

Why Are We Called Now? Feast of Tabernacles

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I have two questions. Why are we here? Why are we called? Actually, the title of my sermon is Why Are We Called Now? There is a reason for that. We could be sitting somewhere else. Why aren't we down in the Spokane Opera House? Why aren't we out here running up and down the freeways at 75, 85, 90 miles an hour? That's just the trucks. In those two questions is the answer to that. I'm going to try to answer that during the sermon. At the end of the answer to those questions, I'm going to tie that in with what it has to do with the Feast, because the Feast has everything to do with why we are called, why we are here now.

At my age I have to think a lot about death. That's a real possibility. Being an old golfer, in golf terms I'm definitely on the back nine. I can explain that later to someone who doesn't understand that. I am sort of a history buff. In high school and college there is really no interest in history. For some reason, as we get older there is an interest in history. Maybe that's because we're becoming part of it. I'm not sure. The aftermath of war gets to me sometimes. I think of the large military cemeteries, like Arlington, on the beaches of France and many places in the world, not only United States soldiers but many, many other soldiers. It just brings tears to my eyes when I see that. I stumbled across a movie when I was thumbing through the channels and stumbled across a movie. It was an HBO movie and the ratings said it was for general audiences, no bad language, no violence, no sex. What intrigued me was the title of it. Some of you may have seen this movie. The title of it was Taking Chance. I thought, what's wrong with the grammar there. Don't you mean taking a chance? It was a story about a young marine that was killed in Iraq and his name was Chance Phelps, based on a true story. It was a very touching story, a very moving story. It was about the marine officer that escorted his casket home. He finally took it to his family. If anyone can watch that dry-eyed, they are a lot tougher person than I am. It was a very moving thing, but it just spoke to me of the tragedy, of the waste of lives that we see in the world today. People suffer. People die.

We just buried an individual, one of the members in the Moses Lake area. We had the opportunity to go say goodbye. I leaned down and I just said, "goodbye old friend" and he died that night. We've done this so many times. We've held people's hands in hospitals that have been dying. I remember an elderly lady in our town at one time. We used to give her a ride to services all of the time. I got a phone call one day and she said she had been kidnapped and she was whispering. I could hear people in the background. Finally, I kind of figured out what was going on and I asked if I could I talk to one of her kidnapers. It was actually a nurse. She had been taken to the hospital. She was completely out of it. It made us feel very bad. I'd go up to the hospital and see her. She became almost comatose at one time. I would sit there and hold her hand. When I tried to leave, she would grab my hand, so I would just sit there. She never left

the hospital. I think we've all had those kinds of experiences. We have done that with our friends, watched their suffering. As God's people, we know their suffering is over. They're waiting on the resurrection. Everyone is going to die, even in the world. It's just a matter of time, but they're going to be resurrected. We'll picture that in the last day of the feast.

If you would, please turn to Ecclesiastes 7. We go to funerals. We go to memorials. We go to services. I did my father's funeral service. There was no one else to do it. Almost all of his friends were gone. He had no religious affiliation. He didn't have a minister, anyone to do it, so I did it for him. That's really hard to do when you do it for one of your parents. Anyhow, in Ecclesiastes 7:1, using the New Living Translation paraphrase:

Ecclesiastes 7:1. A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume and the day you die is better than the day you were born. (NLT)

Of course, that means in a sense.

2) Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies, so the living should take this to heart. (NLT)

In other words, a funeral, a memorial service or something like that forces us to face our own mortality.

3) Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. (NLT)

That should inspire some introspection in our lives and it does. It makes us think about things. Especially as we get a little bit older, we can take a look at our path. Hopefully, we don't have a whole backfill of regrets.

4) A wise person thinks a lot about death, while the fool thinks only about having a good time. (NLT)

That reminds me of 2 Timothy 3, where it talks about people being lovers of pleasure more than they are lovers of God. That's what people do. They never think that they may die. We are called. We understand the process of the physical life, the death, the resurrection and all of that. Then I read obituaries. We have been in our area for many, many years. I have worked with many people through the years. I retired from a corporation that had 1800 people. I'll be reading the paper and I'll see someone there that I know. I have to ask myself the question, did they have any influence on me at all? The big question is, did I have any on them? I have to think about that. It should make us all think, could we have done more to help people in this life, especially as we get older and we look back. As we go along in our prayer, Bible study and meditation, all of that, as we function in our jobs, do we just carry on our lives? We don't often think why God called some of us now. What could we do to help people, grieving people, people that we interact with, no matter what the situation is?

