

Whom The Lord Loves, He Chastens

First Day of Unleavened Bread

Harold Lee

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By way of introduction, I would like to begin in 1 Corinthians 11. This is a very familiar scripture. I would daresay one that will be read many times in the next couple of months. It certainly will be read during the spring holy days. In this discourse, Paul was very strongly correcting the Corinthian congregation for their very irreverent approach to the Passover meal. Let's turn to verse 23 of 1 Corinthians 11 and I'll start there. I'm breaking into a thought here.

1 Corinthians 11:23. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

25) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

26) For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

27) Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28) But [he says,] let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29) For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner... (NKJ)

And Paul is instructing them and us that this unworthy manner may result in our potential failure to examine ourselves.

29) For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (NKJ)

He's basically saying for us not holding ourselves up to the physical and the spiritual standards that have been set by God and Christ, and conveyed to us by His word, will result in a judgment with a very undesirable outcome.

At the point that Paul was instructing them, this judgment was not talking about the Lake of Fire, the final judgment. He was saying that they bring judgment on themselves. Although a continuance of this behavior could ultimately lead to that.

Let's continue reading and look in the context. I think it will add a dimension to this that I want to delve into a little later. Verse 31:

31) For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. (NKJ)

Let me just read that out of three other versions. The New Jerusalem Bible says:

31) If we were critical of ourselves, we would not be condemned. (NJB)

The American Standard says:

31) But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. (ASV)

The Bible in Basic English says:

31) But if we were true judges of ourselves, punishment would not come on us. (BBE)

Then I'll go ahead and continue in verse 32.

32) But when we are judged, (NKJ)

We're still talking about the judgment from God, which he mentioned in verse 29.

32) But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (NKJ)

So, again, this judgment that they would bring on themselves was not the lake of fire, which he's talking about here.

Remember Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians was very strong and corrective where Paul was trying to shake them out of their complacency by pointing out how they had become complacent. We read in his second epistle that the congregation took his correction to heart, and, in some cases, overcorrected for their behavior.

Let's just examine. The Greek word "chasten" in verse 32 is Strong's #3811. I'm going to try to pronounce it. Please forgive me you that are Greek scholars. It's *paideuo* and it means *to train up a child*. Remember when Christ brought the children in His arms, the Greek word for that is "paidion" (*pahee-dee'-on*). *Paideuo* has that same connotation of "as a child."

It means *to educate, or by implication to discipline by punishment*. It's used in the King James to chasten or to chastise, instruct, to learn, and to teach.

I want to read the commentary from Barnes Notes on this section of scripture. I'll just tell you Barnes Notes, those of you who use that, there's a bit of Protestant jargon in here, but it does contain the essence of this scripture. So, just bear with me as I read it

and just overlook some of that. He's breaking this down. So, he first addresses "but when we are judged." He said:

This is added, evidently, to console those who had been afflicted on account of their improper manner of observing the Lord's Supper. The sense is, that though they were thus afflicted by God; though he had manifested his displeasure at the manner in which they had observed the ordinance, yet the divine judgment in the case was not inexorable. They were not regarded by God as wholly strangers to piety, and would not be lost forever. They should not be alarmed, therefore, as if there was no mercy for them; but they should rather regard their calamities as the chastening of the Lord on his own children, and as designed for their salvation.

And then he comments on "We are chastened of the Lord."

It is "his" act; and it is not vengeance and wrath; but it is to be regarded as the chastisement of a father's hand, in order that we should not be condemned with the wicked. "We are under the discipline" [*paideuometha* (grk 3811)] of the Lord; we are dealt with as children, and are corrected as by the hand of a father;... The design of God's correcting his children is, that they should be "reclaimed," and not "destroyed."

Then the final one "That we should not be condemned with the world."

It is implied here: (1) That the world—those who were not Christians, would be condemned; (2) That Paul regarded the Corinthians, whom he addressed, and who had even been guilty of this improper manner of observing the Lord's Supper, and who had been punished for it as true Christians; and, (3) That the purpose which God had in view in inflicting these judgments on them was, that they might be purified, and enlightened, and recovered from their errors, and saved...

And I want to emphasize the next statement because we're going to delve into it in more depth. Continuing to quote:

(3 continued) This is the design of God in the calamities and judgments which he brings on his own children— And so now, if he afflicts us, or leaves us to darkness, or follows the communion with the tokens of his displeasure, it is, that we may be recovered to a deeper sense of our need of him; to juster views of the ordinance; and to a more earnest wish to obtain his favor.

And that's the end of the article.

If we're not careful in our Christian walk, we can equate prosperity, health, and happiness with pleasing God. If we're having difficult times, we're not pleasing God. And if we are, well we must just be the apple of God's eye. Not necessarily. God is

more interested in seeing us as sons in His family than seeing us all warm and fuzzy right now. God is seeing the end. He's seeing the product and the process is not always one that is pleasant.

Turn over to Proverbs chapter 3, and I'll just read two verses, starting in verse 11. It says:

Proverbs 3:11. *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; (NKJ)*

And again, I'll look at those two Hebrew words.

