

Am I Willing to Walk into an Abyss?

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By way of introduction, let's say that you come across the following scripture. We're going to read six scriptures, just by way of introduction. As you read them, ask yourself, what would I do if I read them all together within a very short period of time—what would go through your head if you read these scriptures? They are all going to be familiar—let's turn to John 17:3. Christ is speaking and anytime the Father or the Son says this is about life eternal, then red flags should go up, the antenna should go up and we should pay attention to it.

John 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they [meaning all of us] might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

4) I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. (KJV)

Read that scripture and let's turn to Ephesians 4:6. Here we have Paul the apostle writing. Notice what he says. You will see a theme through this. Ask yourself, if I came across all of these scriptures in a short period of time, what might I think?

Ephesians 4:6 *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (KJV)*

Let that sink in. Then let's go to 2 Corinthians 5:18. Again, Paul is writing—all these are out of the King James, unless I note otherwise.

2 Corinthians 5:18 *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (KJV)*

Now let's go to Jude, verse 4. We are getting several authors here, but notice what they are saying. This is a warning from God.

Jude 1:4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God [referring to the Father], and our Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV)*

There are going to be people who deny God the Father and who also deny Jesus Christ. Now let's turn to 1 Peter 1:3—another apostle, talking about this very subject.

1 Peter 1:3 *[Peter says] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... (KJV)*

One final scripture now, this is all by way of introduction. We will go back to Acts 3:13. I once had a minister yell at me—literally screaming and yelling. We were discussing God and He said that I kept bringing up these tired old scriptures. Well, they are in the Bible and I don't think they are tired. Yes, maybe they were written a long time ago, but they are relevant. Peter is speaking after God healed a man who was lame from birth.

Acts 3:13 *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he [Pilate] was determined to let him go. (KJV)*

You take all of these scriptures—there are six—read them in a close sequence or close period of time and ask, what do we conclude from these scriptures? Just read them for what they say and what you hear. Read them for what they say. For those of us with a Worldwide background, these scriptures plainly contradict what we have been taught for decades. The point is not to get into specifics, but there are plenty of sermons, plenty of written material on the website and archives and DVD's and CD's to that affect. For decades what we were taught conflicts with the scriptures that we have just covered. If we truly believe these scriptures for what they plainly say, then one of the conclusions that we could come to—shame on us, shame on me, because I've read them for decades—is that we have been guilty of diminishing our Father. We have been guilty of moving Him to the background over time and diminishing what He has done, diminishing His name, diminishing His might and His authority.

Let's say, that this realization hits us like a ton of bricks, as it has for most of us. It did with me and it's all Mark's fault. I went to his house and we covered a couple of these scriptures. These scriptures started wheels turning in my mind, that have not stopped. So, in that sense it is his fault, but here we are. Once this realization hits you, you have to ask, say what do I do with it? This realization comes, but what am I going to do about it? At some point you might take it to your local pastor. If you were out in the inter-lands and you read these scriptures, you might take it to your local pastor. Then the next question is, what would he do about it? He would probably say one of the following: This is not what we've been taught. Our church tradition is different than what you are telling me, this is not what we teach. You might be told that you have a divisive spirit or, the big fall back (at least it was when I came into the church in the '60's) was, that you have a bad attitude. Anybody who said anything to the contrary, was painted with the brush which said that you have a bad attitude. The implication being, either be quiet or you are not welcome. That was the implication.

Let's say you were told that— be quiet or you're not welcome—then what would you do? You've come to a fork in your road. We each have a road. We each have a path we are walking along and now you've been put into a situation where you have reached a fork in that road. One side leads to being quiet. You have been told to put your newly found understanding, your belief in God, on the shelf and just be quiet. Or, the other fork is to follow God's word and to follow God wherever that leads. The fact is that many have been in this situation over the last two, three or four years and I think the reality is, many more will be put in that situation over the next few years.

Let's say you decide to leave. Stop and think about this. What would you be doing if you left because you wanted to follow God? What if, for conscience sake, you had to leave wherever you were previously? What would you be doing? You would be stepping away from the familiar, you would be stepping away from the comfortable and you would be walking into an abyss.

