse 5: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us." When we embrace this Way of Life, and use that Spirit as a tool to help us overcome and grow nearer to this God, we can more perfectly begin to emulate the same righteous characteristics that God already possesses. That's what it is all about—that's our entire mission for salvation: overcoming the self; walking in His righteous footsteps, which means crucifying the self (what you and I are by nature), and instead, emulating more and more of His righteous character. The character of this perfect God who is always right, and never wrong. Now, that's a lifelong battle, and you won't get there—even by the end of your life—and neither will I, but that doesn't mean that we should be willing to settle for less. No, you and I can't do that. We have to keep struggling to grow, and there are always more opportunities for you and me to grow.

. . . because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Thank God that He didn't require us to measure up to some minimum standard before He was willing to be kind to us. Who deserved it? *Did you?* I didn't. I get on my knees and I say, "Oh, God, I don't know why you chose to allow me to understand this Way of Life, but I know I didn't do anything to deserve it." I am just so thankful to be a part of that Body, by His grace.

"[I]n due time Christ died for the ungodly"—you and me, because we were separated from God. That's what "ungodly" means—those who do not take God, at least not the true God, into consideration in what they do. They may use the name of God; they may have an understanding of certain of the moral principles from the Bible, or whatever, but God considers the "ungodly" those who are not really following the Law as He revealed it.

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Oh, yes, sometimes even human beings will make the ultimate sacrifice and give their lives for the benefit of someone else, but usually, it's for people they consider to be deserving. How many of you are going to give your lives voluntarily for somebody who is of the dregs of society—horrible in behavior and example, a terrible character? Would you really give everything so that that person can benefit? That's what Jesus Christ did. That's exactly what He did.

Verse 8: "But God commendeth his love toward us . . ." Unlike what human beings do, God commended His love toward us, "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." That's the personification of love, mercy, longsuffering, compassion, meekness and temperance—all of those fruits of the Spirit.

Verse 9: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies . . ."—which we all were. And to some extent, we still behave like enemies toward God. When we doubt Him; when we rebel; when we refuse to overcome; when we are stiff-necked and hard-hearted, we are still behaving like enemies.

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." That's what grace—unmerited pardon—is all about. That's the epitome of love. And, guess what? The God who died to provide that grace was the same Being who was the God of the Old Testament, whom the world despises. They call Him a cruel and hateful old God, and they have no concept of what they are talking about.

The decisions that God makes are not subject to man's critique. When we don't understand why He did a certain thing, it is not for you, me, or anybody else in the world to pass judgment upon God, as if we know better than Him. Yet,

that's what we do. Romans 11, verse 32. Romans 11 and beginning in verse 32: "For God hath concluded them *all* in unbelief . . ." You can just make that blanket statement for every single one of us, by nature. We are all a bunch of unbelievers, in essence, is what He is saying—the whole bunch—there's not a single one that's worthy.

"For God hath concluded them *all* in unbelief [Why?], that he might have mercy upon all." Why has He kept the world in ignorance of His Law? You would think that a good God—a merciful, a loving God—would open the minds of *all* people *right now*, so that they can walk in that Way, and be blessed, and not have all of these curses. Isn't that what a good God would do? So, *why*, if this God is so righteous and perfect, does He keep them blinded, so that they are miserable and cut off? "[T]hat he might have mercy upon all." But it's in His given time, not according to their expectations.

Verse 33: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" When we don't understand the answer to "why," the answer never involves a defect with God. The answer always involves our lack of understanding, in some way, of a piece of the puzzle—His ways. "[H]ow unsearchable are his judgments." They are far above your capacity and my capacity to fathom—way beyond the limits of the greatest human minds, whoever they may be. "[H]ow unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" And yet, we, as weak, uneducated human beings, are going to use our very limited knowledge—which is about so big—and pass judgment on God, whose judgment is off the scale. It's absurd, isn't it? That's what we do.

Verse 34: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" Who has known? Who, of all human beings, has ever understood the fullness of the mind, and the capability, and the thinking of God? Have you? I haven't. As He said through the Apostle Paul, "We see through a glass, darkly." He only allows us to see, as if through a blurry glass, and we can see certain things, and certain forms, which give us a hint, but we can't see it all. We can't even touch the tip of the iceberg as far as understanding His mind and His Plan. And yet, we, with that very limited, fuzzy vision, are going to pass judgment on God and say, "You are not being fair," or "You are somehow, less than loving and merciful." It's arrogant, isn't it? Absolutely arrogant for any human being to do it. "[W]ho hath known the mind of the Lord . . ." Who is going to make himself equal with God and pass judgments on His acts?