"Despise" is Strong's #3988 and it *means to abhor or to cast away, to condemn, or to disdain, or to loathe, to refuse, to reject, to utterly put away.*

So, it says, "Don't *despise* the chastening of the LORD, nor *detest*." And "detest" is Strong's #6973 and it means through the idea of severing oneself from; in other words to walk away from, to be disgusted or anxious. And that's translated in the King James *to abhor, to be distressed, to be grieved, to loathe, to vex, or to be weary.*

So, Proverbs tells us:

Proverbs 3:11. *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; (NKJ)*

Notice it's written "My son." It's not "You that I am holding at arm's length." He says, "My son, do not despise." It's talking about us today who are the spirit-begotten children of God.

Why should we not do this? Why should we not despise this chastening? Because it hurts and it's not comfortable! Verse 12:

12) For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son [Notice this!] in whom he delights. (NKJ)

I know I have. When you're in the middle of a sore trial, you say "How much more of God's love can I take? I'm not sure I can handle much more of this." Because it says, "in whom God delights." Does that mean we don't have flaws? No.

Remember back with your children when they did something and you had to harshly punish them. Was there an instant in there that you no longer loved them even during that punishment? And the answer is "Of course not!" In fact, it grieves you. It hurts you. I used to laugh at my parents when they said, "Now, this is going to hurt me more than it is you." And I go, "Why won't they tell the truth?" Then as a parent, and now as grandparent, you realize that's true. It's not fun. It's not pleasant not only to the recipient but as a parent or a grandparent.

And I know with God. Brethren, we have to have faith in our Father and know that God's punishment, His chastisement on his children is always given to bring out a positive outcome. It is never in this age, it's never designed to destroy them. It's always to improve.

Have you ever noticed—maybe that's a good way to put it—have you ever noticed that we, as humans, naturally we want to be warm and secure and fuzzy? And when a sore trial comes on us (whether it be internal like health or external like relationship issues like marriage, family, job, on and on), our first reaction is to go to God and say, "Take this away from me! Remove it!" I have to tell you that is the natural reaction of a human.

Remember Christ when He was facing the sorest trial of His life on this earth? He went to the Father not once, not twice, but three times and said, "Is it possible that you remove this from Me?" But then He realized it's not His will; it's not what He [Jesus] wants. It's what God wants. And it had to be that way. And He realized that.

So, it's natural to ask God to take it away. It's not as if somehow we are completely out of tune with God. That is just a human reaction to trials, to pain, to uncertainty.

And in a trial, we want to blame Satan. We want to blame others—our boss, our spouse, our neighbors. And then whatever we perceive as the problem—and again, we've all done this—we want God to fix them. "Would you make this person quit doing this? Would you take care of this?" And again, who among us have not done that?

Perhaps our prayer to God would be to help you understand why you are experiencing a trial, to help you understand, to give you strength to endure and to overcome it.

Several hundred years after Solomon penned the Proverbs, the author of the epistle of Hebrews reminded them of this very thing by quoting the Proverbs. Look over in Hebrews 12. Those words were in some ways immortal. They applied when Solomon wrote them, to the New Testament Church and they apply now.

Let me give you a little history about the epistle to the Hebrews. The author of the Hebrews epistle is not mentioned and there is a wide diversion among the scholars, but most of them agree that it is the apostle Paul. Now keep in mind that Paul was not very popular among the Hebrews, among the Jews, because remember what he did to them before his conversion. And most of Paul's ministry was directed to the Gentiles because of those issues.

Now this epistle was written around 61-62 AD. And this was about the time that James, who was the elder, the pastor of the Jerusalem church was killed. Of course, they lost the person that was their teacher, the person that was their leader, one of the apostles. And that left them in a very upset, uncertain state.

Also the author, again, we believe it was Paul, was preparing them for the very devastating times shortly ahead. We have the history books and know that 70 AD, just seven or eight years later, the city was sacked. The city was destroyed. The temple was destroyed. Many were killed and many taken into captivity.

I will tell you I believe there is a very similar state that the church is in—that we find ourselves in today. As the leaders have died, have we become scattered? And now, facing the future, which Harold's opinion today is it's not going to be seven or eight years. I think it's very close.

But I think we need as we read this, we can very easily put ourselves into this. Hebrews 12 and let's start in verse 5. I'm breaking again into a thought just for the sake of time. It says:

Hebrews 12:5. *And [have you] forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ... (NKJ)*

Here he quotes from Proverbs 11. Keep in mind this was the Hebrews who knew the Old Testament writings very well. He was personalizing the Old Testament writings.

5b) ... "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; (NKJ)

In all of this uncertainty and trials, Paul wanted them to focus on the fact that God was allowing this and it was for a positive outcome in their spiritual growth. Verse 6:

6) For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." (NKJ)

And if you want a title for today's sermon, it is:

For Whom the Lord Loves, He Chastens

He goes on to say in verse 7:

7) If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (NKJ)

You can feel sorry for children that have no boundaries. They're allowed to do what they do and to run. When you see a child that knows their boundaries, that knows how far they can go, that continually get put back in, those really are happy and contented children because they know the boundaries.

8) But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (NKJ)

So, all of the children, it says "all have become partakers," all of God's people. He says if it's not happening to you, then you don't belong to God.

9) Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10) For they indeed for a few days... (NKJ)

This is talking about our human fathers.

10b) ... chastened us as seemed best to them, but He... (NKJ)

God, who has agape love, remember that's outgoing. That's always doing what's right for the other person.

