

God Is Serious

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The scriptures in any of the Bible translations utilized in this transcript contain capitalization of any words that refer to either God or Christ. We do this for the purpose of honoring Them.

As we become older you think about the end of your life more than you do when you're either middle-aged or teenagers, and we will do just about anything to keep alive in this physical life. We don't often consider, or not as often, consider the subject of spiritual death. Physical death we think about to one degree or another, but far less often we think about spiritual death. There are some, even in God's Church—I know a few people—who believe that one way or another God is going to save everybody because He is a God of love—because He loves His children He will find a way to save everybody and nobody will perish. I've had some conversations, not many, with a couple of families over the years, and the proof text they use for that belief we find over in 1 Timothy 2, and to get the context we're going to start in verse 3, but the verse they quote is verse 4.

1 Timothy 2:3 [Tells us] *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior;*

4) Who will have all men to be saved, and to come [into] the knowledge of the truth. [KJV]

If you take that scripture, the verse, the phrase, “Who will have all men to be saved” then they use that saying, “God is going to save everybody by hook or crook, one way or another circumstances come that would cause people to repent and believe in God and be obedient”. The Greek word for “will have” (I'm reading out of the King James Version, “Who will have”), is Strong's #2309 and its meaning is *desires*. God desires, but the New King James Version translates this verse, “Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”. So, when you understand it and you look at the meaning of the Greek and you check out other translations—but more importantly when you cover the subject scripturally, it all becomes clearer. The point is that while it is certainly God's desire that everybody is saved and whoever has been born would ultimately be in His Kingdom; there is far more to it than that. It is not up to God's desire, it is not that at all. He requires us to do certain things, in that sense, it is up to us. God wants—desires—but He has given us a role to play and if we don't fulfill that role before we're done today, we're going to see what the consequences are. He requires us to do certain things, and He is dead serious about us fulfilling our part in this project. When I say dead serious I'm not using those words idly. The title of the sermon is very short because I think sometimes we misinterpret God in some ways,

maybe misunderstand God, in some ways Jesus Christ, too. The title of the sermon is

God Is Serious

1: We must do and not try.

This is not a game. This is not a play to be played out that all is well that ends well for everybody in the end. It doesn't work that way as we are going to see. Let's find out today what God is serious about. The first thing He is serious about is that we and those who are called now, and those who will be called down the road—we must do and not try. That is an important concept: we must do and not try. Let's go to Romans 2:11 and see that God is a fair God and a God who doesn't play favorites. We have a part to play and it is up to us as to what we do or do not do.

Romans 2:11 [Notice what it says] *For there is no respect of persons with God.* (KJV)

God doesn't play favorites. In some cases, in a family of four or five kids, there is more often than not, a favorite kid. Maybe Mom has a favorite kid, Dad has a favorite kid and the other kids get left behind—God doesn't do that. Notice in verse 12:

12) *For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish* [the Greek word for "perish" means *to destroy, to be destroyed completely*, so all who have sinned without the law shall also perish] *without law: and as many have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;* (KJV)

Verse 13, I will read out of the NIV because it is a little clearer.

13) *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.* (NIVUK)

We see here a principle that no matter how God views an individual, He sees all of us as we really are. The point is that we have to obey the law if we are to be considered righteous. It is hard to get around that, hard to get around these verses. Leonardo da Vinci—I think everybody knows who he is—was a brilliant man talented in many, many fields; he was an engineer, a painter, and sculptor. He once said, "I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough—we must apply, meaning apply the knowledge that we have. Being willing is not enough—we must do". He did a lot in his life and he followed that. With that in mind let's go to Ephesians 5:1 and see some scriptures that tell us, we must do and not try but we must wind up doing.

Ephesians 5:1 [Paul is telling the Ephesian Church and us today by extension] *Be [you] therefore followers of God, as dear children;*
2) *And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.* (KJV)

- 3) *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as become the saints.*
- 4) *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.*
- 5) *For this know, that no whoremonger, no unclean person, no covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.*
- 6) *Let no man deceive you with vain words [the Greek means empty words, useless and of no value]: for because of these things cometh [notice] the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. (KJV)*

Those who have a pattern of disobedience—we all disobey but once we acknowledge that, once we see it—then we repent of it. But if we are a child of disobedience and follow disobedience—Satan is the author of all disobedience—if we are a child of Satan, and we dedicate ourselves not to God but to following our own flesh or following spiritual forces that are evil, then the wrath of God is going to come. No question!