What do I mean by abyss. *Abyss* is a Greek noun that means, "without depth" or it can also mean "a deep or seemingly bottomless chasm". You leave the comfortable and leave the familiar and you walk into an abyss—a bottomless chasm. Please understand I'm not talking about the bottomless pit of Revelation—that is not what I am talking about. We are talking about walking into the unknown. Walking into something that is not familiar. Once you step off into the abyss, what happens next is not certain. We sometimes just do not know the future as we step off into the abyss. This can be worrisome for many people because we like comfort and the familiar. Therefore, walking into the unknown can be worrisome for some people.

By stepping off into the abyss, there is one thing you will know for a certainty. Your life is going to change; it's not going to be the same as it was before—it's just not. It's going to change in ways that you cannot know at the time you take that first step into the abyss. We just can't know it; it's unknowable to a human. Of course, to God it is known. Many are going through it now as we speak, many in this room have been through it and many more will face it in the future. That leads to the big question for us today and it's the title of the sermon:

Am I Willing to Walk Into an Abyss?

Am I willing to do that for what I believe, to walk into the unknown, the uncertain and leaving behind the familiar, the comfortable? Am I willing to walk into an abyss? I like to talk by using points—I get a lot of kidding for that—but point number one is:

1. Let's look at some examples of walking into an abyss.

Let's go to Genesis 22:1. I am going to read this out of the New King James. It is a very familiar story—sometimes we read the Bible stories to our kids and this story is in a lot of children's Bible books. It is easy to read right over it or right through it and not understand what is actually going on.

Genesis 22:1 *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham!" And he said, Here I am."*

2) Then He said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (KJV)

Previously, Jehovah had spoken to Abraham. In chapter 18, He promised Sarah that she would bare Abraham a son and of course, they laughed at the prospect. Then in chapter 19, Jehovah intervened to save Abraham's nephew, Lot and then in chapter 21,

we are told that Isaac, Abraham's promised son, was born when Abraham was 100 years old; obviously a miracle. But now this, in verse 2, Jehovah says, I want you to kill your son and I want you to watch him burn as a sacrifice. Think about that. God has done all of this to this point and now He says this. How would you react? What would go through your mind?

3) *So, Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.*

4) *Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.*
(KJV)

The first thing we see here is that Abraham acted. He acted on faith and he acted on trust. He didn't know what was happening but he acted and he started the journey. Jehovah gave him three days to change his mind. Think about that. You are walking with your son and you know you are going to have to kill him. He had three days to turn around and go back home. Just think about that. Verse 5.

5) *And Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."* (KJV)

The Hebrew word for *lad* means "a boy from infancy to adolescence". Obviously, Isaac was not an infant. As we'll see, he carried a stack of wood. He is probably, at least preteens or in his teens. When Abraham said they would come back to them, I think that was probably a combination of faith and hope. He wasn't sure, he didn't know for a certainty, so I think it was a combination of faith and hope.

6) *So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.*

7) *But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, My father!" And he said, Here I am, my son." Then he said, Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"* (KJV)

Thinking, I'm sure, in the back of his mind, that his son was the lamb.

8) *... So, the two of them went together.*

9) *Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.* (KJV)

It is obvious here that Isaac did not resist. Even if he was a preteen or an early teen, if he had wanted to, he could have just started running. He didn't have to fight his father he could just start running. His 115-year-old father would not have been able to catch him. But he didn't. He did not resist because God was with Isaac, and also, he was obedient, even unto death. Isaac did not actually know what was going on, but he was obedient to his father.

10) *And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.* (KJV)

Think about that—he got the knife, the knife is up, the knife starts to come down—and here is the point. Abraham was willing to walk into an abyss. He didn't know the future. I am sure he remembered how God has dealt with him. He didn't know what was going to happen next after he shed his son's blood, but he was committed to doing it and Abraham walked into an abyss—into the unknown. To him at that point, it was into the unknowable. Then in verse 11.

11) *But the Angel [the Hebrew word means messenger or ambassador] of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham!" so he said, Here I am.*" (KJV)

Probably with the knife trembling in his hand.

12) *And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.*" (KJV)

We see that this messenger is relaying Jehovah's words. So now, the Almighty, the God Most High, knew Abraham. How did he know that? Because Abraham was willing to step off into an abyss in order to obey God Almighty. Notice the next two important things that happened right after that. After the Almighty knows, two things happen and that's something we have to keep in mind, as we ourselves walk into an abyss. The first thing that happened was that the Almighty provided for him immediately; verse 13.