In a larger sense in some ways we can think, “What can we do as an individual for a dying world?” Then we think about how insignificant we are as individuals. We think, “I’m just a tiny little speck in the universe. What can I do in those situations to help and to comfort people?” In Psalm 8 David felt the same way.

Psalms 8:1. O LORD, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.

2) You have taught children and nursing infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose.

3) When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers — the moon ... (NLT)

It was full the other day. We were doing a countdown until the feast. I was counting the moon, two full moons until the feast.

3b) ... and the stars you have set in place —

4) what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?

5) Yet you made them only a little lower than God ... (NLT)

The King James Version has a mistranslation here. It says angels, although the word is Elohim, which means God or Gods.

5b) ... and crowned them with glory and honor.

6) You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority —

7) the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals,

8) the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. (NLT)

It tells us all of that in the Genesis record.

9) O LORD, our Lord, Your majesty name fills the earth! (NLT)

We have to see there David’s plaintive cry. In all the vastness of the universe what’s the reason for man? Carl Sagan, the famous astronomer, scientist, writer, asked a question. “Are we just a speck of sand on the shore of this cosmic ocean?” He further likened us to a “granular element.” He said we are like a luminescence that just flickers for a moment in this vast universe and then we are gone. What’s the reason for that? Of course, he didn’t know, as far as I know. We might be able to help a few people, touch a few people now, but can it really do much to help very many people? We have to think about that. Can I make a difference at all in the grand scheme of things? That is what David wondered.

It comes down again to the question, why were we called? Our religion is not just supposed to be a routine practice – keeping the Sabbath, keeping the holy days, paying

tithes, not eating pork, doing all of that stuff. It's supposed to be something very real, something that does make a difference in the people's lives that we touch, each and every one of us every day, and we do in some way. Some people make the mistake, I think, of isolating themselves. God doesn't intend for us to do that, not purposely anyway.

So, the reality of death and the state of the world should help us focus on why we are called and what the ultimate future of mankind is going to be. Again, I ask the question: What are we doing here now? Why were we called now? There are more than two answers to these two questions. I am going to concentrate on a couple of them. Why did God call some people, any people right now? Why didn't He just call everybody? Why did God do that? Let's review a few familiar scriptures. Turn to Matthew 7:13. It begins to indicate why God called only a few people now.

Matthew 7:13. 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.

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

It's kind of an idea there, if you think about it; a narrow gate, a restriction. There is a focus there. We'll get to that a little bit later. In Luke's record, just as a reference in Luke 13:23-24, the disciples asked him, why are there only a few saved? Then Christ said:

Luke 13:24. Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (NKJV)

God did a very special calling. We know also in Matthew 13:10-11, when he gave a parable, the disciples asked him, why are you talking to them in parables? Christ told them. It was a very simple answer, but it had a great deal of meaning.

Matthew 13:11. He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." (NKJV)

It's just not given to the whole world, not then, not now. Interestingly enough, that's preceded by the parable of the sower.

If we take those words literally from Christ, it's saying somehow, some way only a few people are finding life and the rest of mankind is going to find destruction. As a church, as a body of God's people, we don't believe that there is only one calling, one day of salvation. If we did believe that, we could only conclude that only a few are going to be saved out of the entirety of humanity, past, present future. Only a few are given that knowledge, that understanding. We can be thankful for it. We know about the resurrections. We know that some will face the first death. Later on we learn about a second death. That's obviously going to become the most critical, because some will face the lake of fire. We know also in those passages that Christ is talking to His

disciples, but He expected those words to be brought down to us, all of the way down through history, down to His return actually.

He is just emphasizing and saying that there are only going to be a few called now to the truth. By that he is saying only a few people are going to go through life living God's truth, living God's way. Another thing we can't forget in all of this is we have that wonderful knowledge of the great White Throne Judgment. All of the masses are going to have access to God in the future. We believe those words here that Christ spoke are very true. Only a few are called now. We've been given that invitation to travel that narrow way at this point in time.

