

# Make the Church a Refugee

Rick Railston  
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Well, hello again, everybody. I forgot to announce we have 163 here today. We averaged 119 last year and we just appreciate everyone coming and being here today.

This has been quite a year for God's people. I think if you look back on your life and the lives of friends in the Church that it's been quite a year. I remember back at the Feast in 2002, I gave a sermon about the "Wearing out of the Saints" mentioned in Daniel. If we were to take a survey today among God's people and ask the question, "Do you feel worn out?", my guess would be, my strong suspicion would be you're probably feeling a lot more worn out than you were nine years ago. I certainly do.

And it seems like lately—and I say "lately," over the past year or two, maybe even three—that God has allowed Satan to increase the amount of pressure on His people, on God's people. A level of restraint has been removed from Satan and Satan is more active in the minds and hearts and lives of God's people. And, obviously, God has allowed that and God knows that. So, at this time, I think God's people, now more than ever, need to have a place of safety, a place of refuge from the pressures that bombard all of us in our everyday lives.

And if you look in the dictionary under the word "refuge," Webster's says it's a "shelter or a protection from danger or distress." And the word "refuge" comes from the Latin word *refugium* which means to flee or to escape.

It's interesting that in the Old Testament God provided a place of refuge for people who needed it. I'm going to summarize Numbers chapter 35. You don't need to turn there unless you want to, but I'll just summarize what the chapter has to say. It tells us that the Levites were given cities because they had no inheritance in the land. I think we all know. But God designated among those cities six that were "Cities of Refuge." And the Hebrew word for "refuge" means asylum.

Of course, my cracked brain when I think about asylum, I think of a mental institution where they lock people in rather than something to flee to, but that's not the context that God uses that word. I think sometimes all of us need an asylum—locked up occasionally. Ha ha.

Anyway, today that word would be applied let's say for in Egypt right now, the Coptic Christians are being persecuted by the Muslims. And so, one of those Coptic Christians might apply for asylum in the United States. It means you flee for refuge.

And the Cities of Refuge were for a perpetrator who accidentally killed someone. If it was an intentional killing, then there was no refuge and the avenger, as it's

talked about in Numbers 35, which is generally a member of the offended household, would take vengeance (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) on the perpetrator if it was intentional.

But if it was not intentional, then there was a place, a City of Refuge. And Numbers 35 gives examples of accidental killings.

Today, if we put it in today's terms, it would be like if you had your let's say a new roof put on your house. And there were workers up on top of the roof and they were carrying these big stacks of shingles. They come in packages about like this and about that high. Our neighbor is getting his roof replaced. So, it's familiar to me. And these workers are carrying these heavy shingles packages. And let's say one of them stumbled at the edge of the roof and fell forward and dropped the package. It fell off the roof. And the man's wife was walking underneath at that time and that package hit her on the top of the head, broke her neck, and killed her. So, this is the kind of unintentional killing that the Cities of Refuge were intended for.

The residents of the city would come together and decide between the avenger and the perpetrator to decide whether, indeed, it was an accidental killing. And if it was, then the perpetrator of this accidental killing would go, could go to that city and once he was in the city, he was safe. The avenger, the family member, could no longer bring retribution or bring justice. As long they stayed there, it became a City of Refuge.

So, God provided a refuge for one who honestly needed that.

Now, the question for today is (and this is all by way of introduction): Do you feel like you need a City of Refuge right now? And I think most of us would say "Yes, it would be nice to have a City of Refuge right now." It would be wonderful, wouldn't it? A place where we could all come together and just stay here like we are right now and be protected and be in a state of refuge. But that is not God's Plan for this time. It's just not.

Let's go to John 17 and verse 15. Christ made it very, very plain that this is not God's Plan for the end of this age, or for his people down through the Millennium in the New Testament. John 17:15. Notice what Christ said.

***John 17:15. I pray not that [you should] take them out of the world, (KJV)***

Not go onto a hilltop. Not go into a monastery or a convent or something like that.

***John 17:15. I pray not that [you should] take them out of the world, but that [you should] keep them from the evil [one]. (KJV)***

And the implication is very clear. God says, "I pray that Satan will be restrained while you are in this world." Not in a City of Refuge.

Then Paul repeated that in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. We'll read verses 9 and 10. I'll read it out of the New King James. It's a little [clearer]. 1 Corinthians 5 verse 9, Paul reiterated the same admonition. Verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 5, he says.

**1 Corinthians 5:9.** *I wrote to you in my epistle... (NKJ)*

And this was a previous letter that was not canonized. 1 Corinthians 5 verse 9:

**1 Corinthians 5:9.** *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.*

*10) Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, (NKJ)*

Because you rub elbows with them all day long. He says:

**1 Corinthians 5:10b.** *...or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. (NKJ)*

Again, a clear implication that we have to live in this evil world, we're called to do that. But the fact is despite that God has provided a place of refuge for each one of us right here and right now. And that is the title of the sermon: *God Has Provided a Place of Refuge Right Here and Right Now.*

So, before we talk about that refuge and identify it, let's review Two Underlying Principles that we need to talk about.

