

Restoring Godly Distinctions

Feast of Tabernacles

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Brethren, as we all know we're here at the Feast of Tabernacles looking forward to the one thousand year reign of Christ where we're hoping to be, as firstfruits, serving with Him in the millennial period ruling over mankind and working with them to follow and learn God's way. Having grown up in the church my entire life, probably one of the more common ideas I've heard put across in regard to this timeframe is an idea I'd like to call "the instantaneous transformation". In other words, it's the idea that after Christ and the firstfruits come down to the Mount of Olives, take over the planet, establish the Millennium, and bind Satan—it's the idea that humanity just instantaneously jumps in line, all start obeying God and enthusiastically want to learn everything about His way right off the bat. If you look at it that way, what that means logically is our job, then, will be working with these enthusiastic, co-operative students who want to drink in everything about God's word and we just teach them the finer points of doctrine as they eagerly try to learn it all as fast as possible. Now, that is a wonderful sounding, very feel-good scenario that doesn't correlate with reality at all.

Oftentimes, we lock onto an idea like this, quite frankly, because it feels good. It is a happy, positive scenario that feels good. Then, the idea gets repeated and repeated and we just accept it, even though it doesn't match with scripture. In reality, if you look at scripture, the scripture tells us very clearly that at the onset of the Millennium, there will be a significant amount of resistance. Everybody will not just fall in line immediately. There are a number of individuals—in fact, significant numbers of individuals—who will thumb their noses at God initially.

What that means is our job is again, not just jumping in to teach the finer points of doctrine to these eager cooperative students, but we're going to deal with a number of people who are quite resistant. It will require patience and diligence on our part to work with them initially just to get their attention to even want to listen to God. Then, once they're listening, we'll work from there to develop a basic foundation of godly principles so that they can build their knowledge to understand God's plan as well as what God wants to accomplish with them. Again, it takes a very different view of what our job is and what that will require of us.

What we're going to see today—there are many people, as I mentioned, that will be very resistant, initially, to God's plan. Even when they start to turn around and begin to start to listen, again it's not jumping in and teaching them the finer points of doctrine. In many cases, it will be building a foundation of getting them to accept godly principles to build on from there. What we will see here is a lot of this initially is going to be restoring godly distinctions. You'll see there are a number of basic distinctions that, if you're

looking at the world through biblical eyes, just seem like commonsense. Yet, this group of people largely has rejected all of this. So, you have to start building those basic concepts of distinctions with them before you can build into more developed spiritual concepts for them to understand. If you would like a title for this sermon, it is,

Restoring Godly Distinctions

As we will see today, that will be a lot of what we will be doing.

Often, I've heard this idea presented:

Christ and the firstfruits come down from heaven and establish the Millennium. Just immediately, utopia ensues. Everyone jumps in line and obeys God.

That does not match with scripture. Again, it's a nice feel good idea. It does not correlate with reality.

Turn over to Zechariah 14, where we'll start reading in verse 16.

Zechariah 14:16. *And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

17) And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. (NKJV)

Notice we're already talking about how God will deal with those who are resistant. Now, also notice the magnitude of this, verse 18.

18) If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations ... (NKJV)

Notice there is an "s" on the word "nations". It is plural.

18b) ... the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

19) This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (NKJV)

Imagine that. You're talking about multiple nations of people that are refusing to come keep the Feast. I think many times we just breeze right over this scripture because, again, in our minds we have this perfect utopia and we're thinking, "Well, there may be a few rebels over in the corner that are not cooperating with God but everybody else is in line." That's not what this verse says. It says there are numerous nations of people who refuse to come to keep the Feast.

Now put that in context with what is really being said here. As you know, to obey God, we have to do many things to follow His instructions completely. And, some of those things are difficult, kind of hard changes for us - to deny doing things we want to do. And, with our human nature, we have to discipline ourselves. It takes some character to do it. Coming to the Feast of Tabernacles generally is just fun. Isn't it?

I grew up in the church and attended Ambassador College in my early adult years. Over those years, I've known many people that at one time were a part of the Church of God, actively involved, that today are not at all involved. Many of those individuals would tell their stories today of "The church was this bad cult that I was a part of at some point. And I'm so happy to be away from that" and such. Or, they talk about how they grew up in the church. "My parents were in this strange religion and here's all that happened." In seeing that though, I can't state that I've never seen an individual who told their story that sounded something like this:

"Man, when I grew up, my parents, they made me go to the Feast of Tabernacles every year. They forced me to go off to a nice location, stay in a good hotel. They gave me extra money and they commanded me to have fun for a week! Can you imagine how horrible that is?"

I've never heard anybody tell that kind of story because the Feast, in general, is the easy, fun part of obeying God.

If you are refusing to do the easy, fun part, that tells you about their attitude in general regarding obeying God. They are thumbing their noses at obeying God. That's what is taking place here. So, you have to think of people in these terms. This will be the attitude of the audience you will work with at the beginning of the Millennium.

