

Jesus Christ, Our Perfect Paragon

John Pollock

Recorded July 1, 2017

On January 16, 2010 a sermon was given titled The Carrot, The Egg And The Coffee Bean. That sermon began with the following story.

A young woman went to her mother and told her mother about her life and how things were really hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and she just simply wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and she was tired of struggling with the pressures of life. It seemed as though when one problem was solved another problem arose. Her mother, the loving mother that she was, took her into the kitchen. Her mother filled three pots with water, placed each on a burner and set each burner on high. Soon the pots came to a boil. In the first she placed carrots. In the second she placed eggs and in the third she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil without saying a word. In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. She ladled the coffee out and placed that in a bowl. Turning to her daughter she asked, "Tell me what you see." The daughter replied, "Mother I see carrots, I see eggs and I see coffee." Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and to break it. After peeling the shell, the daughter observed that it was a hardboiled egg. Finally the mother asked her daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted the rich, rich aroma of the coffee. The daughter then asked, "What does this mean mother? What's the point of all of this?" Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same trial. Each of these objects faced the same testing. Each of these objects faced the same adversity that of boiling water. Each object reacted differently. You see, the carrots went in strong. The carrots went in hard. The carrots, if you will, went in reluctantly. However, after being subjected to the adversity of the boiling water, the carrots softened up and the carrots became weak. The egg had been very fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. After sitting through the trial of boiling water, its insides became hardened. The coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the adversity of the boiling water, they actually changed the water itself. "Which are you?" the mother asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks at your door how do you respond? Are you a carrot? Are you an egg or are you a coffee bean?"

In that sermon of 2010 we then stated the following.

Well, brethren as silly as this may sound each of us needs to ask ourselves the following. Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Do I have a fluid spirit, but after some hardship, some sort of trial I become hardened? Do I become

stiff? Does my outer shell look the same, but on the inside am I different? Am I bitter? Am I tough? Has my spirit changed to that of stiffness and a hardened heart? Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changed the hot water. The bean actually changed the adversity, changed the circumstances that were bringing about the pain. When the water gets hot the bean does what? The bean releases its fragrance. It releases its flavor.

Additionally, in the sermon of 2010 four verses of 1 Peter 2 were read:

Within verses 21 through 24 we found seven virtues. Those seven virtues, coupled with our opening story of The Carrot, The Egg And The Coffee Bean are the basis of today's sermon. In today's message we are going to review seven virtues of a Christian's life. These seven will help each of us take on the characteristics of a coffee bean; seven virtues of Christianity that will help each of us to handle the adversities in our lives, to help each and every one of us to become more Christ like, more Christ centered, more like Jesus Christ in whatever state or circumstances we may find ourselves within. We will see that the seven virtues we will study here today were virtues that Jesus Christ himself possessed, virtues which he lived by in his physical life.

The title of today's sermon is,

Jesus Christ, Our Perfect Paragon

What's a paragon? A paragon is *a person or a thing regarded as a perfect example of a particular quality or a particular virtue*. Who better to be our perfect paragon than Jesus Christ himself and not in that he possesses a particular quality or a particular virtue, but that Christ possesses a number of virtues, seven of which we will review here today. Thus, Jesus Christ is our perfect paragon.

Before moving on let's define virtue. Virtue is defined as *behavior showing high moral standards*. Synonyms of virtue are goodness, morality, integrity, righteousness, honor, decency and purity. In other words it's Jesus Christ himself.

Let's turn to 1 Peter 2:21-24. These are the verses mentioned above referenced in the 2010 sermon and again these are the basis of today's message.

1 Peter 2:21. *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

22) *"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth";*

23) *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

24) *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.*

(NKJV)

Peter writes here, under the inspiration of God, that Christ is our example, that Christ is our perfect paragon. We are to follow Jesus Christ's steps. We find here in these four verses seven virtues. We find the virtue of suffering patiently in verse 21; that of purity in verse 22. We find the virtue of meekness in verse 23, the virtue of humility in verse 23, the virtue of obedience in verse 23. We read of the virtue of love in verse 24 and that of forgiveness in verse 24. For the remainder of the sermon we'll see what scripture has to say about these seven virtues.

Virtue Number One – Suffering Patiently

Within this virtue we find two aspects; that of the sufferings of Christ and that of the sufferings for Christ. The sufferings of Christ would take a sermon all of its own. In your own Bible study look up the following, all related to the patient sufferings of Jesus Christ, that his sufferings were predicted.

1 Peter 1:11. *searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (NKJV)*

In Mark 9:12 his sufferings are explained.