Now let's go to James 1:21. We saw in Ephesians some things we ought not to be doing or practicing. Paul said if you do these things God's wrath will come upon you.

James 1:21 [James talks about both the negative side and the positive side] *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your lives. (NKJV)*

22) *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only [then he says] deceiving yourselves. [If we are hearers of the word and we don't do we deceive ourselves]*

23) *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;*

24) *for he observes himself [he sees his reflection in a mirror, he sees who he is], goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was [he forgets his sin, forgets hurting other people, setting a bad example].*

25) *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does [what he actually ends up doing].*

26) *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and doesn't bridle his tongue [...]*

There's a lot we can say about the tongue, we know about that. He claims to be religious and can't keep his mouth shut.

26 continued) [...] *but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*

27) *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

(NKJV)

In other words, not to allow the world to affect us—to be unspotted from the world. You could draw the analogy, certainly back in the horse and buggy days when sidewalks

were boardwalks and the roads were mud. It was common for a man escorting a woman to walk on the outside toward the street because of the mud and splatter, and all of that coming up would hose down the woman he was escorting. So, he blocked the way and his pant legs got spotted or her dress got spotted by [muddy dirt] in the street which came up and soiled the people walking on the sidewalk. That is a good analogy because the dirt on the street is the world of Satan, and it comes up and launches into us and it can stick to us if we allow it. That is what James is talking about. We have to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Now let's go to chapter 2:19.

James 2:19 *Thou believest that there is one God; thou do well: the devils also believe and tremble.*

20) *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

21) *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

22) *Seest thou how his faith wrought with his works, and by works was his faith made perfect? (KJV)*

Sometimes I don't think we appreciate what Abraham went through because it was a three-day journey. Can you imagine going for seventy-two hours knowing that at the end of seventy-two hours you were going to have to sacrifice your son? You were going to have to do it not with a rifle as it wasn't long distance. Nobody else did it—you had to take a knife and actually had to do it yourself. Can you imagine what went through his mind that whole trip. Can you imagine he probably didn't sleep a wink—I certainly couldn't. You would be in turmoil the whole time, pleading to God, asking God as Christ did, "let this cup pass from Me." yet God didn't respond. He didn't call it off during those three days, and then we know what happened. It came down to the actual doing of it, then God called it off and told him to stop. The fact is that his faith was made perfect by what he did and was willing to do. Going on in James 2:23.

23) *And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God.*

24) *You see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

25) *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way?*

26) *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (KJV)*

Works are a component of everything we do. We know out of the heart the mouth speaks, so out of our heart, we speak, and out of our beliefs and our minds, we take certain actions. God watches those actions. Now let's go to 1 John 3:7. I've said many times I like John's writing because he writes in very short sentences and very much to the point, and his writing is very clear.

1 John 3:7 *Little children* [John was old when he wrote this, and people of middle age and younger were probably like little children in his eyes], *let no man deceive*

*you: [and there were some who were attempting to deceive] he that doesth righteousness is righteous, even as He [God] is righteous.
8) He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested [made apparent and came to the earth], that He might destroy the works of the devil. (KJV)*

We see the great phrase, “he that does righteousness is righteous” is what we must do. Notice what Christ said in Matthew 25:31. In Matthew 25, He is talking about the time when He will come, and this time instead of coming in a human body He will come in Glory.