Logically, you can see it doesn't make sense that you will jump in with this group and start teaching them the finer points of doctrine. They don't even care. They don't even want to show up. So, this is going to require a more basic approach to turn this attitude around. Realize by the time this takes place, you will be dealing with a culture of people that their whole experience prior to living through the end and through the Day of the Lord has been a culture that has completely rejected everything about God's way of life. I'm not just talking about the Sabbath and the holy days, clean and unclean meats, and these types of things that you learn when you first come into the church. I mean the basic commonsense values that we would think of that in our world today are oftentimes referred to as Judeo-Christian values, values based on basic principles. These people will have rejected all of those. You have to turn around and build that foundation to go forward.

Turn over to 2 Timothy 3, where we'll take a brief look at the culture that will have formed these peoples' experience. This is how their view of the world has been shaped. 2 Timothy 3, verse 1.

2 Timothy 3:1. *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
2) For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud,
blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
3) unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of
good, (NKJV)*

Notice that. They don't just like having their sin. They literally hate what is good. This mentality, this culture has shaped their minds and their whole world view. Continue in verse 4.

*4) traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
5) having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn
away! (NKJV)*

If you can, think of this in terms that this has been their whole experience in their lives--hating good and everything associated with God and Judeo-Christian values. They have no regard for the Bible and the principles in it. Then, all of a sudden, Christ and the firstfruits come down from heaven, take over the planet, and set up the Millennium. And, they say, "By the way, the Bible is the manual for life. You are supposed to live according to this book and follow this."

It's not realistic to think they say, "Oh boy! Give me a copy." That won't be their immediate reaction. They will be rather resistant to all of this. If you think about people that refuse to come to the Feast (refuse to do anything associated with God), they are for all intents thumbing their noses at God.

Where do you start working with individuals like this? You have to start at a very basic level to do this. Remember, we read that story in Zechariah 14. Obviously, Israel is more cooperative than a number of these other nations. Zechariah 14 talks about the Feast taking place in Jerusalem and the nations that refuse to come. Obviously, the Feast is taking place there. So, Israel is being more cooperative with God and more embracing of the holy days than the other nations. Yet, even if we look at the descriptions of what will take place with Israel, there still will be a lot of remedial work to take place to get them, again, in line with God's way.

Turn over to Ezekiel 44 and we'll look at some of this. We'll start in verse 23, but let me just set the context of this. If you read these last nine chapters, chapters 40 through 48, of Ezekiel, you'll see a vision that God revealed to Ezekiel about the millennial period that we're here picturing. One of the interesting things you'll see, as you read through this vision, is a graphic description of all the elements of the old covenant system. You have a temple. You have a priesthood. You have sacrifices. You have grain offerings. You even have the presence of God dwelling in the most holy place in the temple, separated from the people by a veil. It's this system described in graphic detail.

As I mentioned, you have a priesthood established during this timeframe performing similar jobs to what they did in Old Testament Israel. Notice here what we read in the

priest's written job description—what their job will be during this time. I want you to notice the first thing listed when Ezekiel's vision lays out what their job will be. Ezekiel 44:23.

Ezekiel 44:23. *"And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. (NKJV)*

Notice, making basic godly distinctions is one of the things the priesthood will teach the people. That is mentioned before the Sabbath and the holy days and everything else, which you find listed in the next verse. Notice in verse 24.

24) In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths. (NKJV)

Yes, they will be taught the Sabbath and the holy days and the laws, etc., but notice the first thing mentioned—making basic godly distinctions. This is because we've had a culture that has rejected and turned away from all godly things. Again, this is for Israel, who, again, will be more cooperative.

Imagine where you start with people who say, "I ain't coming to that Feast. Forget you. I'm not even going to show up." Where do you start with those people? Again, you start with establishing basic godly distinctions. We'll look at a handful of godly distinctions here of how God approaches life. Many of these are concepts that if you value the Bible and look at the world through a Judeo-Christian values viewpoint, many of these things are considered basic commonsense. Yet, that's not how those who survive into the Millennium are going to look at it. So, we will have to establish these distinctions.

The first godly distinction we will have to restore is the distinction between God and man. God is infinitely superior to man. Man is not equal to God. God makes the rules, and, if we're smart, we follow them. If we don't, we're going to suffer the consequences. And, you have to grasp that distinction to start with because that's the foundation of everything.

Think of our current culture today. We live in a world dominated by secular humanism. Very often, you'll see in our world the very existence of God just being denied. "God is this myth from an ancient book that somebody made up. We really evolved from apes and God really isn't true at all."