Mark 9:12. *Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? (NKJV)*

In Luke 24:26 and 46 his sufferings were fulfilled.

Luke 24:26. *"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"*
46) *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day," (NKJV)*

We find that in Acts 3:18 his sufferings were witnessed by many.

Acts 3:18. *But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (NKJV)*

They were witnessed by many in 1 Peter 5:1.

1 Peter 5:1. *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: (NKJV)*

We find that Christ's sufferings were proclaimed in Acts 17:2-3.

Acts 17:2. *Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,
3) explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." (NKJV)*

As I said, the patient sufferings of Christ would be a sermon by itself, so today we will look only at the suffering for Christ. Suffering is part of our Christian calling. Turn please to 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 15-27. I will be reading from various versions of scripture in today's message. If I don't reference it it'll be from the New King James Version.

1 Corinthians 12:12. *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

13) *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body —*

15) *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?*

16) *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?*

17) *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?*

18) *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*

19) *And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*

20) *But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.*

21) *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

22) *No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

23) *And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,*

24) *but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,*

25) *that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

26) *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

27) *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (NKJV)*

We find here that we are one body. We find here that as one body we will suffer individually, yet we are to suffer as one body. It's a necessary part of our Christian living. Turn to Philippians 1:29-30 from the New Living Translation.

Philippians 1:29. *For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.*

30) We are in this fight together. You have seen me suffer for him in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of this great struggle. (NLT)

You and I have been given the privilege, as verse 29 reads. Boy, that's a great way to look at our calling, a privilege. We have been given a privilege of not only trusting in Christ, but the privilege of suffering for him. Look at the wording in verse 30. I want you to reflect on what we just referenced in 1 Corinthians 12. We are in this fight together, because we are one body in Christ. We have seen others suffer for Christ in the past and we see many trials today. We see others in the midst of great struggles today and in some cases plural, if you will, as in multiple trials; multiple struggles all at the same time. All you have to do is take a look at the weekly prayer updates, usually published three times a week. Many brethren are struggling. Together, brethren, we are to suffer for Christ. With this suffering for Christ as a privilege fresh in our minds please turn to Acts 5:12, 14-30.

Acts 5:12. *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.*

...

14) And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

15) so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

16) Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

17) Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation,

18) and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. (NKJV)

Here we find suffering for Christ.

19) But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

20) "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

21) And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22) But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

23) saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

24) Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

25) *So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"*
26) *Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.*
27) *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. ...*
(NKJV)

I will insert a little editorial here. I don't know about you, but I would assume there would be a great deal of mental anguish here, mental suffering for Christ, if you will. It would be as if all of a sudden you and I were called before the courts of this land for preaching the gospel.

27b) *... And the high priest asked them,*
28) *saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"*
29) *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.*
30) *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. (NKJV)*

Continue in verses 33-35.

33) *When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.*
34) *Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.*
35) *And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. (NKJV)*

Continue in verses 38-41.

38) *And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing;*
39) *but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God."*
40) *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*
41) *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (NKJV)*

Throughout this chapter we find the sufferings of Peter and other apostles. Look how the disciples viewed their sufferings. They departed from the presence of the council after being beaten and they were rejoicing over it, rejoicing that they were worthy, privileged if you will, to suffer for Christ's name.

As we summarize this first point of suffering patiently turn to 1 Peter 5:10.

1 Peter 5:10. *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (NKJV)*

In the big picture of our calling we find here our suffering is actually a short duration. We only suffer for a while and that our suffering for Christ is never in vain. These sufferings will perfect, these sufferings will establish, these sufferings will strengthen and these sufferings will settle each of us.

Virtue Number Two – Purity

Purity is illuminated by the life of Jesus Christ, our perfect paragon. Jesus Christ came into the world holy. Holy, of course, is just another way of saying pure or purity. Turn please to Luke 1:35 from the New International Version.

Luke 1:35. *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (NIV)*

From the announcement prior to his birth to his death on the stake, which we will reference shortly, Christ lived a life of the virtue of purity. Turn to 1 Peter 1:13-19.

1 Peter 1:13. *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*
14) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;
15) but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."
17) And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;
18) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,
19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (NKJV)

Again, this is the purity of Christ, our perfect paragon. Turn please to 2 Corinthians 5:20-21.

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

We find here that Christ was and is the perfect example of purity, as he lived His life without blemish. He lived His life without spot. Jesus Christ knew no sin. Turn to 1 Peter 2:19-22 from the New International Version.

1 Peter 2:19. *For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.*

20) *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it ... (NIV)*

We just covered this in virtue number one, suffering patiently, suffering for Christ.