We know that someday that narrow way is going to be opened to all mankind. Mankind is going to have great access during the Millennium; great opportunity for everyone. We're picturing that here. That's one reason we are here today. We are here at the feast to rehearse, to verify and to picture these things in our mind. I am just thinking about recently attending a graveside service. It was a nice setting with sunshine. The sandhill cranes were circling in the air, doing that funny chirp that they do. There was a very large, extended family sitting there; children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. They were all honoring their dad, their grandfather, their great grandfather. I looked at those people and thought, those people are very sincere, very nice people, but they need help and I can't help them much today. I really admire people who are good at being able to go up to people and give them comfort, help grieving people. I'm just not very good at that. Obviously, we are all called from different walks of life. We're all products of different environments, being raised differently.

I can't recall much sympathy in my life, so it's difficult for me to extend that to someone else. At least I recognize I have a problem. I think about the way I grew up. I was raised in a thirty-foot trailer. My father was a construction carpenter. He'd go from job to job to job. We finally wound up in southeast Washington at the Hanford Project. You know, those old trailers looked like a loaf of bread. They were made with plywood and it had to be a metal frame for the tongue and all of that. I think they just slathered them with tar, let that dry and then spray painted them silver and had a couple of little windows in them. That's the way I grew up. From there I left high school and went into the military. You can trust me on this that the military really isn't into sympathy. I didn't learn any there at all. I served almost five years in the navy on destroyers. I remember one time we offloaded in the middle of the night, pitch black night, black sea. We offloaded a seal team on an island. These guys were camouflaged up. They were all dressed in black. They took off in their zodiacs and we turned and went the other way. I can guarantee those guys weren't getting any sympathy. They had a pretty hard life.

After the military I enrolled in a community college. I needed a career. I always thought everything was easier for everyone else. They got the sympathy. They got theatta boys. I hardly ever did. I carried a 3.72 GPA and one semester I made the dean's list with a 4.0. The only reason I am saying that is because that was really hard work for me. I had to really knuckle down. I didn't get any special help from teachers or any

sympathy. I just had to do what I had to do. That's just kind of a digression. I recognize I have a problem and I do what I can.

It's comforting to me, thinking about those people. They're very sincere. They're hurting, but they don't understand God's truth, way of life and what the ultimate future of mankind is going to be. We can be so thankful that we do each and every day. Still, you can't help but think, what can I do? How can I help them right now? Can I really make a difference in any of these situations? Again, it all boils down to why we are called, this calling we've been given.

All of the scriptures that we mention and go to during the feast have a present and a future meaning. Turn to 1 Peter 1. I think Peter is always appropriate at the feast. It is an epistle based on hope and obedience to God's truth. Interesting enough, in the very first chapter he is speaking to scattered brethren, scattered churches.

1 Peter 1:24. ... *All flesh is as grass ... (NKJV)*

Everything physical passes away. As human beings we die.

25) *But the word of the LORD endures forever. ... (NKJV)*

It never changes, never waivers. Whatever word we have now, whatever truth we have now from God is going to carry on into the future. It's going to be exactly the same. Then he goes on in verse 25. Actually, the first sentence is quoting Isaiah 40:8. If you go back and look at Isaiah 39, it talks about the really hard times the Israelites have and then in chapter 40 it talks about the comfort and even mentions the return of Christ. In that context we go to 1 Peter 2. Again, I will use the New Living Translation. Just for the record, I have a few problems with the New Living Translation. As with any paraphrase, you have to be careful with them. As long as it doesn't change the meaning and the intent, it kind of helps with the modern language.

1 Peter 2:1. *So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy ... (NLT)*

Do you remember the disciples asking who is the greatest? This is Peter.

1b) ... *and all unkind speech.*

2) *Like newborn babies you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. ... (NLT)*

Does that have anything to do with our calling? It certainly does.

2b) ... *Cry out for this nourishment. (NLT)*

I always think of two individuals when I think of Peter, the pre-conversion and the post-conversion Peter. They are entirely two different people. He is talking about a full experience of salvation here. I think all of Peter's experience came the hard way, especially his death.

3) now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness. (NLT)

He very kindly called each and every one of us. Remember back in 1 Peter 1:14 he talks about our former conduct. In verse 15 he says,

1 Peter 1:15. *but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (NKJV)*

We are called to that. We are called to God's truth, to change the way we live and to live differently. Turn to 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2:4. *You are coming to Christ who is the living cornerstone of God's temple, He was rejected by people ... (NLT)*

He still is, except by the few. People try to believe in a Christ. Historically, the Israelites, the Jews rejected Him and the world rejects Him in general now.