If you're a survivor of the Day of the Lord, I doubt that will be much of a debate. The reason I say that is imagine if you live through the end times and you experience the Day of the Lord. That means you lived through the time when the two witnesses were on the scene and dramatic events were taking place. The two witnesses were foretelling events, and prophesying, "Here's what's going to happen next," and, then, it

happens. Their track record starts looking pretty good. You start to realize that the two witnesses are performing miracles and, as this plays out, you realize there has to be something to this. Then, you witness Christ and the firstfruits coming down out of the sky on white horses to the Mount of Olives and setting up the Millennium. You witness the earth going from a destroyed chaotic condition to a healed condition like the Garden of Eden. You have to notice that. You can't be brain dead enough to have not picked up on all of this taking place. So, I seriously doubt there's going to be debate such as, "No, there's no God. We evolved from apes."

Even though these survivors may obviously be aware that God exists doesn't mean they grasp the distinction between God and man. Let me give you some examples of that. Turn over to Isaiah 14, where we find scriptures talking about Satan. As we know, before rebelling against God, Satan was a cherub that worked directly at God's throne. As we've covered before, God the Father's throne is pictured by the Ark of the Covenant, with cherubim on each side. He who dwells between the cherubim is God the Father. Lucifer used to be one of these cherubim. He actually served right there. He's seen God's throne.

It wasn't debatable to Satan whether God existed. Satan has been there. He's seen God personally. That doesn't mean that Satan grasps the distinction between himself and God. As we're going to see here and as we so often hear in our culture today, Satan thought it was all about equality. Notice here in Isaiah 14, verse 12.

Isaiah 14:12. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!
13) For you have said in your heart: ... (NKJV)

Notice what it says here. "You have said in your heart" is Satan's internal dialogue, you might say. This is his thought process as he goes through his rebellion.

13b) ... 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation ... (NKJV)

In other words, "I'm going to put my throne just like God the Father's throne is."

*13 continued) ... On the farthest sides of the north;
14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'*
(NKJV)

This is about equality. "I will be equal with God the Father."

Jesus Christ didn't even claim that. Think about that. He's a God-being but he was always clear, "My Father is greater than I am. He's the one true God. He's the Most High." Jesus always said, "My Father is my head. He's My God." Christ always recognized that the Father is superior to Him. Even though Jesus Christ is a God-

being, He never claimed to be fully equal with God the Father. Jesus understood the distinction.

Satan thought it was all about equality, that he should be equal with God, and he had the same rights as God. No, he does not. Satan does not understand the distinction.

This is exactly the belief Satan sold to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were in a similar situation to what the people at the beginning of the Millennium will experience. They know that God exists. With all that they have witnessed, they know, "There is something to this God. He's not a myth. We've seen too much for that." Adam and Eve had talked with God. They had had conversations and heard His voice. It wasn't a question of "Is this some myth from some ancient book?" No, God really exists, but Satan sold them the belief that it was all about equality.

Turn over to Genesis 3:1. This is a very familiar story here where Satan approaches Eve.

Genesis 3:1. *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"*

2) *And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;*

3) *but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (NKJV)*

Notice Satan's response to this.

4) *Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.*

5) *For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, ... (NKJV)*

Notice that it's like when Satan said, "I'll be like the Most High." "You'll be like God," that's what Satan is saying.

5b) *... knowing good and evil."*

6) *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

7) *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. (NKJV)*

Notice the sales pitch that Satan gave Eve because this is the sales pitch for every major evil ideology we have today. It you notice how multiculturalism, how socialism, how feminism and all these ideas are sold, the sales pitch is always equality—even

when the concept doesn't apply. And, with this exact sales pitch, Satan approached Eve.

Basically, Satan said, "Eve, you have to understand. God is trying to oppress you. He's holding you down. He's cheating you out of equality. Here, eat this fruit. It's empowering." That's exactly the sales pitch. That has been working for six thousand years because it appeals to human emotion. It appeals to our envy and it sounds like a sense of fairness. Yet, again, the idea of human beings being equal with God—equality isn't a valid concept here. It doesn't even apply, but Satan sold them on it and it caused them to reject God.

And, this is the very thing that you will have in the Millennium, a culture of people who have rejected everything about Judeo-Christian values, the very foundation of the Bible. They are from a culture that has taught them extensively for years that the greatest value is that of equality, and your self-esteem and your self-value. You're worth everything and it's all about self. Now, God shows up and says, "No, you need to obey." "No, it's all about me," will be people's natural reaction, and it's about equality.

This is exactly what God had to teach Nebuchadnezzar. Turn over to Daniel 4 and we'll learn some lessons here about how God got Nebuchadnezzar's attention. We're going to pick up with the details when Nebuchadnezzar actually is turned into a beast. Just to set the scene here, remember the context. Leading up to this in the first several chapters of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar has a couple of dreams that God inspired and has Daniel interpret for the king. God gets Nebuchadnezzar's attention multiple times.