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His Glory:
32) And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
33) And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left.
34) Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, [you] blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
35) For I was an hungered, and [you] gave Me meat [food]: I was thirsty, and [you] gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and [you] took Me in:
36) [I was] Naked and [you] clothed Me; I was sick, and [you] visited Me: I was in prison, and [you] came to Me.*

Then the sheep on the right hand said to Christ:

*37) [...] Lord, when did we see You hungry or feed You, or thirsty and gave You drink?
38) When did we see You as a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothed You?
39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came unto you?*

And then the King—Christ—answered in verse 40:

*40) [...] [You] shall say unto them, truly I say unto you, Inasmuch as [you] have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, [you] have done it unto Me.
41) Then shall He say also unto to them on [His] left hand [symbolized by the goats] depart from Me, [you] cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. (KJV)*

Then He said:

*42) For I was hungered, and ye gave Me no meat [anything to eat]; I was thirsty, And gave Me no drink:
43) I was a stranger and you didn't take Me in, I was naked and you didn't buy any clothes for Me, and I was sick and in prison and you visited Me not.*

44) Then shall they also answer Him, saying Lord, [when did we see You hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison, and when did we not minister unto You?

They are debating the issue.

45) Then shall He answer them, saying, [truly] I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me.

Now notice the ending:

46) And these shall go away to everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (KJV)

Now we're getting a hint of what happens if we are not righteous if we don't keep God's Law. Some have deceived themselves into thinking, well, as long as I try, then God is going to wink at my failures. As long as my intentions are good, then when I slip and fall He will just wink at me and pat me on the head and say that's okay. God does that sometimes with us, in the sense, of it not being a pattern and we repent. He picks us up, dusts us off, and shows us the right way after we have repented—after we recognize and acknowledge what we've done and go to Him and repent. The point is that when we put these scriptures together (and we're getting close to the end of this first point), we must do and not try—at the end of the day, the fact is there is no try. We either do or we don't. I remember that Dorothy and I took our son to the first Star Wars movie and Yoda, the Jedi master, said something that I never forgot because it was scriptural. I think Luke Skywalker was whining about something and said he tried, but Yoda said, "try not". Do or do not but there is no try because at the end of the day there is no try—we either do or we don't. God is patiently waiting to see are they or aren't they. He's giving us time. Sometimes we don't—we fail and we repent, get up and God helps us to see our sins, but at some point, we have to conquer that and not do it anymore. God gives us decades sometimes to prove that to Him one way or another. My point here to close out number one is that God is serious about our doing works of righteousness every day—He is serious. God is serious when He says there is going to come a day when you are going to have to stand before Me and stand before Jesus Christ and give an account of what we thought, what we said and what we did. We're all held accountable. The point is you can't stand up that day and say, well, God, I tried. That does not cut it. We either do or we don't. Doing means up here ((pointing to the head)), what comes out of here ((pointing to the mouth)), and what we actually physically do. That is the first point.

2: The second point of what God is serious about is that we must completely obey God, emphasis on the word completely.

Let's go to Matthew 23 and look at verse 23. We know that in the whole chapter of Matthew 23 Christ is railing on the scribes and Pharisees, and He uses the word

hypocrite over and over and over. As we talked about before, the Greek word for hypocrite, if you were an actor in the time of Christ or the time of the Greek empire, was for the name of an actor. In other words, your profession was a hypocrite; that means an actor on a stage. What Christ is saying, and He is using that word very clearly, is that you Pharisees and Sadducees are actors on a stage—you are hypocrites. Let's look at verse 23 of Matthew 23.

Matthew 23:23 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites [you are acting out, you are real]! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin and [He says, but you] have omitted the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith. These ought you to have done and not left the undone. [KJV]*

He clearly says you have to obey in the big picture—we would say the trunk of the tree—but He also says that there are some tiny little details, mint, anise, and cummin that we need to pay attention to, that we can't ignore. We must completely obey God. Something as simple (and we've all caught ourselves doing it), as singing along with the hymns by second nature, but our mind is somewhere else. The men are thinking about golf the next day, or the ladies are thinking about maybe getting out in the garden, or whatever it is. I have caught myself singing praises with my mouth but my mind is not even in church. It is somewhere totally different. When we talk about the mint, anise, and cummin; this is one of those items. I don't want to stand before God saying I was thinking about the NFL game on Sunday, rather than singing praises to You and thinking about the words as I was singing them. I don't want to have to answer to that. That's an area where I have doubled down on because of knowing who God is and knowing who Christ is—by singing along it adds new meaning. The point is we have to give account for everything we do. Let's look at complete obedience from the standpoint of the heart. Let's go to Matthew 5. We know Christ in His very first sermon added a spiritual dimension of the law. When you add a spiritual dimension of the law by necessity you add a mental dimension of the law. It's not like counting out a bunch of leaves, it is what is going on between your ears at all times. Matthew 5:20, Christ is speaking—reading out of the New Living Translation. Christ is speaking strong words.