10 continued) ... but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. (NKJ)

I would submit to you that the place to start the examination of ourselves here, as we move into it, is to start with our examination with our relationship with God our Father and Jesus Christ our brother. I think sometimes when we start it we start to make a list of:

- Here's what I need to do.
- Here's where I need to work on.
- Here's where I've failed.

And, frankly, that's sort of—I'm not saying we shouldn't do those things, but I believe the first thing we need to do is let's look at the relationship that we have with God and with Jesus Christ before even any of the other has a hope. If we don't have a relationship with them, then we're not going to benefit. They are required by God, but understand all of that doesn't buy us a thing.

Look over in Isaiah 64. No matter what we do, no matter how hard we work, no matter how much we try to do good works, it just doesn't buy us anything. Isaiah 64 verse 4:

Isaiah 64:4. *For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him.*

5) You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned—in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved. (NKJ)

He realizes that we've sinned and we need to be rescued.

6) But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (NKJ)

Just skip down to verse 8. I think this helps us put our relationship into perspective.

8) But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. (NKJ)

Have you ever considered trials and chastening are a way that we are shaped and we're molded and we're formed? Nothing that we can do on our own will earn us anything with God as far as what we're going to receive, but just as we read in verse 8 with the acknowledgement of God our Father, He corrects us and He chastises us for our spiritual growth. With the acknowledgement of God being our Father, comes the acceptance.

When you're a child, it's easy to accept your father, to accept your mother, but when you get to be grown up, mature, it's kind of hard to think of yourself as a child. But with us understanding that God is our Father comes the acceptance that He's the one that's shaping us into what He wants us to become.

Does God know what He's doing? Is He trying to kill me? Doesn't He know what He's doing? There is a strong indictment for us criticizing God for our trials, if we see them for what they are.

Look over in Isaiah chapter 45, just back a few chapters from where we are now. Isaiah 45 verse 9, it says:

Isaiah 45:9. *"Woe to him who strives with his Maker! (NKJ)*

And, again, it's this clay and the potter. It says:

9b) Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! (NKJ)

Because, if you're going to strive with something, go do it with someone else. You, as a little potsherd, go strive with the other potsherds, but not God.

9 continued) Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' ... (NKJ)

"What are you doing to me?" Or, and I think this is a very interesting way of putting it.

9 continued) ... Or shall your handiwork [In other words, us!] say, 'He has no hands'? (NKJ)

Just hold your finger there. Let's go look over at Numbers. Again, hold your finger there in Isaiah. Let's go look at Numbers 11.

When we consider our lives, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions to consider. When is what is going on in our lives beyond God's ability to stop it, to fix it, to prevent it, to heal, to feed, to provide? When is it? At what point is it completely out of God's control or His ability to do something? That's the point that we would say to our potter, "He has no hands. He can't reach that far. He can't fix this."

The Israelites were in the wilderness and they were feeling sorry for themselves. They came again to Moses and accused him of wanting to deprive them of their lives and deprive them of what they really missed and really desired. Moses, as a human, was at the end of his rope and he went to God. We'll pick it up in Numbers 11 and verse 12. Moses is talking here to God and he says:

Numbers 11:12. *"Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers' (NKJ)*

Moses is completely exasperated trying to understand their reactions.

13) *"Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'*

14) *"I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.*

15) *"If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now— ... (NKJ)*

It's interesting because there have been a number of those that we look up to that have gone to God and said, "I can't take it anymore. Please kill me. Just put me out of my misery. And then wake me up in the resurrection. I just can't deal with this." I don't know of a time God said, "Okay," and He did it. Now, later they died, but God was not only doing something through them, He was doing something with them.

15) *"If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!" (NKJ)*

And then in verse 23 and I won't read all of it.

23) *And the LORD said to Moses, "Has the LORD'S arm been shortened? [Is it out of my reach? Can I not deal with this?] Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not." (NKJ)*

What happens in our lives outside God's ability to fix it? He was the one that by His Word scooped up—well, He spoke us into existence. He willed us into existence. He knows our frame. He knows we're dust. At what point is it out of God's control and He can't fix what is happening to us?

Go back to Isaiah 45. We'll pick it up in verse 9.

Isaiah 45:9. *"Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'? (NKJ)*

"His arm is too short," as He said in Numbers.

10) *Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?'"*

11) *Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his [Israel's] Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.*

12) *I have made the earth, and [I] created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. (NKJ)*

God is saying, "Look! Look everywhere. I did this. My hands that are not too short have done this."

Verse 18:

18) *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other.*

19) *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.*

20) *"Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save.*

21) *Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; ... (NKJ)*

Not a destroyer! Not a respecter of people.

21) *... a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me.*

22) *"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (NKJ)*

I was recently talking to someone regarding prophecy. I mentioned what I firmly believe is stated in 1 Corinthians 13 that prophecy is a gift that God gives.

For what my personal opinion is worth: Far more people today walking the earth claim it and think they have it. And I think far more claim it than they really do. I think it's easy to think of yourself as a prophet. God is going to have to sort that out.

But I will say this as emphatic as I can say it: This is a gift that God has not given to me. And the reason that I say when I say that is what I'm about to tell you is not from a deep understanding of the mysteries of prophecy or to predict a specific time or when an event will occur. I am not a prophet, but let me tell you what I am.