*4b) ... but he was chosen by God for great honor,
5) and you, are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more you are holy priests ... (NLT)*

That is, we are going to be. He is building this quality in us now. That's what Peter is talking about. You know, we used to think this life was a training ground. Remember all of those sermons? We are being trained for God's kingdom right now. I have come to the point where I don't really believe that any more. I think this life for you and me is a proving ground. When you look back at the example of Abraham, when God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and he went through all of that, what did God say when He got all done? Now I know you. That wasn't a training exercise. His faith was proved by his obedience. I think it's the same for us.

5b) ... Through mediation of Jesus Christ you offer spiritual sacrifice. (NLT)

Look at Romans 12:1. A living sacrifice is what we are. That's what we have been called to be. Continue in 1 Peter 2.

6) Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture ... (NLT)

He is quoting Isaiah 28:16 here.

6b) "I am placing a cornerstone ... (NLT)

Again, that's the foundation. Jesus Christ is that cornerstone. He's that foundation. Everything is built off of the cornerstone of a large structure.

6 continued) ... in Jerusalem chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced. (NLT)

If we live by this world's standards, the way we used to conduct our lives, it's a disgrace in God's eyes.

7) Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone," (NLT)

In spite of anyone that rejects it.

8) And "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that will make them fall." They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. (NLT)

Actually, that's a consequence, rejecting God.

9) But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priest, a holy nation, God's very own possession. ... (NLT)

He owns us. We agree to that.

9b) ... As a result you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of darkness ... (NLT)

It's Satan's world; very definitely in darkness. It's getting darker all of the time.

9 continued) ... into his wonderful light. (NLT)

The gist of what he's saying here is that God's people should be different. We should be setting a different example. We should be living by a different standard. We'll talk a little bit more about that later on.

10) Once you had no identity as a people ... (NLT)

You were just part of the world. You didn't have any distinction before you were called.

10b) ... now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy. (NLT)

Boy, are we thankful for that. I am thankful for that every day.

11) Dear friends, I warn you as temporary residents and foreigners to keep away from worldly desires that war against your souls. (NLT)

I think of Ephesians 6 when I read that, God's armor, because we are in a battle every day. We are in a battle here, but what helps us is God's power. I can always feel the collective amount of God's holy spirit at a feast site.

12) Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior ... (NLT)

Where did we learn that behavior? We learned it from God. We were called into that. We are following Jesus Christ. It's going to tell us that.

12b) ... and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world. (NLT)

At some point in the future, in the Millennium, people are going to see that. They are going to see why you are different when they begin to realize that, to really see that.

13) For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority, whether the king as head of state, (NLT)

There's a spiritual challenge for you. Someone was asking me the other day about my military service and I said, yes when you get out, unless you are a really bad boy, or girl now, they have to give you the reenlistment spiel. They offered me a cash bonus. They offered me raise in rank with a promise of another raise if I raised my hand and signed up for another six years or whatever it was. I didn't want to re-enlist. My big problem was I couldn't handle the authority. I got tired of obeying orders. Now I want to obey the orders from the right source.

14) or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right.

15) It is God's will that your honorable life should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. (NLT)

Notice, it doesn't say silence with your mouth, rather by your Christian example, your conduct.

16) You are free, yet you are God's slaves. ... (NLT)

We are bought with a price.

16b) ... So, don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. ... (NLT)

He is addressing real slaves here. But we have the scripture in John 8:32, which says the truth will make you free, free of the shackles of Satan's world, which we're

functioning under, freedom from that huge lie that the world's okay. Well, it isn't okay. Hardly anything the world does, and it's getting worse and worse, isn't okay. You try to tell your kids that and they look at you kind of funny, because they're taught that everything is okay. It's not okay.

17) Respect for everyone and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God and respect the king. (NLT)

It's all about Christian behavior, all about why we were called, the kind of lifestyle and the way we are to conduct our lives.

19) For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right ... (NLT)

This is based on God's laws and principles.

19b) ... And patiently endure unfair treatment. (NLT)

In other words, just because you are treated badly, unfairly, which happens to all of us at some point in our lives, it doesn't mean you are justified in retaliating in kind. That's not to say you can't stand up for yourself on occasion, but it depends on the circumstances.

20) Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. ... (NLT)

Again, it's the context of a master and a slave here, but what about your employer? The same principle applies to them. You know, we're called into God's truth to follow these principles. I am sorry to say I know brethren that can't keep a job because they can't keep their mouth shut. They talk themselves out of a job. Sometimes it's a chronic condition. You don't get credit, as far as God is concerned, by being outspoken to the point where you are doing yourself or others harm. You just don't.