Matthew 5:20 *But I warn you [Christ is saying]—unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of heaven [God] at all. [strong, strong words]*
21) *You have heard that the law of Moses says do not murder [If you commit murder you are subject to judgment. Now Christ adds the spiritual dimension.]. But I say if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment. If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council [If you curse someone you are in danger of the fires of hell]. (NLT)*

God knows what is in our heart. God knows what motivates our actions and our words and our deeds. Let's go to Psalm 44 and look at verse 21. It's a good that God knows our hearts because sometimes we can accuse other people of certain things and assume we know what is in their heart when we don't have a clue.

Psalm 44:21 *Shall not God search this out? for He knows the secrets of the heart [of every human being who has ever lived or will ever live—He knows what is in our heart]. (KJV)*

Some people, like the Pharisees, can stand on a corner and toot the horn and throw the alms in a jug and do something outwardly righteous, but in their heart, if they are doing it to have praise of men—God knows. God knowing the heart also knows the motivation. Christ is telling us that we have to have a change of heart, which means a change in the mind and a change in the spirit. That affects the words that we say and the deeds that we do. That is what we read earlier—righteousness. He who does righteousness is righteous. So, completely obeying God includes what is in our heart and what is in our mind. What I mean by that is when I first came into the church back in the mid-sixties, the motivation was to save my skin. Everything I was reading—the Basil Wolverton drawings and the books and the Plain Truth which had a mushroom cloud going off on the front cover—I was in the Air Force at the time and I knew full well the effects of nuclear weapons and what they would do. My motivation in a large part was I don't want to go through this. I want to save my skin. I don't want to suffer any of this, and the tribulation, and the German invasion, and the tanks and the piles of skulls and everything that was a part and parcel of that. The question God asks in completely obeying Him—do I obey God because I must. In other words, I must obey God if I want to have eternal life. I must obey God if I want to avoid the tribulation. I must obey God to save myself from the horrors to come. It is like we obey but we have this gun at our heads from God because He is saying if you don't obey Me, I will pull the trigger. Then you are done. Or, do we obey, and this is where we want to get over time—it took me three decades to get there—do we obey because we want to, not because we must but because we want to. We want to please God. We want to make God happy with us. As the Old Testament talks about, we want to make His face to shine upon us. Do we obey because we don't want the trigger to be pulled or do we obey because we love Him so much that we want to be like Him? Do we love Christ so much for what He did for us, and the way He walked the earth and the example He set that we want to be like Him? Do we obey because we want to save ourselves, or do we obey because we love God with all of our beings? Closing out point number two: God is serious—very serious about our complete obedience which includes our heart and our mind as well as our words and our deeds. The third point we want to make is something God is very serious about, especially as we are closer to the end time.

3. God wants us to grow in understanding and knowing Him and Jesus Christ.

He wants us to know more about Him and Christ, to understand Him and Jesus Christ. He wants us to do that—the scriptures are very clear. When you think about it if you love God with all your heart, why would we not want to if God is everything to us, and Christ is everything and His sacrifice. Why would we not want to know more about Them, so we could be like Them? Why not? Let's go to Jeremiah 9 and look at verse 23. God expresses His desire in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

We'll read two out of the old and two out of the new under the third point, growing in the understanding of God and the knowledge of God and Christ.