I am a sailor. One of my loves is sailing. And, as a sailor, you have to read the winds and you have to know the sky. And I know when there is a red sky in the morning, sailors take warning. There are going to be winds. There is going to be nasty weather and all of that.

So, what I'm going to tell you is not as a prophet. I'm telling you this as a sailor. So, take it for that.

I believe—looking at the red sky in the morning, the signs of the time—in a sailor's opinion, we are standing on the precipice looking over into the abyss. If God did not intervene, we would go over that into oblivion.

Brethren, I've heard everything from "We've got a lot of time left" to "We don't have much time." And I will tell you, as a sailor, we don't have much time left. When you have the red sky in the morning, that's the day the storms hit. That's the day they're going to do it. And everything that we see around us... I wish I could say I see this. I think and I am convicted of this. The next good news we're going to have, again, is when Christ returns.

And, brethren, how we fare from this moment through that storm is dependent upon one thing and that is our relationship with God. Nothing less is going to have a positive outcome. And that positive outcome—I don't want to sugar-coat this—might mean we give up our physical lives just as countless other saints, other brethren have in the past.

Look over in Romans chapter 8. Romans 8 and verse 36, it says:

Romans 8:36. *As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."*

37) *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

38) *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (NKJ)*

In other words, off in the future!

39) *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJ)*

Brethren, why should we be afraid of anything? Illnesses, disease, job loss, family relationships, threats, betrayals—I dare say that most of the people sitting here have experienced multiples of those. And let me tell you, we will continue to. Let's make sure it's done because of our relationship with God not because of some of the things that we have done that we've brought things on ourselves.

What is our tipping point? At what point do we say, "I'm done, too much. Take me out of the fire. That wasn't part of the bargain. God surely doesn't expect me to submit to that." Show me in the Bible where a person walked away.

Don't forget who authored the epistle. As far as we know, again, he's talking to the Romans, but go over and let's look in 2 Corinthians 11 at the person who is saying, "Look, I know you're going to have a hard time. It's okay. There's nothing that can come between you." This was not someone that didn't have any practical experience with some of the trials. 2 Corinthians 11, it says:

2 Corinthians 11:23. *Are they ministers of Christ?— I speak as a fool— I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*

24) From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26) in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, ... (NKJ)

Notice this one!

26b) ... in perils among false brethren;

27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28) besides the other things (all of this physical), ... (NKJ)

Notice what he also mentions.

28b) ... what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (NKJ)

We wonder when Paul talks about his infirmities or his thorn in the flesh. I think I could take just about any one of those things and go, "I know why he had that." I just wonder how he got out of bed in the morning. He must have ached because forty stripes 5 times, beaten with rods, stoned 3 times and left for dead. Paul could have had to give himself a pep talk to just get out of bed in the morning. How many of us have felt that way? You just want the world to go away. And yet, I don't know of any of us that could say, "These are some of the things we've been through."

But notice in all of that, he says, "Also my concern for the church." One of the great burdens that he experienced, including all the physical torture was the mental anguish of, the behavior of, and the spiritual condition and maturity of, and his concern for the brethren. It was one of the things he agonized over. Never mind all the physical problems, all of the pain that he endured, all of the betrayals of false brethren, all of those things. The thing that still also concerned him was the brethren and how they were doing.

Verse 29:

29) Who is weak, [am I] not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

30) If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. (NKJ)

Here is why us focusing on a relationship is not something that can be put on the back burner. Building a relationship with God, a relationship to the depths of our being to implicitly trust Him with our physical and our spiritual lives, I believe just as Abraham and Jacob and Paul and most importantly Jesus Christ did, there will be a test for us to a degree or another that God will know that we have that trust in Him. I don't know what it is. I think everyone has a different test, a different threshold, but there just like with Abraham and God said, "Now I know." I think as sons we are going to all be faced with that in some form or another. God needs to know. And the only way that we'll get through that is to have a relationship with Him, to have built trust and faith in Him over time.

It's interesting because a relationship can only be built over time, over trials, over tests that you can ultimately have faith in God. We need to spend time communing with God and walking together, and, I don't know if you've considered this, going through trials together. Brethren, there is no Cliff Note's version for this test. We won't be able to cram the last night and pass the test. There's no shortened form of the test. If you believe that or you doubt that, go (in your own time) to Matthew 25 and look at the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

I remember back many years ago, before God became an anathema in this country, when you could still consider God to be someone, some being. When a movie was shown, whether it was a war movie and the soldiers were about to be engaged or prisoners being led away to their execution, the Jews making their last stand on Masada, whatever it was that their circumstances were almost certain death, they would start reciting the twenty-third psalm.

I want to turn over there or maybe, since most of you know it by heart, you can just mentally follow along. I and others have given entire sermons on this. I think even at times some of us that like to talk more, maybe two sermons on just these six verses, but there is tremendous truth that is contained in these verses. Psalm 23, it says:

Psalm 23:1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (NKJ)

God has promised that He will supply our needs. Promised.

2) He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters. (NKJ)

That is a state of contentment with having God as our provider and our watchman. It is to have a trust in Him.

3) He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (NKJ)

There is a promise of a certain future that is based on a lifetime walk of following Him.

4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; ... (NKJ)

We're not on this journey alone. We're not going through this trial alone. If it's just us and we're on a desert island, and maybe that is our trial, we're still not alone.