20b) ... But if you suffer for doing right and do it patiently ... (NLT)

That is, in a Godly fashion. I have said I get some funny looks sometimes. I tell people, I don't have to be nice, but I have to be civil. I have to remember who my boss is and I have to conduct myself in a certain way.

20 continued) ... then God is pleased with you.

21) For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering. Just as Christ suffered for you, he is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (NLT)

One time I gave a sermon on the various citations through the New Testament on the word "follow." I came up with seventy plus. One of my friends kind of took that and ran with it and came up with a couple hundred. I don't know where he got them, maybe words or something that indicated that we're to follow Christ.

A few years ago I was ordained an elder, had been a deacon for many years. I guess they tired of beating up on me and they wanted to beat up on me a little more. I wasn't called to be an elder. I have never gotten that confused. Someone was very nice and they sent me an email and said, we hope of all the gifts you can do this and all that. I don't have any special insight on prophecy. The gifts are up to God. I can't leap tall buildings at a single bound. Don't have x-ray vision. The only way kryptonite would affect me is if a big rock fell on me. I was called to follow Jesus Christ, no matter what that takes. Anything else is just responsibility.

The whole context of what Peter is talking about is we're called to make a difference now. The word "example" in verse 21 means a *written copy*. We'd say a carbon copy. One of the commentaries says the word is also meant in the sense of a master artist making a drawing, a painting that the students are supposed to duplicate exactly. They are supposed to do exactly the way the master artist did the picture. Also, we get the sense there, following his example, that we are called into a narrow way. If you think about that for a minute, that constricted, narrow way kind of means that we need to follow in the exact footsteps of who called us. We need to follow in Christ's footsteps, because if we don't, we could fall off. We could drift away, we could get lost and all of that.

22) He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. (NLT)

I can't say that. Can you? Even if some little old lady comes up to me and tells me that, I'd say, let's kind of back up in this conversation and start all over again. That would be my response. Let's be honest with each other. We all do those little deceptions, those little things, don't we?

23) He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. ... (NLT)

That's not my first reaction. Again, I think of the pre-conversion and the post-conversion Peter. You know, he was a rambunctious, in-your-face kind of a guy and look what he did in spite of all that false bravado. He denied Christ three times. He thought he could do it all on his own. He was gutsy enough to do that.

23b) ... He left his case in the hands of God ... (NLT)

We review what he went through at the Passover and what an example he set.

23 continued) ... who always judges fairly, because he is qualified to do that. (NLT)

We are not qualified to do that right now, just not.

24) He personally carried our sins in his own body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. ... (NLT)

That's a key phrase there. It's what we're supposed to be doing, living and acting rightly in righteousness. When we come up out of that baptismal grave, a symbolic burial, we are supposed to be different. We are supposed to start to live differently, be a different example. That's what God called us to.

25) Once you were like sheep, who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. (NLT)

We are called now, the few, to be an example following and duplicating the behaviors of that supreme example, Jesus Christ. It tells us in Revelation 1:6 that Jesus Christ is going to make us kings and priests in His kingdom. That's not a done deal yet. We have some living to do. We can't say, when we are called and embark on that narrow road, thanks a lot Lord. Yes, I see the light at the end of the tunnel and then just go on our merry way. That's not what we are called to at all. We can't do that. It doesn't work that way. We have to apply that truth. We have to use it. We learn from God. We have to live a certain way. All of these scriptures plainly tell us that. We have a whole set of books in the Bible that tell us we need to do that. That's part of the answer to why we are called; to be a Godly example in our lives to whomever we might touch. All of us affect and touch someone. We want to strive to be those carbon copies of that supreme example.

Here's the thing about example, folks. It matters a great deal what kind of example we set. I was talking to a member the other day and he was telling me about his mom. She didn't believe like they did whenever they were first called, started practicing the beliefs that they had been called into, God's truth, but she still respected those things. I thought that was a neat story. We have no idea how our example affects people.

That's what Peter was saying in his epistle. We are supposed to be representing and reflecting Jesus Christ in every piece of our lives, every part of it. A lot of times we hear a sermon built around what would Christ do? How would he live? How would he do that? I came up with a short list of questions. It begins with do we help people or hurt people? Another is do we condemn people or forgive people? That doesn't mean we condone bad behavior and there's a lot of that going around. Do we serve people or not serve people? Do we sigh and cry for the world or think, boy they are getting what they deserve?