22b) *... this is commendable before God.*

21) *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

22) *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (NIV)*

Jesus Christ, our example, our paragon, was sinless in His life. We are to follow His example as best we can. Even though we are unable to attain perfection, exercising God's holy spirit, we must strive for perfection.

Virtue Number Three – Meekness

Let's begin this third point with the understanding that meekness is not weakness. To be meek is to be gentle, somewhat yielding, compliant if you will. Galatians 5 is a great resource. You probably know where I am going with this. Right after Paul lists the works of the flesh found in verses 19 through 21, in which, by the way, he lists outbursts of wrath (there's no meekness found in that), he then begins in Galatians 5:22 to list the fruits of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

23) *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

24) *And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

25) *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (NKJV)*

In verse 23 we find gentleness listed. The King James Version reads *meekness*. Gentleness here is meekness and meekness is a hundred and eighty degrees opposite to the outbursts of wrath, which Paul lists in verse 20. There is a great deal being said here between verses 22 and 25, more than just listing the fruits of the holy spirit. In verse 24 we read "those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh." They have crucified the works of the flesh listed in verses 19 through 21. Question: Have we? Verse 25 states that we are to "live in the spirit." Question: Do we live in the spirit? The verse further reads "let us walk in the spirit." Again we ask the question: Do we? Have we nailed our works of the flesh to the tree? If we exercise meekness in our lives, we are

living and walking by one of the fruits of the spirit. Turn please to Psalms 25:9-10 from the King James Version. Here we find a revelation from God as to spiritual guidance and spiritual instruction.

Psalms 25:9. *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

10) All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. (KJV)

We read here that if we are meek, God will be our guide. If we are meek, God will teach us His ways, a way of mercy and truth to those who obey His commandments, those who exercise the gifts of the spirit, those that we just read in Galatians 5; one of which is the virtue of meekness. Listen to the way that the New Living Translation reads in Psalms 25:10.

10) The Lord leads with unfailing love ... (NLT)

We will talk about that shortly.

10b) ... and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his decrees. (NLT)

God will lead each and every one of us with unfailing love and faithfulness if we will just obey Him. One aspect of that obedience is to put on and live by the virtue of meekness.

Virtue Number Four – Humility

What is humility? It is *a modest or low view of one's importance*. Let's turn first to our paragon, that of Jesus Christ himself. Turn please to Matthew 11:25-26 and 28-29 from the New Living Translation. What does our perfect paragon have to say about humility?

Matthew 11:25. *Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves to be wise and clever," ... (NLT)*

This is actually to those who are anything but humble.

25b) ... "and for revealing them to the childlike.

26) Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!"

...

28) Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

29) Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (NLT)

Jesus Christ, our paragon, states here that he is humble. Here is our example. Christ possessing the virtue of humility is our example and as Christians we are exhorted to

live lives of humility. Turn to Colossians 3:5-14. We are going to see something very interesting here. At least I found it interesting. Much like Paul listed in Galatians 5, here in Colossians 3 he lists the works of the flesh first before listing, as Paul puts it, attributes that we are to put on.

Colossians 3:5. *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry, (NKJV)*

What are these? They are works of the flesh.

6) *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,*
7) *in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*
8) *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*
9) *Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds. (NKJV)*

Again, we find here works of the flesh.

10) *and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*
11) *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*
12) *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;*
13) *bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*
14) *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (NKJV)*

Among other listed virtues we are to put on humility, as we find here in verse 12. With that in mind please turn to 1 Peter 5:5, the second sentence, 6 and 7.

1 Peter 5:5. *... Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility ... (NKJV)*

The "all of you" stated here by Peter are those listed in the previous chapters of this book. To the pilgrims at Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bethania, in addition there were the specifics addressed by Peter to servants, masters, wives, husbands, elders, and younger people. Always remember, by extension, Peter is addressing each and every one of us.

5b) *... for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

- 6) *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,*
- 7) *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (NKJV)*

Peter admonishes to be clothed with humility under the mighty hand of God. Turn to Ephesians 4:1-3 from the New International Version.

Ephesians 4:1. *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

2) *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

3) *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

(NIV)

Here we find that we are to be completely humble; not half-heartedly humble, not humble some of the time, not humble part of the time. You see, we read it a moment ago. I don't know if you picked up on it, but being humble carries with it a reward. We read in Proverbs 3:34.

Proverbs 3:34. *Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble. (NKJV)*

He gives grace to the humble. There is a reward for the humble. It's called grace. Hold that thought if you would. Turn to James 4:6-10.