4b) ... You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (NKJ)

Notice there is no promise of physical deliverance from death—only a promise that He's with us.

5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. (NKJ)

Brethren, who are our enemies? Is it our neighbor? It is Satan? Is it death? Is it anguish, sorrow? Those are our enemies. And those are going to be replaced by an anointing into God's family and a position of service as kings and priests.

6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; ... (NKJ)

Regardless of what man does to us—regardless. We will respond with goodness and mercy as our constant companions.

6b) ... and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NKJ)

As a result of that journey, how and whenever it ends on the human level, there will be no end to our existence and our relationship with God and with each other. As I mentioned, relationships where we implicitly trust God with our lives, both physical now and spiritual, can't be done with the snap of your fingers. I've said it before and I'll probably say it many times in the future that a relationship with God and a strong bond, strong enough to withstand trials, are made over a period of time with trials, with chastisements from God.

During a period of extreme testing and tribulation, relationships are formed with one another. I've mentioned it before: "our foxhole companion." In war, when you know and you see that someone has your back, you start to form a bond with them. And a lot of the trials and tribulations that we experience now that God does and we do see God in them, maybe not to take it away from us when we think it is, maybe not to give us the outcome that we think that outcome should be, but to see us through it and let me tell you; once you come through a trial, you understand why you went through it and you appreciate it.

God has our backs. He is our foxhole companion. If we aren't battle-tested together, we—not God—if we're not battle-tested together, we're going to fail because we do not have a strong bond of trust with God. There are no shortcuts. Just like you can't buy oil from another person for your lamp, you can't rely on another person to provide you with what you need. It's one-on-one, you and God. It's your responsibility. It's your relationship.

Let me tell you what will fail. Let me just give you a couple of real quick examples of what will fail. If you believe you are in the right organization—I'm trying to do this in my Jeff Foxworthy impersonation—if you believe that by supporting some activity, if you believe by doing some machination, fail. Fail. Fail.

Brethren, we have to have a healthy, time battle-tested, one-on-one relationship with God and with Jesus Christ. The only way we'll do it. No person, no man, no anything else other than we have to submit to God; we have to go through those because one day when we go through the ultimate one (And, again, I think all of us have to do that.), there will be a time that we will say "I am so glad I went through those."

Look over in John chapter 10 and verse 27. Christ said:

John 10:27. *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28) "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; ... (NKJ)*

If you want to get an interlinear Bible, that word "never" is made up of no less than four Greek words. If you look at it in a Bible, it says, "And they shall never, never, never, never perish." Never, Strong's #3364; never, Strong's #1519; never, Strong's #3588; never, Strong's #165—all of those. It's an emphatic never.

28) "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (NKJ)

There is no power that exists that will allow, without God's will for us, to be snatched out of His hand. Then He even adds to that to say:

29) "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (NKJ)

When I first went in the army in boot camp, the platoon sergeant... Of course, we all had just got our heads shaved and we're standing out there shivering. And he stands up there and he says, "Does anybody think they can"... I'll clean it up. "Does anybody think they can kick my rear end?"

There was this big guy in the back. He was twice this sergeant's size. And he raised his hand and the sergeant said, "Come up here." So the guy came up there and he said, "So you think you can kick my rear end?" He said, "Uh, I think I can." He said, "Look at them." "Alright," he said, (This is the platoon sergeant.) "Now, does anybody think they can kick both of our rear ends?"

Well, that is what Christ is saying. "Look, nobody's going to snatch them. And, of by the way, the Father, they're not going to snatch them from Him either. He's greater than all." Brethren, we have security that's just incredible if we can just see it and we have that relationship of trust and that bond with Him.

The entire concept of trials and chastisement can become a very slippery slope because, as God's people, we tend to use it not to judge ourselves but to judge one another, especially in relation to trials that others experience. I think we should spend some time on this because, frankly, it can have just the opposite effect of what is the subject of this sermon and what I want to convey to you. Because it can cause us to examine others and to evaluate their spirituality based on what we see.

First of all, there are three emphatic promises that are made to everyone that God has given His spirit, that God has applied the sacrifice of His Son and has redeemed us and given us the right to call Him "Father." There are three promises. Now, these are not the only three. There are more, but there are three that I think are very germane to this.

Depending upon how long you've been in the church, I'm going to use a term "back in the olden days," the then Radio Church of God had, and later the Worldwide Church of God, had a soft-cover hymnal that we referred to as the gray hymnal. Most of you or a lot of you remember the old purple hymnal. That came out I think at the Feast in 1972. But before that was a stapled, dog-eared, well-worn soft-covered gray hymnal.

And on page 3 of that hymnal, there was a song titled "Standing on the Promises." This was a Protestant hymn written—and I say Protestant—back in the 1870s by a Methodist by the name of Russell Carter. But it was added to the church hymnal because back then before Dwight (and those who were helping him) had written enough, they had pulled some of the older hymns that were Biblically accurate and this one was. So, this was on page 3 of the old gray hymnal.

Now, I'm not going to sing it, but the essence of it is that a Christian's life is walking with the assurance of the promises God has made. That's what keeps you focused. It keeps you moving forward.

Now, I'm going to mention three of those. And, again, it's not a comprehensive list, but for what we're covering today, these are very important. Look over in Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 6.