"[O]r who hath been his counsellor?" Are you worthy to be His counselor, or to give Him advice? Job tried to do that. In the totality of his suffering and his agony over so many days, and even months, he pleaded with God without realizing what he was getting himself into. "Oh, God, if you will just give me an audience in your court—if you will just allow me to make my case before you—I know that we can come to some understanding. Just give me a chance and tell me what I am doing wrong. Let me reason with you." Without knowing it—without realizing it—Job was wanting to be God's counselor. "Let me be an advisor, because I see an angle to this thing that I think is in your blind spot. So let me fill in the gaps in your knowledge so that you have more information. Because I know that if you had *all* the facts, and really understood what I was going through, you would help me." Are we going to be God's counselor? Are we going to behave toward Him as if He lacks knowledge or understanding? No, remember, He is omniscient—He has all knowledge. There's nothing He doesn't know, including every circumstance of your need, your suffering, your weaknesses and your desires. He already knows, and in fact He knows them better than you or I do.

You see, even when we pray—and you are going to get a message on this in a few days—the purpose of our prayer is not to try and inform God of things He does not know. You can't tell Him anything He is not already fully aware of, and a whole lot more completely than you and I are.

If something God does, or doesn't do, seems, in our minds, to be wrong, what must be the truth of it? In every single case, it is we who are missing something, not God. It is *we* who are missing something, not God—even if the requirement is just to endure. You may be doing everything He expects you to do, but you still may not be getting the relief you are asking for. That was true in the case of Job. Job's test was to see whether or not he would endure an extended trial and still not turn and curse God. Well, he didn't, but he did manifest doubts and weakness. But his test was for the purpose of seeing if he would endure.

Now, in a lot of cases, we suffer because we are still violating certain laws—even unknowingly—that are bringing automatic curses upon us. And what we should be doing is asking God, "What am I still doing wrong that I need to fix? I want to stop putting my hand on the hot stove. Please show me what I am doing so that I can stop doing it." But sometimes it's just a test of endurance. Will you



continue to obey, and not justify yourself and your whims—the way you want it to be—because you really love His Way more than your own personal comfort right now?

But if something God does seems to be wrong, the truth, in every case, is that it is we who are missing something, not God. Always. Period. If you believe that is true, and if you will use that in the evaluation of everything you experience, you are already far down the road in coming to know this God. Just acknowledge that is true, and when you catch yourself in mind—even a flash of an idea—wanting to criticize, because you think God is not treating you well, or is being distant from you, you grab that thought and you say, "*No*, I will not tolerate that in my mind, because I know it's not true. There is nothing wrong with God; He is a perfect God; He is a compassionate, loving, kind, and good God, all of the time, without fail. And I will not criticize Him. I *will not* criticize Him."

What about in instances like 1 Samuel 15:1? Oh, these are the sort of texts that just drive so-called Christians crazy. They will denigrate the God of the Old Testament, in so many words, as being an evil God. This is just one little snippet—1 Samuel 15 and we will read verses 1 through 3: "Samuel also said unto Saul . . ." Here the prophet Samuel is speaking a message to King Saul. He's telling Saul what God has given him to tell him. Here's God instruction:

The [Eternal] sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the [Eternal] [here is God speaking]. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. [Verse 3:] Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

So said the great Almighty God of love, and mercy, and compassion, and longsuffering, and peace. And He instructed Samuel to tell King Saul to destroy this particular people, root and branch. Do you know what the world calls that today? Genocide—crimes against humanity. If they had the opportunity, they would haul God up before the International Criminal Court and put Him on trial. Now, how do *you* view that? Did God make a mistake? Did He lash out in wrath and vengeance like a human being? If not—if this was also an act of perfect love, and mercy, and kindness—how do you make sense of it? Can you?

Do you know what the answer is—that the world doesn't get? The sins of the Amalekites had come to the full. These people were so corrupt and so vile that they were their own worst enemies. They were miserable people, because when you violate God's laws, you are cursed. And when you are so far away, your life—not only your own life, but those of your children—is absolute misery, and an abomination. The act of God to kill them and to put them in the grave was an act of incredible love and mercy. Human beings don't view it that way, but again, God has a different perspective. These Amalekites are now waiting peacefully in their graves—asleep—and are going to come up in a second resurrection which we are going to talk about on the Last Great Day. They will have the opportunity to have new bodies, and to have converted minds that can understand and receive the Truth so that they can become spiritual Israelites. Now, how is that harming them?