I posed a question earlier. What can we do for the world right now with this calling? I would like to turn to Ephesians 3. What can we do for the world right now? Paul is addressing their concern for him, for his problems, for his trials, his troubles that he is going through. I believe he is in prison now, or about to be imprisoned. Paul goes through so much.

Ephesians 3:13. *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (NKJV)*

Go down to chapter 4. Here is Paul's encouragement for them.

Ephesians 4:1. *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy [appropriately, in a godly way] of the calling with which you were called, (NKJV)*

Respond to that invitation. When we look that up in the Greek, it has various meanings, but it's an authoritative invitation. I don't know about that, but I was drafted. God did the calling, not me. I didn't volunteer. I enlisted in the military. I didn't enlist in God's army. I was called into it. Paul then reminds them there is a responsibility that comes with that calling. It's about thinking, acting and living in a certain way.

2) with all lowliness and gentleness ... (NKJV)

You can read in there humility and being civil.

2b) ... with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, (NKJV)

That's hard to do sometimes. You know, we are a smorgasbord of people that God has called. We have a whole mix of personalities. Sometimes there are clashes. There are conflicts and all that. What Paul is telling us here, is not a single one of us has a right to look down on any other brethren, no matter what we might think of them, no matter what they might look like, no matter the kind of car they drive, the kind of home they live in. We have no right to do that. We need to bear with one another in love. Following is the result.

3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (NKJV)

Again, sometimes we have a hard time doing that. I know people that won't bear with one another. I heard a very disturbing thing one time where an individual said, because they were upset with someone, they would never wash their feet at the Passover. Boy, that's missing the whole point of the foot washing ceremony.

4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, (NKJV)

When I operated and functioned in a corporation, one of the big things was multitasking. We don't do that when God calls us. We live a certain way, the way that we're instructed to live by God's word, by God's truth. We have one model. We don't practice some kind of corporate management style or behavior. We have one example to follow. The interesting thing about Paul, there is not one mention of himself, and he had a lot to moan and groan about. He is really telling them what their primary focus should be. Remember, in 1 Corinthians 1:26, we have read it so many times that I'm not even sure that I have that page in my Bible anymore. Maybe I wore it out. It says, you see or consider your calling. It means we should understand it. Again, the point I am trying to make here is that in order to properly walk worthy of our calling, we have to do at least a couple of things. I do have a couple of points. When we are called into the narrow way, the idea there is that it should become your focus.

1. So, the first thing that will help us walk worthy of our calling is we have to maintain our focus.

Did you ever notice how much energy we waste focusing on the wrong things? I think we all get caught doing that. I was watching an interview recently of Dr. Phil. The interviewer, interestingly recognized things going on in the world, asked him, what do you tell people that get so depressed and down because of all of the bad news that they see all of the time? I thought Dr. Phil had a good response: you have to compartmentalize. That's just another way of saying you get your focus right. He even mentioned if you focus on doom and gloom, you will be that way in your life. That's pretty good advice for all of us.

I know people that do that, all they think about, all they talk about is when are we going to flee. We used to give a gentleman a ride to services every Sabbath. He has since passed on. He watched the news. His question almost every Sabbath on a trip to Prosser was, when do you think the end is coming? I'd shoot my wrist out and look at my watch and say, about 15 minutes. That's as good a guess as any, because I don't know. He'd laugh. He humored me.

Have you ever caught yourself focusing on past regrets in your life? I think a lot of us do that from time to time, especially as we get older. We focus on our past sins, past mistakes we've made. Maybe we are living with some of those mistakes now. Do we focus on that? You know, the Feast of Tabernacles is all about focusing on the future, not the past. Doesn't God say He forgives our sins or mistakes and removes them as far as the east is from the west?

We have an example that Paul gives in Philippians 3. You know where I'm going. Paul had a ton of regrets; his persecution of the church, everything.

Philippians 3:8. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (NKJV)

He really focused on what was valuable. He knew the difference. He could see the difference through his hard experiences; what was valuable and what wasn't. Sometimes a trial helps us to get our focus right, doesn't it?

Do you ever notice how Paul mentions in different places his trials, his sufferings, the shipwreck, all of the things that he went through. Do you know how he always uses that? He always uses it to point back to Christ. That sounds like a very high level of spiritual focus to me.