Deuteronomy 31:6. *"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the [Eternal] your God, He is the One who goes with you. (NKJ)*

Remember: There is never a time that we're going through a trial alone. Never forget that. We never face a trial alone.

6b) He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

7) Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the [Eternal] has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.

8) "And the [Eternal], He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed." (NKJ)

Promise number one, we can stake our lives on it: Don't be afraid. God will not fail us nor forsake us.

Matthew 28, one much like it, Matthew 28 and in verse 20. Just go to the end of Matthew. This was one of the last things He said as He was on this earth before He went back to the Father. I'll just read the second half, Matthew 28:20.

Matthew 28:20. *"... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (NKJ)*

So, what are the time limits on this? To the end of the age. Again, brethren, we never face a trial alone.

Promise number two: He's our constant companion and will remain at our side forever.

At this point, we should be feeling very confident about God's presence in our lives. He will never fail us. He is with us always.

Promise number three: Our Christian walk with God, as our constant Companion, involves trials and troubles and tribulation. John 16 and verse 32:

John 16:32. *"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (NKJ)*

Here Jesus Himself reaffirmed that the Father was with Him just as with us.

Now, here is the third promise.

33) *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. ... (NKJ)*

So, just as He said before, "Be strong and of a good courage." Notice the promise.

33b) *In the world you will have tribulation; (NKJ)*

We didn't want to hear that one. We like the first two. The third one, well... But He says:

33 continued) *... be of good cheer, (NKJ)*

For the sake of time again, I won't turn but in 1 Peter 4:12 it says, "Don't think it strange when some fiery trial comes on you as if it was unexpected." He goes on to say, "Rejoice in your trials." I know that's hard. Do we rejoice because we don't feel it hurt? Or do we rejoice because we know God is with us? His arm is not so shortened. The outcome is sure, but the outcome is going to be what He wants it to be. Not what we want it to be.

He didn't say might. He didn't say maybe. He said you will. You might want to underline that word. You will have tribulation.

But what He did say is we can be of good cheer. We can rejoice, brethren. Why? Because the road we're going on has already been traveled by Him. He's been down the road. He's with us. And He's going to help see us through it, help us to navigate through it.

That leads me directly to our next point, which is: If we don't earn anything with God and what we get is a gift, why are we going through this? What are we learning? We're not working to earn something, but we are learning something. And that's the most important. Not what we're earning. It's what we're learning.

Look over in Hebrews chapter 5. Here's a point that even Christ Himself was not exempt from. Hebrews 5 verse 7:

Hebrews 5:7. *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears ... (NKJ)*

This is the God who spoke us into existence.

7b) *... to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, (NKJ)*

And we know what happened to Him. He was killed. It says, "He was heard." Underline that statement. Again, "He was heard." God heard Him. And God comforted Him, but He still went through what God had determined and He died.

8) though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (NKJ)

Notice this:

9) And having been perfected, ... (NKJ)

He was perfect. How could He have been perfected? Because He learned; because He understood our mortal weak state having gone through it. It didn't take away from His perfection. He was perfected because now He had walked in our shoes.

9b) He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (NKJ)

Brethren, we are close enough to each other that we know what trials each other experiences. And, as we watch... That's probably not a good word. That implies Jonah sitting on a hill waiting for Nineveh. As we up close and personal with our feelings see someone going through trials, our approach can tell us a lot about our own spiritual maturity.

Now, before I go on, I want you to notice our approach is what goes on inside you. It's your feelings. It's your thoughts. It's even your prayers to God, all done in private between you and your Father. Remember this is inside you. So, nothing ever has to be voiced. This is an internal test.

One approach is to see someone in a trial is to wonder what sin or what shortcoming they have that God would allow them to go through all of this. Again, we go back to the old "health and wealth," which is completely contrary. "Well, if you please God, He's going to put us in the diamond lane and we're not going to have any problems."

I want you to consider a well-known scripture, but consider it to a deeper level. Let's go over to Matthew 7. And, again, I want you to maybe look at this scripture in a way of the context of what we're talking about today, which might not be apparent. And I'm not trying to say this was the hidden meaning that Christ put in this. I'm just saying here is something we can apply. Matthew 7 verse 1, it says:

Matthew 7:1. "Judge not, that you be not judged. (NKJ)

And, again, the Greek word #2919. It means *to condemn or to damn or to sentence or to sue*.

Matthew 7:2. "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (NKJ)

Now, before I go on, I'm not talking about like the Corinthians seeing someone else sin and saying, "Oh, I'm going to be merciful and I'm going to be loving and I'm just going to show everybody how much I just love." This has nothing to do with sin. I think God has a reaction to sin that needs to become our reaction.

3) *"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?"*

4) *"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?"*

5) *"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, (NKJ)"*

So, He's not saying not to help your brother. He's saying, "Here's the course you have to follow. First, you get the plank out of your own eye and then you will clearly see to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

Have you ever considered going through the process of (and I'll use His analogy) going through the process of removing a plank from one's own eye? Christ said, "Look, by doing that, it will allow you to see. And to help another person, because the experience of (and, again, I'm using His analogy), the experience of plank removal has to teach you something. It's not to just get a plank out of your eye. It's so that you can serve and help another person.

Let's expand it to our universe. God is preparing us to serve and help others that come after us, people that have the same problems that we have had. Remember we're not the great. We're not the mighty. We're just Joe Schmo. They have the same problems and issues that we have.