When God wiped out the peoples of the world with a flood in the time of Noah, was that an act of evil? No, it was an absolute act of love and kindness to that world, whose sins, again, had come to the full, and who were their own worst enemies—absolutely miserable. The earth was full of violence and every imaginable evil.

When God wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah, the same thing. He did those people a favor, because now they are waiting for the time of their conversion. He is a loving God, and yet, the world doesn't get it. So they say, "Ohh, that terrible God of the Old Testament. Ohhh, He killed people—He committed genocide." They don't know they are talking about Jesus Christ. It was the one who became Jesus Christ who gave this order to Samuel. Oh, they revere their concept of Jesus. "Oh, we love Jesus because Jesus died for our sins, and He was the sacrificial Lamb." Great. But they don't get it. They don't even know Him at all—they don't even begin to understand who this God is. But you have that opportunity.

The message, brethren, is to stop judging according to your concept, or my concept, of what God's will should be. Very often He doesn't reveal to us His will and purpose in the short term. He allows us to see the long-range plan, which is what these Holy Days are all about, but He doesn't give us advance knowledge about what's coming immediately, and why. That's where you and I have to walk in faith, no matter what we experience, and trust that He is working it out for our good, no matter how difficult.

Romans 9 and verse 14. Romans 9 and beginning in verse 14, and we will read through verse 21: "What shall we say then?"—Paul says to the Romans. "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Down deep inside, that's what a lot of people think—even in the church. "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Does He ever make a mistake? Does He ever miss something? Does He make a poor judgment? Paul says, "God forbid." No way—never.

"For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Now, that seems a little preferential. God says, "I'll decide when and how I will have mercy, and when I will not." But whatever He decides, it is still part of the righteous acts of a loving God—always.

Verse 16: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth . . ." That means judgments concerning what happens in the lives of individuals are not up to you and me—the ones that have been called to run this race, and to overcome, and to qualify. It's not up to you or me to pass judgment, "but of God that sheweth mercy." What he is saying is that when there are things that you or I don't understand, we need to stop putting ourselves in the place of God as if we can make judgments about what is right and what is wrong regarding circumstances. He says that you and I have to get ourselves out of that, because God is the one in control—He has the reins. He knows what He is doing. Don't doubt it. ". . . but of God that shows mercy."

Then drop down to verse 20: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" We all do it. We all do it, unknowingly. We don't mean to, but we do. One of the things that I hope to accomplish in this series is to bring all of these little nuances of mind to our attention so that we are better able to recognize them when they happen. Because those are things that foster offense. And what was it that Jesus Christ said was going to happen in the last days prior to His Second Coming? What was going to be the hallmark of the time leading up to His return? "Many shall be offended." And He is saying that many of His called people are going to be offended and begin to betray one another, and they are going to turn away from the Truth. Why? They will draw conclusions in their minds that are different than God's. They will separate themselves from God because they do not trust that He knows what He is doing, and that He is *always* a good God. And, therefore, they will allow their own interpretations to trump their obedience and their consistency in following God. And they will go their own way.

If you want to avoid falling into the trap of offense—which is going to catch many, and already has caught many of God's chosen people in this age—get to know God. Get to know Him, and furthermore, to trust Him. That's going to be your salvation.

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

If you go back and read the verses I skipped, we are talking about Pharaoh. Some people think, "Well, God was mean to Pharaoh, because God is the one who hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that Pharaoh couldn't do anything but what he did." But it was still God's perfect will and purpose—even for Pharaoh. He didn't mistreat or abuse Pharaoh. Only if you understand and believe that He is a good God, will you reconcile that in your mind. If you leave even a shadow of an opening in your mind to begin to think, "Well, I don't know. God didn't seem to treat Pharaoh fairly there." If you allow that, what you are saying is, "Hm, Hm, Hm, God is defective in judgment, at least sometimes. He can't be trusted fully." Don't allow it—don't allow that ever to take root.

This God whom we are talking about is worthy to be praised and to be glorified at all times. At *all* times. Notice Psalm 100—a short Psalm. We'll read the whole thing. Psalm 100—a psalm of praise:

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the [Eternal] with gladness: come before his presence with singing [we did that this morning and we do that in every service in which we come before Him during this Feast of Tabernacles]. Know ye that the [Eternal] he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people [meaning we belong to Him; we are His property; He can do with us what He wants, and we don't have anything to say about it], and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.