9) and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law ... (NKJV)

That's talking about just complying with the law through some kind of ritual rather than really loving God and wanting to obey God with all of our heart.

9b) ... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

10) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

11) if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (NKJV)

That's the first one for us.

12) Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (NKJV)

God called and drafted Paul in a very special way. He laid hold of us, too, each one of us and called us out of this world.

13) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind ... (NKJV)

He didn't waste the time and the energy focusing on the past. Frankly, there is no spiritual profit in that.

13b) ... and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

14) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15) Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. (NKJV)

As already mentioned, sometimes we just have to get our self-focus out of the way so God can work with us. We're just in the way.

16) Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. (NKJV)

Here's what Paul said and he learned this the hard way.

17) Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (NKJV)

Obviously, our walk is how we live.

18) For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: (NKJV)

He's not talking about people in the world, who are not called. He is talking about those that have wandered off the narrow path.

19) whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things. (NKJV)

They have completely lost focus. Unfortunately, those folks are lost. I think all of us would like to hear Christ say in the end, when we are resurrected, "Well done faithful servant," rather than "I don't know you."

20) For our citizenship ... (NKJV)

Our future, actually, that's being held in reserve right now.

20b) ... is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (NKJV)

That's the future for us.

Most people get hung up and they focus on their private interpretation of the Bible. People get in verbal fights over speculations and all of that. I look at it this way: There is an example in John 5:1-15. It's a familiar example about the individual that obviously has some paralysis and he was by the sheep gate, the pool of Bethesda. Occasionally, an angel stirred up the water and he had no one to carry him down. You remember the whole story. I wonder, is that true? Can an angel really do that? I don't see any other example of that in the Bible. Angels are used many different ways, but I have never seen them being used to heal. Have you? I kind of wonder if it's a Jewish superstition.

We have to remember that the Bible is a very concise record. There are just a lot of things we don't know. Anyhow, my point here is that Christ didn't condemn that. He just healed the man. He said take up your bed and walk. The point here is we should focus on what we do know, not burn a whole lot of mental calories focusing on something that's unclear and in the end really doesn't mean anything anyway. I think you know what I mean. People blow everything out of proportion doing that. Paul warned Timothy about that. He said, don't get strung out, hung up in those endless arguments, because that's all they are.

In Ephesians 1 Paul taught that real, genuine understanding only comes from God.

Ephesians 1:17. *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18) the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; ... (NKJV)*

That tells me it's over a lifetime that we get that enlightenment.

18b) ... that you may know what is the hope of His calling ... (NKJV)

Interesting how this is tied together, right?

18 continued) ... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, (NKJV)

We are picturing that at the feast. The point here is that any understanding we are applying in our lives only comes from God.

Ephesians 2:10. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ... (NKJV)*

In other words, this refers to bearing fruit for God. We know that.

10b) ... which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (NKJV)

We're called to focus on Jesus Christ in our Christian walk. Have you ever thought about the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 with the idea of focus? Yes, I know we have different theories, different ideas. We have had different teachings in the past on the seven churches. Just think about this. The first church, Ephesus, lost their focus on their first love. The second church, Smyrna, focused on persecution. The third one, Pergamos, focused on wrong doctrines. The fourth one, Thyatira, focused on a false prophetess. Sardis lost spiritual focus to the point they were dying spiritually. Philadelphia had a right focus. They were a good example. The last one, Laodicea, lost focus on the kind of Christians they should be. They were described as lukewarm.

You know, I've heard people use that as an excuse. They say, well we're in the Laodicean era anyway. I know I'm a Laodicean so I'll just kind of plug along and hope I'll

make it. What's wrong with that? I know the church traditionally has taught that these are eras of the church and that may be true to some extent, but I think that kind of confines it. The only trouble with it being eras, you know what that tells me, is that it implies it's a given if you are in that certain era you are stuck. You can't do anything else. If you are stuck in the Laodicean era, you are going to be a Laodicean. There's nothing you can do about it. If you read and look at those seven churches very carefully, it doesn't say that's one hundred percent. It just says there's a dominant problem with each one of those eras. So, you can't confine it just to the eras. If that were true, does that mean you throw out the Bible and how to live, what you can do to change because you are stuck in a certain era? That just doesn't make any sense.