Now, perhaps our trials are not because we're sinning, but our master potter is fashioning us into vessels to better serve those that come after us. At least that was the pattern that Christ set for us. Now, having said that, there are plenty of trials that we bring on ourselves, and those we have to deal with. It says if you're beaten for your faults, well you know what? Get used to it. But when you're beaten for your righteousness, then that's commendable before God.

But let's use this. Perhaps the fault is not related to the accuser, but it's something that they have to deal with. And again, the analogy is a log in someone's eye. If a person has worked to remove it, they understand the struggle and the pain that's involved with the extrication of an object from somebody's eye. It's debilitating and it hurts. And it takes time and it takes patience. And it takes time to heal from that afterwards.

If that person sees another person with the same issue, do you think they're going to disdain them and naturally just push them away? Or do you think—and I'm talking about someone that has God's spirit—or do you think they will naturally want to encourage and help them through it as well?

I'll tell you. Ask a former smoker in God's church what one of the most difficult struggles was that they had. And then ask them how they feel about others struggling with the same issues. When we go through something that is very difficult, then when you see somebody else with it, you empathize with them. And you encourage and you tell them, I've been there. If you want to call me at one o'clock in the morning because you've just got to do this, guess what? I laid awake at one o'clock. I know what you've gone through. Let me help you through that.

Brethren, even in society, we want to criticize our government. We want to criticize our lawmakers, our president, our boss, our spouse, our neighbors. If we were not called and given God's spirit and given the hope of what is ahead, we would be right there in the thick of things. Would we not be worried? If God hadn't called us, would we not be worried about them coming and taking away our guns or taking away my Social Security, taking away my Medicare? Who is going to be the next president? Which lawmaker should we support?

But, brethren, we know. If we have that relationship with God, we know that what we have doesn't come from a man. It doesn't come from a government. It doesn't come from a lawmaker. It comes from God whose arm is never shortened that He cannot save, that He can't change us.

No one can take anything away from us that God doesn't allow them to. Remember when Christ Himself stood before Pilate and he said, "Don't you know I can have You killed?" "No, you can't." Now, He said it respectfully. He said, "You couldn't do anything unless God allowed you. Those that delivered Me to you have the greater sin."

Now, does that mean we'll never get hungry? We probably will. Will we be arrested? Perhaps. Will we suffer want? Good chance, but God knows it and He will supply our needs. Not a man, not a government, but God.

Look over in Romans chapter 13.

We can become so distracted by what man is doing that we take our focus off the relationship with God that we're developing. We lose sight of ... because all of those idols of wood are so in our face. They are so up close and personal sometime we can let them distract us and we then fail to see God behind everything.

Romans 13 verse 1:

Romans 13:1. *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. ... (NKJ)*

When this was written, remember... In fact, if you want to know what it was like back then, go back and look in your history books. This was not a picnic.

1b) ... For there is no authority except from God, ... (NKJ)

God allows it.

*1 continued) ... and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.
2) Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (NKJ)*

Brethren, God didn't create this world and then go off somewhere on a desert island and count coconuts and everything that is happening somehow He missed it. No. God is there. He knows what's happening. He is allowing what's happening to us. And we have to trust Him and have confidence in Him. We have to rejoice. I'll let you know when I get that one down. I'm far from it, but it's our goal. It's what we have to work for.

One of the other responses to someone's trials, whether it be health or external, is to go to God and to petition Him to stop it. What are you doing to this person? Can't you see he's gone through enough? God, here is how I want you to fix this... Just listen to my advice and let me tell you how to make this okay. Do we then proceed to advise the sovereign God on how to deal with this?

I want to promise you something that you can take to the bank. You've done this. I've done it. We've all done it. This last week one morning I had my BFF McKenna with me. And when she's with me, she's never more than about two feet away from me.

I was down in the shop and I was putting some electrical connectors on some wire. I was doing that and I have the little box of electrical connectors. So, she asked me what I was doing. I told her and she said, "That's not the way to do it! You're doing this all wrong."

Okay. So, I set down the stuff. And I said, "Well, show me how to do it." Well, it was obvious to her. You just take the electrical connectors out of the box and you just kind of set them up and see if you can balance them all on the table. That's how you fix the problem.

I went, "What?" Not only did she not understand the solution. She didn't even understand what I was trying to do! And it just endeared me because that's what we do with God. "Stop this, God. Leave that person alone. Are You being a big bully? Let them go!"

Now I'm not saying we shouldn't have compassion on others in their trials. We should care about what they are experiencing. Earlier I mentioned three promises that God made to us. What is that in the Proverbs? Three things God promised. No, four. The four, I'm going to say four you can take to the bank. There's another promise.

Here it is in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13. You probably don't have to turn here. When you're in a trial, you read this about two or three times a day.

1 Corinthians 10:13. *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with [it] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (NKJ)*

Our intercessory prayers for others, first and foremost, should be centered on a person's spiritual growth and on God working with them in the manner that He knows best. Even that takes faith to not dictate to God, the great sovereign God, how we think He should fix the problem. We probably don't even understand the problem.

Matthew 6 and verse 25, this should bring us a lot of comfort if we can just apply this.

Matthew 6:25. *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life [first and foremost], what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?
26) "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (NKJ)*

Doesn't God know what we need?