Beginning in Daniel 3, we see the story of where Nebuchadnezzar throws Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fire. And, Nebuchadnezzar personally witnesses how the men who throw the young men into the furnace were consumed by the hot fire. Yet, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are standing in the fire and a fourth man joins them. Nebuchadnezzar even says, "There's a fourth one in there. And, he looks like the Son of Man." Then, when the three come out of the fire, they're not even singed. Nebuchadnezzar has had great reason to know God exists. Nebuchadnezzar even said to Daniel, "In you is the spirit of the true God." Obviously, he is not completely in ignorance that God exists.

Then, God gives Nebuchadnezzar a dream that he will be humbled. "If you don't repent, everything will be taken away from you." Nebuchadnezzar is warned and given time to repent, but he doesn't respond appropriately with this. Notice Nebuchadnezzar's response. Let's pick up in Daniel 4, verse 28.

Daniel 4:28. *All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.*

29) At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.

30) The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (NKJV)

"It's all about me, and I made it all happen. I don't owe credit to God for it. I'm big and bad and I did it." This is basically what Nebuchadnezzar says. That didn't go over well with God. Verse 31:

31) While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you!

32) And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33) That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

34) And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, ... (NKJV)

He's the one writing this.

34b) ... lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: ... (NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar has had a change of attitude here.

34 continued) ... For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.

35) All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (NKJV)

The light is turning on. Nebuchadnezzar is now beginning to grasp "God is superior to me. And, I had better shut up and listen, because God has gotten my attention here."

Think back to what we started this sermon with. In Zechariah 14, we talked about all the nations that refused to come to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And, what does God do? He shuts off the rain. God will increase the pain level until He gets their attention.

Oftentimes, we stop to think about the Millennium, again, with a positive picture and skip over the reality of the details. Instead, we picture that the earth is always green and luscious. There's abundance all the time. Everything all works out great and no one ever feels any pain. We have to remember that when Christ returns, God doesn't throw away the Bible. The fundamental concepts of the Bible will still apply. We will be dealing with individuals here. God the Father tells us, "I am the Lord. I do not change." And, Jesus Christ is described as being "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Their past behavior is an extremely good predictor of their future behavior because they do not change.

If you look in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, what do you see? Obeying God results in blessings being poured down on you. Thumb your nose at God, and you will feel some pain. That is what is going to happen here at the beginning of the Millennium because those people are thumbing their noses at God and refusing to go along.

What happens? God says, "Okay. Let's see how well you do without water. Let's see if that changes your attitude." God switches off the rain. Why would God do that? Because when you give it some time, what will happen? Drought conditions occur that affect your ability to grow crops and feed yourself. You will start feeling some pain. In the process, if you look over and say, "Those nations over in Israel that are trying to cooperate with God, man, life is going so much better for them. Everything is lush and green and they have abundance. Man, we should reevaluate this decision. Maybe we shouldn't be quite so hardheaded." This is the objective with stopping the rain. Turn the pain level up to get the people to stop and say, "Maybe we made some missteps here," and turn this around.

Yet, realize you first have to establish the fact that God is superior and it is a good idea to shut up and listen to Him. This is step number one to establish with these people. God is superior and that's the concept that everything is based on. You have to establish that before you can get down to the distinction between good and evil.

That's distinction number two that we have to look at. We have to establish again the definitions of good and evil. First, you have to grasp that there is an Almighty God and He makes the rules. If you've been sold on the idea of equality—that all cultures, all religions, all viewpoints are equal—the first thing you did in order to buy into that idea was throw out the concept of an Almighty God. If there is an Almighty God who establishes the rules and declares what is right and wrong, then that means all cultures, all viewpoints, and all religions are not equal. Some are right and others are wrong. That's based on the simple concept that God's way works and other ways don't work. It's just that simple.

Realize if we look at it in terms of right and wrong or good and evil from our human perspective, invariably we will wind up defining them in terms of human emotion because we are emotional creatures. Emotion affects how we look at things and how we think. We tend to think what feels good is good. And, if it feels bad, that can't be good; that has to be evil. And, we define things in terms of emotions.

Yet, if you do that, you will have very skewed views of not only right and wrong and you won't understand God appropriately. You won't understand how His plan plays out or the details of His plan of salvation, because you're asking the wrong question. The reason I say that is when we look at this from a carnal human perspective and naturally look at subjects through emotion, the question we're asking when we define good and bad is: Does it feel good? The question you should be asking is: Does it do good? As we're going to see, many things don't feel good but they actually do good. Understand

the way God looks at it. He's always asking the question: Does it do good? He looks at the long-term end results of a decision or an action—not how it feels on the front end.

To understand appropriately the distinction between good and evil you first have to have God because good is defined in terms of God. To see that, turn over to 3 John 11.

3 John 11. *Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. ... (NKJV)*

Again, first, we need a definition of what those are.

11b) *... He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (NKJV)*

Notice we define good in terms of God, being connected with Him, and knowing Him because He is the definition of what good is. He defines the rules and He is the personification of what love and good is in His actions. To have a proper definition of this you have to acknowledge God as the beginning of wisdom. No God, no wisdom. That is how it works. This is a fundamental concept. That's when we realize that God is the one who defines good and evil. He defines it through His law. This is why first you have to acknowledge God before you can come to an adequate understanding of good and evil and how to have a successful society.