Remember back in 1 Kings when Elijah was running for his life. Jezebel was going to chop his head off, or do something. He thought he was all alone and he went and hid in a cave. God asked him, what are you doing here, Elijah? He said, well I'm all alone. They're trying to kill me. He wanted some sympathy from God. Anyhow He said, you know there are 7,000 people that haven't bowed their knees to Baal. Yet, that was the pagan belief in Baal that was affecting the entire nation of the Israelites. Just because you're stuck, or you think you're stuck, maybe that's the programming, doesn't mean the rest of God's word doesn't mean anything. Of course, that's not true.

In Revelation 3:18 I think it's kind of interesting the way Christ inspired the ending of these messages to the seven churches.

Revelation 3:18. *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire [godly character], that you may be rich [spiritually]; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (NKJV)*

That kind of tells me, fix your focus. That's what He is telling that church. The whole point here is if we lose our spiritual focus, we're going to gradually drift away. There is no doubt about it. It's just going to happen.

I gave a message just before the feast about holding onto God's truth. I remember hearing a story one time about two couples that were vacationing down on the Gulf. The gals decided to lie around on the beach, read books, sunbathe. You know how ladies are. The guys said, let's go get some surfboards. We're manly. We're going to go out there and cut some waves, or whatever the terms are for surfers. Anyhow, they got out there and there are no waves. The tide was right in between. It was kind of lazy sea and the sun was shining. They fell asleep on the surfboard. When they fell asleep, they were really close to the shore. After a little while they woke up and they could barely see the shore. One guy said, hey, we have to get back to the shore, so they started paddling. They just about killed themselves, and they were exhausted when they got to the beach. One of the locals said, you know, if you had drifted out there just a little bit further, there is a current out there. They would have never found you. The point is we have to be careful we don't drift away.

2. Another part of our calling, walking that path God called us into, the way we conduct our behavior, is following that truth.

It's all based on God's truth. I made a short list of the truth scriptures. Follow along with me and see how this relates to our calling. In John 1:14 Jesus Christ is described as the embodiment of truth. It says,

John 1:14. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (NKJV)*

He lived that truth perfectly. In John 4:23-24,

John 4:23. *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. (NKJV)*

Have you ever looked that word up? It means adore. We think of our mate who we adore. We don't really think of it in the terms of adoring God, but we have hymns. We sang one the other day, page 161 based on Psalm 150 – Join Me In Glad Adoration. That means worshipping God with all of our heart, all of being. God is just central to our think, our acting, everything that we do.

24) God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (NKJV)

John 8:31. *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (NKJV)*

I quoted that earlier. Ephesians 6, part of the armor of God.

Ephesians 6:14. *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth ... (NKJV)*

To me, being a golfer, that's an interesting analogy that he is making, when he talks about your waist girded with truth. I know for the Roman soldiers that was a belt and all of that. To a golfer I need that core strength to turn. This tells me that if my waist is girded with truth, then any way that I turn that truth applies, no matter what I do.

Do you think truth as a function of the way we live, what we practice in our lives, has anything to do with the calling that we've been given? What about the truth of the future? Here's a futuristic scripture for you. Zechariah 8. We're called into God's truth to be a guide for our entire lives and actually, even into the future. Here's a real futuristic, millennial setting scripture for you.

Zechariah 8:3. *Thus says the LORD: "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain."* (NKJV)

Put that with Isaiah 2, as a reference.

Isaiah 2:2. *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.* (NKJV)

Flow to that city of truth. One translation says, like a stream, like a river coming to that truth. Those are amazing scriptures. They all have to do with the truth. I just hope and pray that we all in personal prayer pray for each other that we live up to those high standards, because we have a tremendous future based on that truth. We can look forward to that.

Here are some final words from the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1. He talks earlier in verse 3 about the knowledge of Him, who called us.

2 Peter 1:4. *by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises ...* (NKJV)

We wouldn't even know to be here if it weren't for God's truth that we were called into. We wouldn't even recognize it unless God called us, worked with us, even prior to our calling. We wouldn't even understand God's truth.

4b) *... that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* (NKJV)

We were called out of that. We were given that knowledge. It goes on to say knowledge, self-control, all of that. That implies right knowledge and applying that, using that in our lives.

9) *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, ...* (NKJV)

His focus is skewed spiritually.

9b) *... even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.* (NKJV)

Far too many, I'm afraid, have done that, not that any of us are without sin.

10) *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;*

11) *for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* (NKJV)

Brethren, we are called to make a difference now and in the future. Let's keep the feast. Let's remember to keep our focus straight. Let's hold onto the truth and let's look forward to this wonderful future that God is telling us about at the feast.