James 4:6. *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

7) *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

8) *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

9) *Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*

10) *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (NKJV)*

Grace is given to the humble and the humble are lifted up in the eyes of the Lord, in the eyes of God. Turn to Isaiah 57:15.

Isaiah 57:15. *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (NKJV)*

What more would one want than to ensure the presence of God Almighty in our lives. We can have that if we will just exercise the virtue of humility.

Virtue Number Five – Obedience

Once again, Jesus Christ, our paragon, did exactly that. He obeyed. Turn first to Hebrews 5:5-9.

Hebrews 5:5. *So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You."*

6) *As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek";*

7) *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,*

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

Jesus Christ himself learned obedience by the things he suffered. We covered that in virtue number one, that of suffering patiently.

9) *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (NKJV)*

Note the admonition to you and me. We have the offer of salvation if we obey Him. Christ obeyed. We, too, are to be obedient. Turn to Matthew 26:39 and 42.

Matthew 26:39. *He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*

...

42) *Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." (NKJV)*

The physical side of Jesus Christ did not want to go through what he knew he was going to go through. You see, Christ knew the scriptures. He has read what it says in Isaiah and other places. The spiritual side of Christ knew that he was to do his Father's will and not his own. Obedience was the key factor in his prayers to his Father and Christ's obedience was absolute total obedience. Turn to Philippians 2:5-8 from the New Living Translation.

Philippians 2:5. *Your attitude should be the same of that that Christ Jesus had.*

6) *Though he was God, he did not demand or cling to his right of God.*

7) *He made himself nothing; he took a humble position of a slave and appeared in human form,*

8) *and in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on the cross [stake]. (NLT)*

Christ's obedience was total, even to dying a criminal's death on the stake.

Obedience in a Christian's life comes from a converted heart. Turn please to Romans 6:17-18 from the New American Standard Bible.

Romans 6:17. *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,
18) and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
(NASB)*

Turn to 1 Peter 1:22. We became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching which we are committed to. We find here:

1 Peter 1: 22. *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, (NKJV)*

Obedience in our lives, in our Christian calling is aided by the indwelling of God's spirit. In Romans 5:19 we find once again our paragon example of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (NKJV)*

Due to Adam's sin, his disobedience, we all became sinners, but by Christ's obedience we all can be made righteous. Again, here we find our paragon, Jesus Christ himself. We find here the example that we are to follow.

Virtue Number Six – Love

Herbert W. Armstrong stated on many occasions that love is *the outgoing concern for others*. Using this as our definition we can turn once again to our paragon, Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ exercised this particular virtue time and time again in his physical life and he exercises that in his spiritual life at the right hand of his Father as well. We will see that shortly. Turn to Romans 8:35-39.

Romans 8:35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
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,
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. (NKJV)*

I want to quote verses 35 and 37 from the New Living Translation. It really clarifies the love that Christ has for each and every one of us today as we go through the diversity of our trials.

35) Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or cold, or in danger, or threatened with death?

37) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (NLT)

Let's read the preceding four verses in Romans 8:31-34 from the New Living Translation.

31) What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32) Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for all of us, won't God, who gave us Christ also give us everything?

33) Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No. He is the One who has given us right standing with him.

34) Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No. For he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us, and is sitting in the place of the highest honor next to God, pleading for us. (NLT)

I want us to look here at the love that the Father has for each of us, that the Father Himself, Who is love; at the love He has for us. He gave up his own son. He watched His own son be beaten. He watched Him crucified and He watched Him suffering with anguish hanging on a tree. The Father allowed this so each of us can have an opportunity to be born into the God family. In addition, look at what is stated here in the latter portion of verse 34. We find here Christ pleading for us. The King James reads that Christ *makes intercession for us*. Daily Jesus Christ is at His Father's right hand making intercession for us, pleading to our Father on our behalf. Do we, can we comprehend the love, the outgoing concern that Jesus Christ and His Father, our Father, have for each one of us? I personally don't believe mankind can fully understand what unconditional love truly is. We can put it to words. I just did. We can define it, but do we truly understand it? Turn please to John 14:21. We will read this one verse which carries so much meaning.

John 14:21. *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (NKJV)*

We find here a very intimate love from both the Father and our savior. Along the same line of love being intimate turn please to Galatians 2:20.

Galatians 2:20. *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* (NKJV)

We are going to go through a little exercise. In verse 20 at each instance where there is a pronoun I or me, I want you to plug in your own name. It is very personal, brethren, very personal. As a side note here, there are seven instances. That's interesting; not six, not eight, not twelve, not one. Is it divine inspiration? I feel so. Seven, of course, is the number of perfection, the number of completion. Jesus Christ's love for each of us is very, very personal. We need not lose sight of that.