27) *"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (NKJ)*

How many of us, how many hours of lying awake at night, worrying about things we had no control over have we spent. I'm glad I don't have to keep a tally of mine. And it's all for nothing.

28) *"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;
29) "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
30) "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
31) "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
32) "For after all these things the Gentiles seek [those that don't have God at the center], For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (NKJ)*

Here's the key:

33) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, ... (NKJ)*

Seek first the spiritual things, the important things.

33b) *... and all these things shall be added to you. (NKJ)*

Now, does this mean that we don't ask for physical things? No. The model prayer tells us, after we focus on what is really important—God and His sovereignty and His kingdom and His Son, His righteousness—then we do ask for our daily bread—both by the way, both spiritual bread and our physical bread.

Brethren, our intercessory prayers for one another, evaluate, are they all just about a person's physical? Or are we just asking God to give someone something physical? Something ... and it can be healing. Again, that is right and that is proper but we also should be concerned and ask God about the spiritual.

Look over in 3 John 1:1. John wrote; it says, "The Elder." He was writing this to one of the church leaders.

3 John 1:1. *To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:*

2) Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, ... (NKJ)

So, he was concerned, but notice this:

2b) ... just as your soul prospers. (NKJ)

In other words, I'm concerned about the spiritual things. And, as that is manifested, those other things then are important as well.

When we pray to God our intercessory prayers—and here is a good personal examination point. And, again, only you can answer and only you know how much of those prayers are just spent with other people on "Give them a job. Heal them. Stop their pain," this, that and the other? And again, Christ Himself went before God and said, "Can You remove this?"

How much of it is on "Help them. Help encourage them. Help them to grow from this." And I think, to ourselves, that will tell us a lot about how we look at it. We need to focus in those prayers. And, again as Christ said when He talking about tithing, "You ought to have done the one and not leave the other undone." I'm not saying we don't care about people's physical well-being or their situations, but we also should be concerned about their spiritual well-being. Because let me tell you, when you are in those conditions, you're more vulnerable even spiritually because God made us flesh and human. In those situations, we are more exposed and vulnerable. That's a time when we should be praying for someone else and praying for their spiritual well-being as well as their physical well-being.

Let's go back to Hebrews, next to the final scripture. And, as you're turning there, let me just give you a summary of this. Remember our primary focus should be on our relationship with God and Christ. Our primary focus to one another should be a concern for another's spiritual well-being. And that can be done by encouragement, by phone calls, by prayers, especially those that have been there, done that and got the t-shirt.

But as you are turning, let me summarize the four immutable promises that God made and Jesus Christ made.

1. He'll never fail us nor forsake us;
2. He is with us to the very end;
3. We will have trials and tribulations; and
4. When we are given a trial, He has already prepared us for it; He has already prepared and He knows what we can handle; and He's not going to put anything on us that we can't handle.

I think about the TV program "The Biggest Loser." And here's Jillian in there and she's screaming at these people "I don't care if you hack a lung up! You're going to do this." And you go, "Have mercy!" But you know what? I've seen the doctor come in a couple of times with the paddles, but for the most part they come out of this and say, "Ah, if it hadn't have been for her, I wouldn't have done this." She knew. She had more faith in them than they had in themselves.

Do you know what, brethren? God has more faith in us than we have in ourselves. Do you know why? Because when He sends us a trial, He's prepared us for it. And somebody standing off can't say, "Well, they can never handle that." God has prepared us for what He sends our way.

Hebrews 12 and verse 11:

Hebrews 12:11. *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, ... (NKJ)*

You can say that again!

Hebrews 12:11. *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; ... (NKJ)*

It sounds like somebody that's been there.

11b) ... nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12) Therefore [knowing that, seeing that, experiencing that, witnessing that,] strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, (NKJ)

Brethren, we have been given a priceless calling. What a wonderful God we serve. What a wonderful God that serves us working out a plan that will not fail, a plan of bringing many sons to glory.

Let's go to the final scripture. Let's turn over to Revelation 3.

Jesus Christ Himself sent a message to the end-time church, one that was designed to shake them out of their complacency and self-satisfaction with their spiritual condition.

Now, we can choose to think this applies to us. Or we can choose to think it applies to someone else and, if you do, you're going to miss a very important admonition from Jesus Christ. If you think it doesn't apply to you that it applies to "them," that's okay. I would just say in your own time, go read about the Pharisee and the Publican and then rethink that. But He sent this to the church and if we choose to apply it to ourselves, we can realize that God sees our spiritual condition in a perfect and holy way. And we all have things to work on and to overcome.

Revelation 3:17.

Revelation 3:17. *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'— ... (NKJ)*

"I've been around for forty-something years. And I've been through that many times."

*17b) ... do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—
18) "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich;
and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness
may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.
19) "As many as I love, ... (NKJ)*

Let's go back to where we started down here.

19b) ... I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (NKJ)

The rebuking and the chastening are for our growth.

*20) "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens
the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.
21) "To him who overcomes... (NKJ)*

In other words: Those that have heard the knock, that have invited them in, that God has come into their lives and becomes a part of it.

*21) "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also
overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (NKJ)*

Brethren, we are going to have trials. Never forget that those trials are because God loves us and He's chastening us.

Verse 22:

22) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "
(NKJ)