Turn over to 1 John 3. We'll read a very familiar scripture here. 1 John 3 verse 4.

1 John 3:4. *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. (NKJV)*

This defines sin—evil, in other words—in terms of the violations of God's law. In other words, God's law defines for us what is good and what is evil. God's law is the basis of those definitions. As you can see, to accept that concept, you first have to acknowledge God. All these build upon each other.

God will be using Israel as a model nation during the Millennium because they're going to be more cooperative. God's purpose for this is so that other nations will notice things are going well for Israel and maybe they "should shut up, pay attention, and listen to them for a while. There are some positive things you could pick up here."

But, if we look over in Deuteronomy 4, we see how this was explained to Israel the first time they were to be a model nation. You can see this isn't only about defining sin in terms of salvation, but just following these principles is necessary to have a functional society, to have a physical utopia and a society that functions successfully, these are the principles you have to follow to do that. Moses explains in what we're about to read that the commandments are wisdom. God's law is the basis for making smart practical decisions that work out. Deuteronomy 4, verse 1.

Deuteronomy 4:1. *"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you.*

2) *You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take [anything] from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*

3) *Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor.*

4) *But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.*

5) *"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.*

6) *Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*

7) *"For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?*

8) *And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?*

9) *Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,*

10) *especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'* (NKJV)

Notice again, this isn't just a matter of pursuing righteousness. If you are going to have a functional society that has wisdom and isn't plagued with problems, this is the way to do it. It's to follow God's law and God's principles because they just simply work. God's way works and other ways do not work. It's a lie to say that all viewpoints, all religions, all cultures are equal. No, they are not. Cultures and values that follow more closely with the Bible will have greater results than those that don't. That has nothing to do with racial concepts. It's the basic idea that God's way works; other ways do not. It's a very simple concept.

We have to keep in mind here that as carnal human beings we tend to define good and evil from the perspective of emotion. What feels good to us, we think that's good, especially if it's on the front end of a chain of decisions, a policy, or something you're approaching. We tend to focus on how it feels on the front end. God's perspective is always: What does it result in? In other words, the issue is not: Does it feel good? The question is: Does it do good?

The reason I point that out is oftentimes in our world, it's not just the issue of rebelling against God and wanting to do evil. Frequently, we wind up as carnal human beings perpetrating evil and very bad decisions out of good intentions. This is, again, because

we define good by how it feels, not by what it results in. Sometimes, we even unknowingly call good evil and evil good.

Realize we will have to deal with this problem in the Millennium due to what people have come through and the way their world experience was defined for them. They have lived in a culture where everything was upside down, where good was evil and evil was good. Notice a brief reference to this in the Bible in Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 20.

Isaiah 5:20. *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (NKJV)

Realize this can happen not just from a point of view as in the book of Timothy of despising good where you hate good and want to do evil. We can wind up doing that out of stated good intentions because we're looking at this emotionally. Even with good intentions, oftentimes, we shortsightedly look at things from the perspective of: How does it feel? Does it feel good? Then we're asking the wrong question. The right question is: Does it do good? That will be very important in the role of a firstfruit administering a society, administering public policy. You have to look at these things. What does it result in? Sometimes we can make very bad decisions and misjudge things if we're asking the question: Does it feel good? Out of good intentions, we can really get off in a wrong direction.

To give you an example of that, turn over to 2 Thessalonians 3. We'll start reading in verse 6. Paul covers important concepts here. You'll see from the next example that we in the United States have created some disasters in public policy by ignoring this principle.

2 Thessalonians 3:6. *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.* (NKJV)

As we keep reading, we'll realize the tradition about which Paul talks.

- 7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;*
- 8) nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*
- 9) not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*
- 10) For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*
- 11) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*
- 12) Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

13) *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

14) *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

15) *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (NKJV)*

Paul is speaking of someone who refuses to work that is physically capable and has the ability to work, but he or she is lazy and refuses to apply himself or herself. Understand Paul is not talking about situations where someone is in desperate straits due to circumstances outside of their control. That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about self-inflicted problems where someone has the ability to do differently, but chooses not to. Paul teaches here, "Don't subsidize bad behavior." If someone refuses to do their part, don't enable this because if you do, you create more problems.

What oftentimes happens in situations like this is people look at it and say, "We need to be Christian. We need to be compassionate and loving and caring." If you ignore the concept Paul teaches, you are going to create a disaster. All you have to do is look at the welfare system in the United States of America that was instituted in the 1960s and see what has resulted over the decades since then.

I speak from firsthand knowledge because I actually worked for the Texas Department of Human Services after I graduated from Ambassador College. One of my first job assignments was processing claims for Food Stamps and AFDC (a welfare program that's been changed since then). There, I saw the culture that system created.