13) *Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So, Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.*

14) *And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.*" (KJV)

So, the huge lesson is, that once we step off into the abyss, God will provide. He will take care of us in ways we cannot imagine.

Then the second thing that happened, the Most High God blessed Abraham because of what he was willing to do; verse 15.

15) *Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16) and said: By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—*

17) *blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.*

18) *In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.*" (NKJV)

Abraham was willing to step off into an abyss to obey God, and because he was willing to do that—God knew. Then God provided, and as we see here, God blessed Abraham for what he had done. After God knows, in this case after Abraham walked into the abyss, He provided and He blessed.

With that Old Testament example, let us look at a couple of New Testament examples. Christ is starting His ministry and He is walking and teaching and He is asking for some help from those God has called.

Matthew 4:18 *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.*

19) *And he saith unto them, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

20) *And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.* (KJV)

We don't know all of the details. It is not recorded what Christ might have said to elaborate on this calling. However, what is recorded is, that they walked off their jobs—they left immediately. Back in those days, in a situation such as this, if you didn't fish that day, you didn't eat that day. Yet, they dropped the nets and started following Jesus Christ. Do you think their families might have been a little bit upset about that? Maybe they didn't come home that night. Maybe the families set out looking for them and they found the nets and the boat there and their husbands gone. The family might have been a little upset. But the fact is, they stepped off into an abyss, not knowing what the future held. They left the familiar, they left the comfortable and they walked into an abyss to follow the One who said, I am the Son of the God you worship. I'm His Son, come follow Me. They dropped the nets and walked into the abyss.

In Matthew 9:9 we see another example of somebody walking into an abyss. There is more to this than meets the eye, when you think about it.

Matthew 9:9 *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom [he was a tax collector, employed by the government]: and he saith unto him, Follow me. [again, we don't know all the details] And he arose, and followed him.* (KJV)

If you are employed by the government, particularly by the Roman government, you put yourself in jeopardy if you walk off the job. The Romans were dictators and the Romans were rulers—you walk off the job, it's not like just walking out of McDonald's today and saying goodbye. There are a lot more consequences, it is a most serious decision. But he walked away from his livelihood and stepped into an abyss—into the unknown. He was willing to do it to follow the One who said I am the Son of the God you worship.

I'm going to give you one more example, I'm going to bring it up to World War II or prior to World War II. This is a recent example of a man, who was (as far as we know) not converted in the sense we understand no conversion—Most of us have heard the name Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Particularly, if you have studied history around that time.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 to a very privileged German family and following in the tradition of that family, he became a pastor and a theologian. He was also, a vocal anti-Nazi. He abhorred what the Nazi's and Hitler were doing starting in 1933 and on through the rest of the 1930's. He was a dissident during the 1930's. In his late twenties, he had the opportunity to come to the United States and visit. This was when the Nazi's were persecuting the Jews. They had not invaded Poland yet, but there were a lot of rumblings going on. People were being persecuted and life was pretty bad for people who didn't agree with the Nazi regime.

Bonhoeffer was invited to the United States and he was offered a job. They said he could immigrate and they had all the papers arranged. He could immigrate and be a theologian here in the United States. He knowingly made the decision, to go back to Germany and was not going to be quiet. Talk about walking into an abyss. Dietrich Bonhoeffer did go back. He went back, got engaged to a young German woman and three months later the Nazi's came after him and threw him into a concentration camp. He was there for about a year, as I recall, and two weeks before the camp was liberated by the Allies, in 1945, he was hung at the camp at age thirty-nine. Talk about walking into the unknown, into the abyss, for what he believed. This is what he said, this is a quote from him and it's very applicable to today: *Silence in the face of evil is evil itself. God will not hold us guilt-less. Not to speak, is to speak. Not to act, is to act.*

Think about that. That was his core belief and he acted on his belief to his own peril and to his own death.

As I mentioned in the announcement, two and half years ago, Pacific began teaching the truth about God and Christ, teaching the very scriptures that I have just read in the introduction. Initially—this is two and half years ago—it was received with joy by most. Yes, there were questions, there were discussion, there was going back and forth and at least on the surface, everybody agreed.

But, to show you the power of Satan, he began to work in the minds of some and then they talked to others. All of this was under the table—myself and the elders of Pacific at the time, James Smyda and Jack Elder had no clue that this was going on under the table, so to speak. Satan stirred up one or two people and then they stirred up others and it began this big gossip thing going on.