Jeremiah 9:23 *Thus says 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 [yes, that's all just selfish vanity and pride].*

24) But let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me [two things—understand and know], that I am the LORD which exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteous in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the LORD. (KJV)

In other words, God is saying very clearly the thing I delight in is knowing Me and understanding Me. Now if we were God, or if you were a physical father, wouldn't you want your kids to know about you. Wouldn't you want your kids to understand you. My dad grew up on a ranch in New Mexico, and I took great delight from the time I was about three years old. My mom and dad told me I had to have cowboy boots, a cowboy hat and a six-shooter around my waist—and I pretended to be a cowboy. I had one of those stick horses, and I galloped all over the neighborhood killing all the bandits and all of that—part of it was because my dad grew up on a ranch. He was an old cowboy. I took great delight in sitting at his knee and having him tell me stories about what went on at the ranch. The bad guys, the sheriff, the Indians, the good guys; I wanted to know all about it—take that—and God calls us, and Christ died for us, and we're just going to sit there—no leave me alone, I don't need to know anything about you; I don't want to know any more about you. Does it seem logical that God would want that? My dad took great delight in telling the stories and watching our eyes get big and we would act out in the living room. You could tell he enjoyed it because we wanted to know more about him. The same thing for my mom, too—I'm not leaving my mom out. The point is that we are told in Jeremiah 9 that this is what God delights in, that He wants a group of people to know Him better and understand Him better. What's wrong with that. Let's go to Hosea 6:6. This is a time of offerings being made at the temple. The people looked at those offerings as very important, very valuable and also their relationship with the God that they worshipped.

Hosea 6:6 [God is speaking] *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice [I'd rather you showed mercy than to kill a lamb, and He says]; and [I desire] the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (KJV)*

I'm just hitting two in the Old Testament; there are many others. Now to the New Testament, Christ's own words, John 17:3. Christ follows and emphasizes and acknowledged that this is important to both Him and His Father.

John 17:3 [Christ Himself speaking, and He says, in fact He prefaces this with you want to know what life eternal is, or what gets you to have life eternal] *And this is life eternal, that they might know You, [Christ is saying] the only true God, and Jesus Christ, [two Beings, the Holy Spirit isn't there, this would be a perfect*

time to put the Holy Spirit in there if there is a Trinity, wouldn't it? But He says, you might know of the only true God] *and Jesus Christ, Whom You, God the Father, have sent* [He is referring to Himself].

4) I have glorified You on the earth, [and even more so by His death] I have finished the work which You gave Me to do. (KJV)

Now let me read verse three out of the NLT.

John 17:3 *And this is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, the One You sent to earth. (NLT)*

That is serious. He says you want eternal life. I want you to know Me, the only true God, and I want you to know My Son, Jesus Christ. I want you to know both of Us. That should be a mission statement for us. Then the fourth verse, the second New Testament verse, is 2 Peter 3:18. We know that by heart. We have quoted that many times, and if you read this verse for what it says, this is something that never ends. As humans, we can't begin to know everything there is to know about spirit, or about God.

2 Peter 3:18 *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [...] (KJV)*

The knowledge—the way we do that is not by studying metaphysics, not by going to Greek scholars, not by attending a seminary somewhere where you take philosophy courses. That is the mistake that I think Dr. Stavronides made in 1994 -1996 era, even a little before when the World Wide Church of God blew apart. He was trying to describe the nature of God in physical terms. That is impossible, you can't do that. We can't even comprehend it, we don't even know much about it. What we want to do is growing in grace and knowledge. We're not studying the nature of God, or the nature of Christ, in the sense, of trying to understand the spirit and how spirit works because we won't know until we become spirit. What we are studying is the knowledge of God and Christ in the record of scripture. Scripture is a record of God and Christ, that is all it is, a record of God and Christ. What They did, what They said, how They inter-related with mankind, how They inter-relate to each other. That is the record of scripture. When we grow in the knowledge of the Father and the Son, we are investigating the record of scripture and trying to learn as much as we possibly can—that's all, no more, no less. You think God might want us to do that. I think so. All I'm saying in this third point is that if we love God with all our heart, with all our being, with all our might, with all our mind, if we do that shouldn't we want to know Them better. Shouldn't we want to study about Them? Well, of course, and yet we get flack sometimes for that. My point in closing out number three is that God is serious, He is deadly serious about our coming to a greater knowledge of Him and of Jesus Christ. He is deadly serious about that. Why is He serious about that? So, we can brag about our knowledge? Is that the goal that we have all this knowledge about the activities and the roles of God and Christ, and all the titles and all of that? Is the goal so we can strut around and brag to people? No, of course not! The goal is rather that by studying and knowing more about God and

Christ we can worship Them more fully because we know Them better. We can obey Them more fully because we know Them better. We know Their minds, we know how They think and how They act by studying the record of scripture. That is a good thing, a very, very good thing.