Realize I'm not against by any means helping people who have legitimate need due to circumstances outside their control. The same God who inspired Paul to write this also inspired the third tithe system. He is not against helping people in need. What God is against is subsidizing bad behavior.

What I witnessed was the creation of a culture where we discouraged people from working and, instead, encouraged single parenthood and literally created this culture in entire neighborhoods. Crime problems went rampant and it was a disaster. You can statistically map it out. What so often happens is these things get started through good intentions. Again, we want to help people. Yet, again, it's looking from the perspective of: Does it feel good? You have to ask the question: Does it do good?

I've been in the situation before where you're dealing with an individual in whom you see a record of self-inflicted behavior. And, you have to tell them, "No, we're not going to subsidize that. We're not going to encourage this. We've tried to work with you to get you to take actions to help your situation and you're just refusing to do so." Oftentimes what you'll hear then, is, "You have no love. You have no compassion. You don't care about people. How can you claim to be a Christian?" They'll play upon emotion.

It doesn't feel good to be in that situation when you have to tell someone, "No," and say, "I have to stand firm on this." You have to ask the question: Does it do good? If you

don't, you can create a monumental disaster over time as the sins of the fathers are visited upon the third and fourth generations. And, you will wind up with an entire culture of this. Again, I've seen it on a large scale.

This basic principle is something we have to look at in terms of defining good and evil. We, as carnal human beings, generally define things in terms of an emotional perspective. As I started this sermon, I noted that oftentimes we look at the Millennium as an instantaneous transformation—everything just goes good. Why? Because that scenario feels good. It sounds good, positive, and uplifting.

Yet, it doesn't match the Bible. It doesn't correlate with reality, but it feels good. And, as humans, we tend to latch onto ideas because they feel good. Yet, we will have to step back from feel good emotions to ask: Does this do good? When you're reigning over the earth, administering public policy, that question becomes very important because what can feel good today can be disastrous tomorrow because it doesn't do good in the long run.

The next distinction we need to look at is the distinction between life and death. If you look at God's overall plan of what He wants to accomplish with mankind, the entire purpose of creating mankind in God's image, as we know, is to expand God's family, to expand the Kingdom of God so that more God-beings can be born into His family in the future. This purpose carries with it the concept that there is sanctity to human life. All human beings are valuable because they're all potential God-beings. The basic concept of the sanctity of human life needs to be instilled into people before you can teach them deeper spiritual concepts of God's plan.

Just to illustrate where I'm going with this, if you watched the news at all in the last week, I am sure you heard about the mass shooting that took place in Las Vegas, Nevada last weekend. And, if you have paid attention to the news at all over the last few years, you've probably heard of a string of similar events that have happened periodically over the decade. Yet, every time any of these events happen, one of the first things you hear on the news is "The problem is the guns and we have to get rid of all the guns."

Left me say—before I go any further here—it is not my purpose in anyway whatsoever to debate the politics of gun control. I'm trying to illustrate that every time I hear this discussion come up, I can't help but think of the community I grew up in as a teenager. I grew up in a small rural community in Southern Alabama that was mostly a farming area. It was a very peaceful area. It was common for people not to lock their doors because you didn't have to worry much about people stealing from you or other crimes. At the same time, this is a rural farming community where in the wintertime deer hunting was one of the most common things people did. I'm convinced the vast majority of homes had a gun because it was just commonplace.

If you went to the high school that I attended, looked around, and observed the students, what you would see is most every teenage boy—myself included—if you

looked at their jeans pockets that they had worn for a while, you would see the indentation of a large pocketknife where it had been in their jeans' pocket. Typically, those pocketknives would have about a four-inch blade on them—something the schools today would freak out about if a kid brought that into the school. We all had one of those in our pockets. It was considered commonplace because this was a farming community. A pocketknife was a useful tool that everybody had. We didn't see them as weapons to stab each other.

Even though there was a gun in every home, there wasn't a murder rate or people shooting each other. The reason being that by worldly standards this was a conservative community of professing Christians (And, when I say "professing Christians", it was typically different versions of Protestantism, Baptists, Methodists, or other types of protestant religions.) Because of that, there was a basic belief in the sanctity of human life. So, even though there were guns and knives all over the place, nobody was being killed. There was this basic belief that human life had an inherent value and you just don't go around killing people. These were carnal people not called to salvation at that time, didn't understand all of God's way, but understood the basic concept that there is sanctity of life. And, in this rural community with a gun in every house, there was no crime problem. We could leave our doors unlocked and not be worried about it.

Understand that to have a functional society, you have to have the basic belief in the sanctity of human life. This is one of God's basic rules laid out when He first made a covenant with Ancient Israel. Turn over to Exodus 20, where we find, as we know, the Ten Commandments, the basis of the rules God wanted Ancient Israel to follow as part of His covenant. Notice in verse 13.