They were all upset because what was being taught violated what we had been taught previously, violated church tradition. A silent conspiracy within Pacific occurred. It shows you the power of Satan to control or provoke the minds of human beings, as one unhappy member put it, just about two years ago. It was very succinct, the fork in the road was there. He asked if I was willing to lose a fourth of the brethren to continue

teaching this. He said he was telling me that if I kept teaching this, a fourth of the brethren were going to walk out the door. Well, that was a very succinct analysis and I asked, who are they? He said, he couldn't tell me as it was confidential. I asked what their objections were. He said again, he couldn't tell me as it was confidential. I said that he was asking me to grab hold of a cloud here, how can I respond if I don't know who they are and what they are saying? But it was confidential.

Ultimately the answer I told him was, if I want to put God first, I don't have a choice. The same is true for all of us. If we want to put God first, there is no choice—we follow God—there is no choice. And a fourth of our brethren walked out and they did so with slander, with accusations, with all of that. It left us within a matter of days, with no way to record Sabbath services, to send out DVD's and CD's to the scattered brethren all over the world, because we weren't streaming back them. The communication we had with them was the DVD's and CD's. So, we were not able to provide services for the scattered brethren. Yet, all of those who stayed, were willing to put God first, they were willing to step off into an abyss. At that moment in time we didn't know what was going to happen, we didn't know what the future held. We had our hopes, we had our trust and faith in God, but we did not know what was going to happen. At that moment, everything for a day or two seemed dark and then the miracles started to happen.

People with expertise we didn't know they had, stepped up to do various jobs to get us back to where we were. The Almighty provided a new hall in Kennewick. Jack and Marie went looking and the first hall they saw was the one we now have in Kennewick—it just happened.

Eleven months before this, we had received a large donation from a group we had never heard of. They had folded their tent. I got a phone call and they said we're going out of business, we're not going to do this anymore, would you like our cash reserves. I had never met the people before and I said, okay yes. I was not going to turn that down. They sent us a pot of money. This was eleven months before all this happened. We didn't need the money—we were not building any buildings, so we wondered what was going on. We just put the it in a series of CD's and let it sit there. And now we know. It was there and it was available to get us through this crisis.

The bottom line is, we were down for three weeks and then we were right back up again. Just as Abraham was provided for and was blessed, so were we. Looking back what has happened is now, we have doubled the number of Elders, we've doubled—I say we—God has doubled the number of Elders, God has doubled the number of deacons, God has doubled the number of congregations and we have more brethren on our data base now by ten percent than we had before this whole thing started and you've got this—this beautiful hall. None of this could have been planned in advance, nothing could have been planned in advance, only God could do something like this. We couldn't engineer it, we couldn't plan it, but God did just that. What we see weekly now, are brethren willing to step off into their abyss—their unknown. We see it on a weekly basis, it's happening. They do so, knowing that God is going to provide—don't know how—but God will provide and God will bless.

Now we come to the second point.

2. We're going to cover some common excuses for not stepping off into the abyss.

When we come to a fork in our road, we have a decision to make. Keep the status quo or put God first. Stay with the comfortable or the familiar, or walk into the abyss which means the unknown. When we walk into the abyss, guess who comes after us to change our mind and get us to turn around. We know who our adversary is and he does indeed do that. In Luke 9:57 Christ is teaching, preaching and healing.

Luke 9:57 *And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, [they were walking on foot] a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. (KJV)*

Notice Christ's response. He is saying that if you want to follow Me, I can guarantee it is not going to be a bed of roses—not going to happen.

58) And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes [they have a home], and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. (KJV)

He didn't know where He was going to stop for the night, it depended on the circumstances. He didn't know where His next meal was going to come from. Maybe sometimes they went hungry, we don't know.

59) And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

60) Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. (KJV)

This man was saying, I know this is the right thing to do but the timing isn't good for me right now. That was his excuse. In other words, he was putting conditions on the Messiah and what the Messiah wanted him to do. He was putting forward his conditions. So, the question that we have to ask ourselves is, should we operate on our time or should we operate on God's time. We always have to make those decisions.

61) And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

62) And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (KJV)

The point is, if this man went back home to say farewell to his parents, his wife or brothers and sisters—they would put pressure on him; what are you doing, are you nuts, don't do this. Of course, they would put pressure on him and of course, he would change his mind and he might decide not to heed the call and to stay home.