Last point, number four. This was a quote given to me. I'm quoting a minister who is still alive and a very good friend of mine, going back to when Dorothy and I were in the Boston church in the late '60s. I asked him a question about this whole thing that I started out in the beginning—did he think God was going to save everybody. I was new in the church, and he looked me right in the eye, and I'll never forget it. He said not everyone would make the Kingdom of God. That is the fourth and last point.

4: Not everyone will make the Kingdom of God.

I've never forgotten—it just burned into my brain because it is true. Let's go to Matthew 7:12 and I'm going to read it out of the New King James. Christ says, for people to say that everybody is going to be saved by hook or crook, they would have to ignore a whole body of scripture and a mountain of evidence to the contrary. Matthew 7:12.

12) Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the Prophets. (NKJV)

He goes on to say:

13) [Christ says] Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it [many].

14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way [it is narrow and well defined, but it is also difficult] which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)

I don't know what few means in God's mind; I don't think any of us do. But it is a scary thought when Christ says, "there are few". You could say He was talking about the fact that when He walked the earth not everybody was called, and most of the people were blinded, therefore, few find it. You could do that if you want to diminish what Christ said and you wanted to make it easier for us and make us feel better about ourselves. But I tend to take this seriously, in the sense, at the end of the day when it's all over, there may be few who are in the Kingdom of God. I'm not pretending to know what few means—I have no idea; I do not have a clue. The point is not everybody is going to be there—that is obvious.

15) Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16) You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

- 17) *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.*
18) *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit. Nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.*
19) *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire [an obvious analogy to the lake of fire].*
20) *Therefore [you don't want to be thrown into the fire] by their fruits you will know them. (NKJV)*

In other words, you can know a false prophet—that is the immediate context here—“therefore by their fruits you will know them”. Notice verse 21.

21) *Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven [God], but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (NKJV)*

That is the qualifier—who does the will of His Father who lives in heaven, lives between the Cherubim.

- 22) *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, we cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? [You would think that would be a qualifier to get you in the kingdom, doing all that]*
23) [notice the answer] *And then I will declare unto them, I never knew you; [I don't know who you are, I don't recognize you] (NKJV)*

In part because what is mentioned here—casting out demons, prophesying all these wonderful works—but what was between the ears while they were doing it. Was it to aggrandize the self, was it to please an administration or group of men, or whatever it might be. Or did they do it because they love God with all their hearts and with all their minds.

He says, “I never knew you”.

23 continued) [...] *depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*

That is a scary scripture to me. We can't practice lawlessness. God does not wink at our sins. Now let's go to Matthew 25:1 and if you have a marker place it there because we are going to read a little bit and then go to another scripture and come right back.

Matthew 25:1 [very familiar account, very familiar parable to all of us] *Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*
2) *Five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

Let's stop here and look at the Greek word for “wise”. It is Strong's #5429 and it means *thoughtful*, implying a cautious character. That means they were careful in their conduct. They thought before they spoke. They thought before they did

something. They were very cautious, very careful; wise in that regard. Now the Greek word for “foolish” is Strong’s #3474. It is a word we’re familiar with in English—the Greek word “morose” from which we get our English word moron. Strong’s #3474 says, *dull or stupid; that which is heedless*. We would say today the foolish shoot themselves in the foot all the time. They are the ones who say ready, fire, aim, instead of ready, aim, fire. They go headlong into something where angels fear to tread and they don’t think. Zodhiates in his Complete Word Study Dictionary, The New Testament says, “Use of persons meaning morally worthless.” He quotes Matthew 5:22, so keep your finger here. Let’s jump back to Matthew 5:22. We read it earlier and I’m going to read it out of the King James this time.