Exodus 20:13. "You shall not murder. (NKJV)

One of the basic fundamental rules God put out to them, "Don't go around killing each other. Human beings have an inherent value and you should respect that because they are created in the image of God." In fact, God gave the ultimate penalty for those who would violate this. Turn over to Exodus 21:12.

Exodus 21:12. "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. (NKJV)

In other words, God took it very seriously. He said, "I don't want you to kill anybody else, but if you do, if you kill them, we're going to kill you. This is not going to be tolerated. This is a fundamental rule that you have to abide by."

If you look at this, there is this distinction here. Not only as I mentioned in the example of our current society versus the town I grew up in, but also, if you assign basic value to human life, that will reduce crime. If you look even at our society today and others, most societies in various cultures have some type of laws against murder. Whether

those laws are enforced or people still violate them, most people still recognize that murder is a problem.

There is another area in our culture today—which I'm sure will just get worse and worse as we come closer to the end—where we absolutely confuse the lines between life and death by confusing the definition of life. That is in the issue of abortion. Today, many of the people outraged by the fifty-nine people killed last weekend in Las Vegas don't bat an eye at the 1 to 1.5 million (depending on whose numbers you look at) of children that are murdered every year in the United States through abortion. What has happened there is the distinction between life and death has been blurred. The very definition of life, of what constitutes life, has been confused to the point that people don't even see abortion as wrong anymore. Again, while people are horrified by the Holocaust the Nazis carried out toward the Jews [and others] in World War II, the number murdered then pales in comparison to what we've seen just in the U.S. with abortion.

We have to understand the definition of life. Human life has a sanctity and sacredness to it, because humans are created in the image of God. That is even true of fetuses and the Bible is clear about that if we honestly read scripture. Turn over to Exodus 21. We're going to look at a scripture here that directly addresses the issue of abortion. Even though this scripture is oftentimes twisted and maligned to justify abortion, if we honestly read it, we will see it is very clear. Exodus 21:22.

Exodus 21:22. *"If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no [lasting] harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. (NKJV)*

Notice first of all, the scenario here doesn't say that the child is stillborn. It says it is born prematurely. We're talking about a child that didn't go the full nine months in the womb. In the scenario here, no lasting harm has come. Realize you have two individuals in this scenario. You have the mother and you have the child. This wasn't limited to either one. It says *if no lasting harm comes*, because if you have complications, one or both can be harmed, but in this situation neither feels lasting harm. In other words, the baby is fine going forward. The mother is fine going forward. Note, there are still consequences imposed by the husband of the woman who was hurt.

Now let's notice the next verse here that addresses the other end of this scenario.

23) *But if any [lasting] harm follows, then you shall give life for life, (NKJV)*

Notice that wording. We're going to come back to that.

24) *eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,*
25) *burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (NKJV)*

Now the concept laid out here is God's concept of justice. I prefer the way it's worded in the New Testament. The wording is *with the same measure you use, it shall be measured back to you*. In other words, as one of my instructors at Ambassador College used to love to say, "God will do unto you as you have done unto other people. He'll give it right back to you what you dished out." That's the concept talked about here.

Now, we talked about lasting harm. It's not nailed down as to who receives that lasting harm because we have two parties involved, the mother and the child. This refers to both of them.

Notice in the concept of lasting harm, scripture talked about the term "life for life." In other words, when there is a loss of life involved, the punishment is life for life. To understand what is being meant by that phrase, let's turn over to Deuteronomy 19. There is only one other time in the Bible where this "life for life" statement is used. What we're going to look at is a section of scripture that deals with what we would call in our current world today perjury. In other words, making false testimonies and false accusations about another person maliciously when you know what you are saying is false. Deuteronomy 19:15.

Deuteronomy 19:15. *"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.*

16) If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,

17) then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

18) And the judges shall make [diligent] inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

19) then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil [person] from among you.

20) And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

21) Your eye shall not pity: (NKJV)

Notice the wording.

21b) ... life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (NKJV)

We have the same concept of the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. What it's teaching here is about the person who has made a false accusation against another individual. Once it's been determined that the person committed perjury—that he or she knowingly lied against the other—the way to deal with that person is the punishment that would have come with the crime he or she accused the other of doing, you do that to the person who made the false accusation.

If you look at God's law in the Old Testament, there were several crimes that carried the death penalty, which you could accuse someone of committing. What God is saying is that whatever punishment the accused person would have received, you do that to the false accuser. That means you administer the death penalty when false accusations are made against another person that could have resulted in the death penalty.

Life shall be for life. We read that same statement in Exodus. It's allowing for the loss of life. It means, if life is lost because of what that person did, then, that is the punishment to be dished out. Yes, fetuses are life. Think about that in terms of how we have elevated emotion in our world today. As I mentioned, oftentimes we look at what is good and evil based upon emotion.

The issue of abortion is one of the clearest examples of that. If a woman is pregnant and she's happy about it, looking forward to having a child, a new addition to the family, she is not confused about what is in her womb and neither are her friends and family. Everyone knows she is going to have a baby and it's an exciting event. However, if the mom doesn't want a baby and sees it as an inconvenience, suddenly, everyone is confused. And, now what was a baby is a lump of cells that can be cut out like a cancerous tumor with no other thought involved.