What Christ is saying is, are you willing to walk into an Abyss for me, for that is what I am asking you to do? We have to be ready to give up everything—the comfortable, the familiar, the pleasurable, we have to be willing to give that up and walk into the unknown.

Matthew 19:16 is a familiar scripture to us all. A man came up and asked Christ, what do I have to do, to obtain eternal life? Christ told him, toward the end of verse 17:

Matthew 19:17 ... but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. (KJV)

Then this man asked Him which ones and Christ went through the latter commandments—honoring your father and mother, not doing murder and so on and so forth—then the man told Him in verse 20, I've done all these things since I was a youth. Then the rubber met the road in verse 21.

21) *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect ... (KJV)*

The Greek word for *perfect* means “complete in character”. If you want your character to be complete:

21 continued) *... go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (KJV)*

This man was at the edge of his abyss. What do I do? Right at the edge. Mark recently gave a sermon on November 9 and he asked the question, how much are you willing to sacrifice? How much will you pay? I can assume this man might say, I'll double tithe on everything that I have, or I'll give 50% of what I have. But that was not what Christ was asking. Christ wanted total, absolute commitment. In verse 22.

22) *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (KJV)*

What he did was, he turned away from the abyss. Without doubt he was going through his mind and asking questions. How can I support myself? What is my lifestyle going to be? I'm not going to have a big home, I'm not going to have my car, my big screen TV, my NFL—I'm not going to have any of that. I'm going to start walking the roads and the byways. What would my living conditions be like? He made the choice. In verse 23:

23) *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

24) *And again, I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (KJV)*

The fact is, the pull of the physical is very strong. The other fact is, today, compared to back then or compared to the Middle Ages or to most of humanity, most of us are richer in comparison to the millennia before us. We have hot and cold running water, we have

indoor plumbing, we have automobiles with air conditioning, we have heating and cooling in our houses and the list goes on. The rich you see, have plenty to hold onto. The rich have a lifestyle of ease and pleasure. Human nature wants to stay in what is commonly called its comfort zone. I don't want to get out of my comfort zone, I get uneasy—it's unpleasant, I don't want to do that. In God's church, the same pulls occur. Family weekends, camps, Feasts in exotic places, family, friends—those are all pulls.

Continuing on in verse 25.

25) *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who, then can be saved?*

26) *But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, [Here's the ultimate answer] With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (KJV)*

This is the key to stepping off into our abyss. With God, everything is possible. When we step into the abyss, we step into the unknown. We step away from the comfortable, we step away from the familiar, but we follow God wherever He leads us and that is a matter of faith and a matter of trust. After Abraham stepped off into the abyss, remember God provided and God blessed. We have to have that faith and trust that if we step off into our abyss to follow Him, the same will hold. Part of deciding not to step into an abyss is the fear of the unknown. I studied (I'm almost ashamed to admit it) psychology in graduate school, before God called me and there's a psychological principle that says—I'll just quote the principle: *Humans need to repeat the familiar, even if it does them harm.* This explains why a battered wife will keep going back to an abusive husband, because as bad as the familiar is, it's better for her (the battered wife) than the unknown. She's more afraid of stepping off into the unknown than she is of going back to this abusive man. As with Abraham, this is where faith and trust come into play. The bottom line is - we either believe God or we don't. We either believe Him or we don't believe Him. We either trust Him or we don't trust Him. To step off into the abyss you have to believe and you have to trust.

We will go to the third point and bring it into the reality of today. What is happening right now in the greater church of God?

3. God is calling His people and He is opening their eyes to have a deeper understanding of Him and His Son.

God's roles, God's activities, God's title, God's name. People are being exposed to this and then what God does is watches us to see what we will do with it. As an example, the scriptures we read in the beginning of the sermon. What will we do with it? Will we embrace it or will we reject it? God watches to see.

Now some—historically—some men walked off their jobs. They embraced it, they walked off their jobs, they became apostles. Others delayed by making excuses—I need to go do this or I need to go do that—there's no record of them ever being part of the discipleship of Jesus Christ. They delayed. Still others reject the call outright. Let's

go to Mark 7:7. Christ is speaking and He gives us a warning. We always applied this to “Protestant Christians” or “Catholics” or people like that. But a few of these scriptures have come home to roost within the greater church of God.