The love that the Father and Christ have for us needs to be exhibited to others. In fact, that love is commanded to be extended to others. Turn to Matthew 22:34-39.

Matthew 22:34. *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.*

35) *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,*

36) *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"*

37) *Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'*

38) *This is the first and great commandment.*

39) *And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (NKJV)*

We are commanded to extend the love that God has for us unto others. It's the second great commandment. With that understanding turn to John 13:34-35:

John 13:34. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

35) *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (NKJV)

The love we are to exhibit to others was commanded by our paragon. The virtue of love that He has shown us, that same virtue is commanded to be shown to others. So important is this command to love others that there is an entire chapter in scripture devoted to love and only love. Love is described in detail in that chapter. Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 and 13 from the Revised Standard Version. We are not going to read it all. As you read through this dwell on the fact that Jesus Christ himself, our paragon, lived by these words and has commanded us to do the same.

1 Corinthians 13:1. *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

2) *And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

3) *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

- 4) *Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful;*
- 5) *it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; ... (RSV)*

You see, love is an outgoing concern.

- 5b) *... it is not irritable or resentful;*
- 6) *it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.*
- 7) *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
- 8) *Love never ends; ...*

...
13) *So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*
(RSV)

Here in these thirteen verses we find the love that we should have, that we should exhibit towards others. We find it in detail, if you go back and study those thirteen verses.

Virtue Number Seven – Forgiveness

You are going to love this dictionary definition. Forgiveness from the Bing Dictionary is *the action or process of forgiving*. Really? Aren't dictionaries wonderful? What is it to forgive then? Forgive is defined as *to stop feeling angry or resentful towards someone for an offense, a flaw or a mistake*. Synonyms for forgive are pardon, excuse, exonerate, absolve.

Turn to Psalms 86:1-5.

- Psalms 86:1.*** *Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am poor and needy.*
- 2) *Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You!*
 - 3) *Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long.*
 - 4) *Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*
 - 5) *For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You. (NKJV)*

God is ready to forgive. In human terms it's His nature to want to pass along forgiveness. It's that unconditional love that we can't truly comprehend. Turn to Colossians 1:9-14.

- Colossians 1:9.*** *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*
- 10) *that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*
 - 11) *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;*

12) *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

13) *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*

14) *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*
(NKJV)

The forgiveness of our sins is a direct effect of the actions of Jesus Christ, our paragon. Through the shed blood of Christ our sins can be forgiven. Turn please to Matthew 26:27. Here we find the last words of our paragon after completing the last Passover with his disciples.

Matthew 26:27. *Then He [Christ] took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.*

28) *For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* (NKJV)

As we move into the final aspect of today's sermon, I should probably restate the definition of the word paragon, as some may feel that I have been disrespectful in referring to Jesus Christ as a paragon. Once again, the definition of paragon is a *person or a thing regarded as a perfect example of a particular quality or virtue*. As I stated earlier in this message, who better to be our perfect example, who better to be our paragon than Jesus Christ Himself, not in that He possesses a particular virtue or quality, but that He possesses a number of virtues. Thus He is our perfect paragon.

In conclusion, as Christians, our relationship with our savior should include a number of items; viewing Christ as our example, our perfect paragon, being obedient to Christ and, of course, being obedient to our Father; imitating Christ by implementing in our lives seven of His virtues. He has more than seven. You can study them. The seven virtues that we covered today are suffering patiently, purity, meekness, humility, obedience, love and forgiveness.

We must come to understand that as long as we are in these physical temples we will have peaks and we will have valleys in our lives. There will be times of happiness. There will be times of sadness. There will be times of plenty. There will be times of scarcity. There will be times in which our lives will be trouble free and there will be times when the heat is turned up. There will be times in our lives when the water, if you will, will begin to boil. During these heated times, times of trial, tribulation, times of pain and suffering, we need to reflect on our opening story. We need to reflect on the carrot, the egg and the coffee bean. During our issues in life, we need to turn to Christ in following and obeying Him in imitating each of His virtues as the occasions of heat arise in our lives. By doing so, by applying seven virtues in our lives, we become as the coffee bean. Remember what the coffee bean did with the water? It actually changed the water, the very circumstance that brings about the pain.

With Jesus Christ living in us, we can change pressing situations just as the coffee bean changes pressing situations. Our part is to exercise, if you will, apply, if you will, active, implement in our lives the seven virtues that we covered here, the seven virtues of Jesus Christ; suffering patiently, purity, meekness, humility, obedience, love, forgiveness for you see, Jesus Christ is our perfect paragon.