The command here, brethren, is not just that you and I grudgingly show up and do what He requires us to do. "Oh, He tells us that we are supposed to go to the Feast of Tabernacles, and we are supposed to go to services and appear before

Him. Okay, I'll do it, but I don't like it." He won't accept that offering, if that is our orientation. He wants us not only to obey, but He wants us to obey with a full heart of thankfulness—an orientation of appreciation and of valuing Him.

"[B]e thankful unto him, and bless his name." Verse 5: "For the [Eternal] *is good*." Such a simple-sounding statement. But if you really believe that, do you know the difference it will make in your life? Don't let it just be a superficial concept. Say it in your prayers with a full heart.

[T]he [Eternal] is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

This is a God who deserves your awe; and your respect; and your honor; and your praise; and your devotion, all of the time—every day, all day long. Do you do this?: I find myself sometimes, when I get down to pray, wanting to launch into all of the things I really need Him to help me to do, and I forget to thank Him. He deserves that time—to be thanked, and to be honored, and to be praised. And not just superficially, because that can happen too, when we make it a repetitive obligation. "Thank you, God. Okay, now let me get to my list." No, thank Him from the bottom of your heart, and ask Him for the power of His Spirit to feel thankfulness. And when you don't feel thankful, *tell Him*. "I know that I'm supposed to be thankful, O God, but I just don't feel thankful. I know that's wrong. Help me, because you deserve to be praised, and to be honored, and to be thanked all of the time. Help me to do it." Help me to do it.

Psalm 135 and verse 1. Psalm 135 and beginning in verse 1: "Praise ye the [Eternal]. Praise ye the name of the [Eternal]; praise him, O ye servants of the [Eternal]." There are so many sincere people who claim to be Christian, who are still deceived—they don't know the Truth yet, but they love to get into this, you know, "Oh, praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" And to God, it's a vain repetition. He's not into vain repetitions, because it is all superficial. They may be sincere in what they think they are doing, but they don't know. But He wants His true people to come to praise Him from a real depth of conviction, understanding and purpose, so that when we praise Him, there is thought and substance behind it. *That's* what He is after.

Praise ye the [Eternal]. Praise ye the name of the [Eternal]; praise him, O ye servants of the [Eternal]. Ye that stand in the house of the

[Eternal], in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the [Eternal]; for the [Eternal] *is good*.

Why do you praise Him? Out of obligation? "Grumble, grumble, grumble. I'm supposed to praise you, so here I am praising you, God." No, He gives us a reason to praise Him: It is because He *is good*. He *deserves* to be praised; He *deserves* your honor and your thanksgiving, at all times.

Praise the [Eternal]; for the [Eternal] is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant. For the [Eternal] hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure. For I know that the [Eternal] is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the [Eternal] pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

You know, it was possible that this powerful God might not have been good. Who's to say that He had to have perfect character? This universe might have been created by a being who had the power to create and to sustain, but might not have been a good God at all. Have you ever stopped to think about that? What might our lives have been like if this universe was ruled by a God who wasn't honest—who wasn't upright, who wasn't loving, and merciful, and kind? It could have happened, but it didn't. The Creator God, who has always existed, also happens to be good. Thank God for that. He *is* a good God, and therefore He deserves that recognition, and that thanksgiving, and that praise.

Revelation 4. I'm going to read very quickly, in closing, Revelation 4, verses 4 through 11. Here is an example of praise and worship of God going on at the very throne of God in heaven. Here, the Apostle John was allowed to see in vision an image of something happening at the very throne of God—the worship of the holy angels before this great Majesty, the Almighty God. And here is what happened—let me just read it quickly. Revelation 4 and beginning in verse 4:

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting [these are holy angels with power and authority to carry out certain responsibilities under God], clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a

sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts [actually better translated as "four living creatures"—also angels] full of eyes before and behind. . . . [Skip down to verse 8:] And the four [living creatures] had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those [living creatures] give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Now, that is a compelling ceremony of convicted beings. They are not going to be members of the God Family—they are the serving class known as angels. But these faithful angels have a respect and reverence for the God whom they serve—and they manifest it continually in this worship before Him, at His throne. *There* is a good example of the way you and I should view our God—not just the majesty, the power, the ability, and the capabilities of this strong, invincible God, but the fact that He has the glorious character that deserves our respect, our thanks, and our praise, at all times.

Next time, brethren, we are going to continue with a description of more of the character of this God which makes Him worthy to be praised and to be trusted.