Mark 7:7 *Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* (KJV)

We applied it to the Pope or we applied to Martin Luther or we applied to this movement or that movement. Teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men.

8) *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.*
9) *And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.* (KJV)

They have a fork in their road---Commandments of God or their own traditions. Christ says, you are rejecting the commandments of God to hold to your traditions. You are more comfortable with your traditions, they are more familiar and yet you see in the Bible the truth over here, but you are more comfortable over there. Therefore, you reject the commandments of God. Christ could be saying today, to those who reject God and His commandments and the truth about Him—Christ could be saying, you are not soil, fit to receive the good seed. You are not soil fit to receive the good seed of God, because you are rejecting that. You have rejected the truth.

In the past, when I came into the church, the church taught, at least this was the culture and I'm not pointing at any individual, but certainly the culture when I came into the church in Michigan back in the mid '60's, was bad things don't happen to God's people. If a bad thing happens to somebody in the church, it is because they are sinning. When somebody got into a car wreck or somebody got sick the whispering around the church would be, I wonder if they are sinning—God is not happy with them and withdrew their blessings. People would gossip. Look at what Christ says in Matthew 10:34. We have read over this scripture. We know it by heart and yet we have never applied it inside God's church and we have never applied it to ourselves. It was always coming from the outside.

Matthew 10:34 [Christ says] *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth:* (KJV)

I did not come to make everybody get in a circle, hold hands and sing kumbaya and everything is going to be wonderful.

34 continued) ... *I came not to send peace, but a sword.*
35) *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*
36) *And a man's foes [The Greek word can mean adversaries] shall be they of his own household.* [What does He mean?]

37) *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

38) *And he that taketh not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me.*
(KJV)

If you look up the Greek word for *cross*, in Strong's, it means, "figuratively, exposure to death". But it also means self-denial; putting the Father and the Son, behind the self. Putting the self before God. If we are not willing to put God first and deny the self, Christ is saying you're not worthy—you're just not worthy. The fact is, Elders and wives have been willing to walk away from their retirement—having no social security benefits—walking away from retirement, in order to walk into an abyss. Walk away from money to walk into the unknown, into an abyss. Brethren and wives have been willing to walk away from family, from friends, from their comfort zone, from Feasts in exotic places and all of that—to walk away from that—into an abyss. Knowing all the time, having the faith and trust that somehow God will provide, He will bless, He will take care of us, if we put Him first. Verse 39.

39) *He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.* (KJV)

Let's go back to verse 28.

28) *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].*

29) *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.* (KJV)

We read right over this but it tells us, God knows every detail, every little point. To make that point, Christ says:

30) *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* (KJV)

How God does that, we don't know. I don't know, but He knows. Here is the point in verse 31.

31) *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

32) *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men ...* (KJV)

What does it mean to confess? What is Christ talking about? One of the meanings of the Greek word is, acknowledging a fixed position. What Christ is saying is, if you are not willing to acknowledge My fixed position—and what is that fixed position? In Matthew 16:16, you remember Christ said to Peter, who do you say I am? Peter said, You, are the Son of the Living God. That is Christ's fixed position. Then, if you remember, what did Christ say next to Peter? Man has not revealed this to you but My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. So what Christ is saying, if you confess Me

before men, if you acknowledge that I am the Son of the Living God, going on in verse 32.

32 continued) ... *him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*
33) *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.* (KJV)

When we decide to put God first, we walk into an abyss. Once we totally put Him first, without reservation. That is the one thing Satan hates. He does not want people to know who God really is and for sure he does not want people to follow God who is the Most High and the Almighty. He will do everything he can to turn us from that position. Luke 22:31 shows Peter had this knowledge when he said You are the Son of the Living God, but notice who came after Him. We could put our name in this position too.

Luke 22:31 *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, [this is the one who said, You, are the Son of the Living God] behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:* (KJV)

The Greek word for *sift* literally means “a sieve”. We’ve all used a sieve. It can be a screen you can sift dirt from rocks or you can sift flour from chaff and what Christ is saying, if I gave you over to Satan he would rip you apart, atom by atom, molecule by molecule so that you did not exist. That is what Satan wants to do to you.