Matthew 5:22 [Christ said] *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [in the NLT we read earlier they translated it idiot], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.* (KJV)

Now let’s continue in Zodhiates. He is talking about Matthew 5:22 and says, “it is a more serious reproach than Raca, which scorns a man by calling him stupid”. The NLT said idiot—whereas, morose scorns him concerning his heart and his character. We see here that the wise have a wise heart and a wise character. The foolish have a heart that is lacking in character, lacking in the ability to do right according to God. Let’s go back now to Matthew 25:3.

Matthew 25:3 *They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:*
4) *But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps [and we know oil is a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit].*
5) *And while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept [and we’ve all been guilty of that at times in our Christian life. We have slumbered and we have slept].*
6) *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.*
7) *Then all the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.*
8) *And the foolish said to the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone [going out].*
9) *The wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there not be enough for us and you: but go rather to those that sell, and buy for yourselves.*
10) *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.* (KJV)

The wise, you see, were ready. They were ready to go, ready for Christ to return. They had prepared themselves, they had exercised God’s Holy Spirit. They had a full measure of God’s Holy Spirit. But while the foolish belatedly went out to buy, guess what, Christ came. I don’t think it is an accident that Christ is portraying it this way.

There are going to be some who think belatedly, oh, if I had only studied more, or I should have prayed more, or I should have served more or whatever it might be. We're told that is going to happen.

11) Afterward came also the other virgins, saying Lord, Lord, open unto us.

12) But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. [I don't recognize you; not familiar to Me. Why? Because of their character and track record. Why would I marry someone I don't recognize? Why would I marry someone who is not like Me? Why would I marry someone who does not have the same values I have? That is all true in a physical marriage; how much more than in an eternal permanent marriage.]

13) Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day or the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. (KJV)

If this analogy is true we go back to the fifty percent thing again. I can remember Mr. Armstrong pounding on his desk, looking out at the ministry saying, "I don't think half of you are converted". Then in Pasadena on the stage he would say the same thing, "I don't think half of you out there are converted". If you look at the numbers at the breakup of World Wide, over half left, never to be heard from again. Someone told me about attending an Ambassador College reunion and the number of people in his class who were there was only twenty to twenty-five percent. The other seventy-five to eighty percent had nothing to do with the church. That in itself is a scary statistic. A minister of one of the larger groups has stated that his biggest worry about the group he belonged to was that they were doing a very good job of putting the brethren to sleep. A very good job of that. The fact is that there could be far fewer than fifty percent left after all of this is over. Let's go to Luke 14:25. This is a scripture that we read when we are counseling someone for baptism, and I hope for everyone here and out there that it was read and emphasized when you were baptized. Sometimes on those great baptizing tours when they were baptizing fifty to one hundred at a time, it wasn't emphasized enough. Luke 14:25, I will read this out of the New Living Translation.

Luke 14:25 *A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them,*

26) If you want to be My disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple. [again, that is very scary]

27) And if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple. (NLT).

I pointed out last time, the Greek word for "cross" means either *a pole or a cross* which is an instrument of capital punishment. But it also means in a figurative way—Strong's says, *exposure to death*. You have to be willing to expose yourself to death, in order, to follow Me—ridicule, persecution, death, whatever comes. We went over the last time the track record of the apostles, and how it did not end well for them or the prophets; it didn't end well. This is all in the context of counting the cost.

- 28) *But don't begin [He's saying] until you count the cost. [then He draws an analogy] For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?*
- 29) *Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you.*
- 30) *They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it [ran out of money before it was finished]!'*
- 31) *[He draws another analogy] Or what king would go against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat [strong enough] the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching against him?*
- 32) *And if he can't [is not able, by counting the cost he decides he is not able, then] he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away.*
- 33) *[Now He brings it back home to Himself] So you cannot become My disciple without giving up everything you own [for Me].*
- 34) *Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again?*
- 35) *Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for the manure pile [fertilizer]. It is thrown away [anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand—to either be useful or to be thrown away]. (NLT)*

We have to be willing to give up everything to follow God and to follow Christ. He is serious when He tells us we must be willing to give up everything. It is also very clear by the scriptures we have read that not everybody is going to make it into God's Kingdom. That is a fact.