If you think about these examples, this is what we have done with emotion. We have elevated emotion to the point of allowing our feelings to determine what we call life and what we don't consider life, whether a child is a human being. Because what are we focused on? How does it feel? Does it feel good? Not, does it do good? That's how we have blurred the definitions.

The last distinction we need to look at is the distinction between male and female. If you have paid attention to our world today, you know there is an absolute war on this issue. The issue of gender as a social construct is constantly jammed at us in our society.

If you think about how the Bible describes the end-time, it says it's going to be like the days of Lot. We don't have time to go through the story of Lot, but look in Genesis when the mob surrounds the house. The way the Bible describes that is that all the men from every part of the city were present and were part of this. Again, you can debate numerically whether that was every single individual, but obviously, it's saying it's representative of the entire area.

My point is that it's not the gang over in the bad neighborhood that's doing this; this is generally all the people there. To do that—to have a society with that level of problems with homosexuality—the issue of gender is completely skewed.

Notice in Genesis 1:26.

Genesis 1:26. *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of*

the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27) So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (NKJV)

Notice: two options—not dozens of them, just two. There is male. There is female. It's biologically determined. God did that for a purpose. We hear in our world today, "A woman can do everything a man can do." Well, I have to laugh at that and say, "God didn't create women to do everything a man can do. He created women to do the things men can't do!"

Think about it! If there is not unique value to what each one brings to the table, why go to the trouble of making two of them? Why make a distinction if both don't have an inherent unique perspective that they bring to the table? God created male and female and He created gender roles. God created us differently for a reason. This is very fundamental to keeping a functional society.

Look at gender roles in areas where the family structure has broken down and gender roles have been completely thrown out. What you wind up with is massive single parent neighborhoods. That correlates with all manner of social problems, crime, and societal breakdown.

If you look at this particular subject through the New Testament and look at the subject of marriage, one of the things you see covered repeatedly is biblical gender roles. There is a unique role for a husband. There is a unique role for a wife. And, these roles are different from one another. God didn't create a woman to do everything a man could do. He created woman to do the things man can't do! This is so they complement each other and they work together.

When those roles are in place, families are more functional and they stay together. When you destroy that, you tear society apart. All you have to do is look at your neighborhood. Do you want to map out your high crime areas? Do you know what you will always find? High rates of single parenthood, the family structure being torn down—the sins of the fathers visited upon the third and the fourth generations. You see this because having gender roles in place is necessary for a society to operate functionally.

So, as you can see, we will have to teach these roles to people in the Millennium. Think about the reality of taking a group of people, convinced their entire life that gender is a social construct that doesn't even exist, and trying to teach them the truth. First, you have to get them to understand that God created male and female and these are the only two options. You are to fulfill the role your anatomy and genetics say you are. That has to be established before you can get into the details of how you fulfill these roles, and why they work.

We will do this kind of work in the Millennium. We will have to work with people, again, who are highly resistant.

It's a feel good idea and it sounds wonderful and happy to think that everybody falls in line and we can teach the finer points of doctrine. That's a nice idea, but it doesn't stack up with reality. It's not real because you're working with people who have come from a society where basic Judeo-Christian values have been rejected. All of this has been pushed aside and even demonized as evil. They have been taught that good is evil and evil is good. So, in their minds, everything associated with the Bible they will see as bad and they won't want to follow it.

We will have to work with them patiently to deprogram them and, then, get them on God's track to follow His way. It won't be an easy picture of jumping in and teaching the finer points of doctrine. No, it will be patiently working with people first to get their attention. In some cases that will mean switching off the rain until they have had enough pain that they begin to want to listen in the first place. Then, from there, we have to build the basic foundational principles with them. If they accept these things, then they can grow into learning the finer points of doctrine. Working to this goal will be an ongoing process. It will require more work out of us than we oftentimes picture, because frequently we have a rosy picture that everything goes well and we're just teaching them the finer points of technical doctrine. No. We will have to establish godly distinctions, build the very basic concepts with them, and lay a foundation upon which to build. That will require much patience on our part to work with them through this process because people will not immediately embrace God's way.

Brethren, as we look forward to this time and prepare for the jobs that we will do, realize the work we will be involved in is, in reality, more extensive work than we often have pictured. What we will have to do is be patient with these individuals and work with them as you would a child. As a child grows up, you don't start teaching them college as soon as they're little children. You teach them how to walk and eat their food without spilling it all over themselves. It's the same kind of concept spiritually. We will have to work with them teaching basic concepts, being very patient with them until we start to get their attention, and develop them to the point where they try following God's way. So, brethren as we look forward to this time, let's realize we have an awesome job ahead of us, and much of that job will be first and foremost restoring godly distinctions.