32) *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* (KJV)

We have to remember what Christ said—we read it in Matthew 19—all things are possible with God. Then at the end of Matthew 28, the very familiar sentence that Christ said, I am with you always. We have to remember that. We have to know that we have to trust in Jehovah. We have to put our faith and our trust in Him. God is going to regularly test us to see if we will put Him first. If we do it once, that may not be the end of it. From time to time, God will test us to see if we will put Him, the Almighty, first or something else first. The question comes back to the beginning, are we willing to walk into an abyss in order to put God first.

That leads us to the last point.

This is a question Terry asked in the sermonette he gave at the Feast in 2018.

4. What difference does it make?

We get that all the time—what difference does it make? Let’s see if it made a difference for Judah. In Jeremiah 9:1—Jeremiah is speaking to Judah. Let’s see if it made different to Judah.

Jeremiah 9:1 *Oh that my head were waters, [my head is filled with waters] and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

2) *Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!* (KJV)

He wanted to get away from his people. Why would he want to do that?

2 continued) *... for they be all adulterers [we know adultery can be spiritual as well as physical] an assembly of treacherous men.*

3) *And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth;* (KJV)

The Hebrew word for *valiant* means, “unflinching, unshrinking, unafraid”. He says they are not unflinching and they are not unafraid. They are afraid to stand up for the truth, is what he is saying.

3 continued) *... for they proceed from evil to evil, [notice the key here] and they know not me, saith the LORD.*

4) *Take ye heed every one of his neighbor and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant ...* (KJV)

The Hebrew word for *supplant* has almost two opposite meanings. It means “to trip up by the heel—cause somebody to stumble” But it also means “to swell”. So, one human being can trip another human by the heel in order to elevate the self, in order to swell up above the one he just tripped. What he is saying is that every brother will utterly supplant.

4 continued) *... and every neighbor will walk with slanders.*

5) *And they will deceive everyone his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies ...* (KJV)

That is very interesting. When you teach your tongue to speak lies, that is what we call premeditation. You plan in advance to lie.

5 continued) *... and weary themselves to commit iniquity.*

6) *Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; [here we go again] through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD.* (KJV)

Verse 22, look at the result of them not knowing God, not standing up for the truth about God.

22) *Even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.*

23) *Thus saith the LORD, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:*

24) *But let him that glories glory in this, [what are we supposed to glory in—here it comes again] that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD [pretty simple request, but Judah refused] which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. (KJV)*

What is the condemnation here in this whole passage? It is that Judah refused to acknowledge God and know God for who He is. They refused to do that. They were saying, what difference does it make? We'll do what seems good to us, after all we have the Temple, we have the Priesthood, we have Abraham—we don't need anything. We'll just do what seems good to us and after all, isn't God with us? The Temple is stranding there, the priesthood is there, isn't God with us? Look at the results; captivity, slavery and death—think about that. After baptism, there should be no cost too high to pay—no cost too high. It makes a huge difference to deeply know the Father and His Son.

In conclusion now. I get up early in the morning, long before sunrise and one of the things I'm studying and I look out the window which faces to the east and I see a lot of sunrises over the year. I look at that glorious sunrise and think about God, who designed this and no two are the same. Impossible—too many variables—they are never the same, they are glorious. What's happening in the church today is like a glorious sunrise; it's a new day of understanding of just who God is. We read in the beginning, in John 17 that this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Knowing Who we pray to, really knowing Who we pray to, is eternal life. When we sing the songs during services and we read, knowing Who we are singing to, is a revelation. Knowing Who is being referred to in scripture when we read scripture is an eye opening, mind blowing experience. Once this revelation occurs, so many people have said, it's better than my first love. It is like a second conversion. I am so excited. I can't stand it I'm so excited. It is an encouraging thing to know that many before us have walked into an abyss and they have been blessed by God our Father. They have been taken care of by the Almighty, they have been provided for by the Almighty, even when walking into the dark unknown.

When we walk into an abyss, we are not alone. Many have gone before, many are alive today that have done that, but most importantly, when we walk into the abyss, God and His Son, Jehovah and His Son, are with us. They are taking us by the hand and leading us through this minefield called life and They will provide for us and They will bless us.

Let us remember, that before our time on earth is over, God is going to require us to walk into an abyss, possibly multiple times, to prove, as Abraham proved, who are we going to listen to, who are we going to put first and who are we going to obey? The joy of all this, we have to remember is that when we do, we come into the hands of the Almighty, the Most High God and He will provide for us and He will bless us. Why—because we are doing His will and we are pleasing to Him.