Let's conclude:

One of my great fears for God's people (and for me, too), is that we would deceive ourselves. We would deceive ourselves into thinking that God has so much love for us, and Christ has so much love for us, that He wants us all to be saved—1 Timothy 2:4, that we read in the beginning—therefore, He understands my weaknesses and He understands that I get distracted and He understands that I haven't studied as I should, or haven't prayed as I should, and He understands I've been selfish all my life. He understands that I haven't been the best father or mother that I should have been, and on and on and on. God understands because He really loves me and wants me in His Kingdom. That is a deception because over a person's life we have to demonstrate that we will overcome our weaknesses, our faults, our sins, our shortcomings. God gives us—given me, thankfully, over fifty years, year by year, decade by decade—to try to demonstrate to Him that we will put Him first regardless of what people say, regardless of what pressures come to bear, that we will put God first. No other gods before Me.

Notice two scriptures—notice these very serious truths about whether or not everyone is going to be saved. Peter tells us a reality, and the reality is there because we're human. We're not spirit—yes, we have God's Spirit living in us, and we can exercise it if we choose to do so—but notice 1 Peter 4:18.

1 Peter 4:18 *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? (KJV)*

Now the Greek word for “scarcely” means *with difficulty, with much work*. We will be saved with much difficulty, meaning persecution, opposition, our slipping and falling and then repenting. Skinning our knees again and repenting, and then skinning our knees again and getting up again and keeping at it. Great difficulty and much work over a long period of time. He is telling us that just to be saved by the skin of our teeth, as we would say, is going to take a lot of work. We have to work with great difficulty. It won't be an easy path into God's Kingdom. As I said, when I first came to the church, the idea was that all God's people had this greased skid. All we had to do was just jump on it and down we go, all nice and smooth to the Kingdom of God because we're a part of the World Wide Church of God, and we go to the Feast, and we tithe, and we do all these other things, therefore, life is going to be good. Well, we all found out that is not true. With much tribulation, we enter into God's Kingdom, and we will scarcely be saved with much work and much difficulty.

Last scripture—let's go to Luke 19:27. Christ Himself is speaking, and for those who think that everyone is going to make it, they will have to ignore this scripture.

Luke 19:27 [Christ says He has enemies] *But those My enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither [them here] and slay them before Me. (KJV)*

Now how can you get around that? He says there is going to be a group of people—we don't know how many, it could be millions or billions, we just don't know—but there are going to be some people, and He implied that even the Pharisees who knew who He was and rejected Him—if you read the scriptures carefully some of those have already lost their eternal life. They knew who He was and they rejected Him. He said those who reject Me and reject My Father and reject Our sayings, reject Our Commandments, those people are going to be dragged before Me and I am going to watch them die. That is very serious stuff. He will not cast them out somewhere or put them in the wilderness and let them starve to death or die of thirst, and they go out of His sight. Christ is not saying that. He is saying I want to watch them die because they are My enemies and they won't allow Me to rule over them. They have other priorities. They have other desires and wishes. Their god is something other than God and Christ. It is something else, whatever that might be.

The message in these two scriptures is that we must, while there is still time, get serious about overcoming our sins and our human nature. We have to get serious about

knowing God and knowing Christ better, establishing a closer personal relationship with Them. We have to be as serious about that as God is serious. Look at all of these scriptures, twenty-one scriptures we've read today. God is serious, deadly serious, about our part in obtaining salvation. We don't work our way in, but God wants to know our heart. He wants to know what is going on in our head and what is our motivation. Therefore, what comes out of our mouth and what our deeds actually are is reflective of what is in our heart. He wants to know are you going to exercise My Holy Spirit, or are you going to give in to Satan and your human nature. I'm going to give you—we don't know the number, 50 years, 60 years, 10 years—I'm going to give you a certain amount of time to show Me one way or another. God is telling us I am serious about this. The lesson for us is to realize how serious God is about it. Then we need to be as serious as God is about obtaining salvation and doing our part in showing God that we love Him with all our heart, and we are going to put Him first in our lives.