The First is that:

### **1. We all must understand that God is our ultimate refuge.**

Nothing physical, it's not a city. It's not a man. It's not an organization. It's not a corporation. It is God Almighty who is our refuge. We can never, ever forget that!

Now there are three definitions, three different Hebrew words in the Old Testament that are translated "refuge." And if we look at those three, it's very instructive to teach us what God means by refuge.

The first Hebrew word, its definition tells us that God is the One to flee to. When we're in trouble, when we're in danger, when we're oppressed, God is the One to flee to. Now that Hebrew word is Strong's #4498 and it means a retreat. The term is used in the military, like a "military retreat." When you're getting your fanny beat on the battle field, you start retreating. It's used in that sense. It means a retreat or abstractly, a fleeing or an escape.

And it's used in 2 Samuel 22. Let's go to verses 2 and 3 to kind of get the sense of this Hebrew word that tells us that God is the one to flee to. Not to a man. Not to something physical. 2 Samuel 22 verse 2 and David is talking. And it says—I read out of the King James unless I otherwise tell you. It says,

**2 Samuel 22:2.** And he [David] said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;

3) The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge [that Hebrew word #4498]... (KJV)

In other words, He is the one that David says, "I flee to when I'm in trouble."

**2 Samuel 22:2b.** ...my [savior; (the one I flee to)]; [You save] me from violence. (KJV)

So when David uses that word and David says "I'm in retreat, the place I'm running to is God Almighty," nobody else. That's the first definition.

The second definition tells us—the second Hebrew word, rather, tells us that God is a place of shelter from the world. God is a place of shelter from the world. That word translated "refuge" is Strong's #4268. And it means literally "a shelter" (a place), literally a shelter. And it can also mean it figuratively, but it means basically a place of refuge. It is a location, a place of refuge. And so, this word tells us that God is that place of refuge.

And it's used in Isaiah chapter 25. Let's go there. We'll read verse 1 for context and then jump to verse 4. Isaiah 25 verses 1 and 4, and this uses the Hebrew word that refers to a place of shelter, a place of refuge. Verse 1 of Isaiah 25 says:

**Isaiah 25:1.** O LORD, [you are] my God; I will exalt [You], (KJV)

"I don't exalt men. I don't exalt institutions. I exalt You."

**Isaiah 25:1b.** I will exalt [You], I will praise [Your] name; for [You have] done wonderful things; [Your] counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. (KJV)

Now, Isaiah 25 verse 4:

**Isaiah 25:4.** For [You have] been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, (KJV)

Notice this now:

**Isaiah 25:4b.** ...a refuge from the storm, (KJV)

In that context, a literal place where you can come out of a storm physically and go to a place where you will be sheltered. Now, obviously, spiritually it means that God is the refuge when we're in some kind of trouble or some kind of storm. God is our refuge there. He is our shelter there.

**Isaiah 25:4 continued.** ...a shadow from the heat, (KJV)

So, the second definition tells us that God is the shelter.

Now the third Hebrew word that is used tells us that God is the one to have hope in, God is the one to trust in. That Hebrew word for "refuge" is Strong's #2620. And it literally means "to have hope in or to have trust in."

We find that used in Psalm 57 and verse 1 where David wrote this Psalm. He uses it in the very beginning of this Psalm, Psalm 57 and verse 1. David is talking. Notice what he says. Psalm 57 verse 1, he says:

**Psalm 57:1.** *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: (KJV)*

And boy, do we need to say that everyday in our prayers! We need—all of us need mercy. We stumble, we fall, we slip, we goof up, and we just need to ask for God's mercy and that's what David was doing. He says:

**Psalm 57:1b.** ...for my [life trusts] in [You]: [yes], in the shadow of [Your] wings will... (KJV)

He says "will." And this word shows determination, determining to do this. He says:

**Psalm 57:1 continued.** ...will I make my refuge, (KJV)

In other words, "I will make You where I put my hope and my trust that You will take care of me, You will shelter me."

**Psalm 57:1 continued.** ...until these calamities be overpast. (KJV)

And in the last year, God's people have had enormous calamities come upon them, as we'll talk about as we get into the sermon. And yet, God, indeed, through these three Hebrew words, these three usages in the Old Testament, they tell us that God indeed is our refuge. So, make no mistake about that. God is ultimately our refuge.

The Second Underlying Principle I'd like to establish is that:

## **2. We all know that God will ultimately take us to a Place of Safety.**

A literal, physical location to protect the Firstfruits from the calamities that befall this world as we heard in the sermonette, we understand that. We won't turn there; we all know Revelation chapter 12 where it says "the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, for the woman," for the Church.

And then, Christ said in Matthew 24, He says, "Two shall be in the field and one of them is taken." And that Greek word "taken" means taken. It says two are going to be in the same location. One is taken and one is left. And that means

that that is a miraculous taking. It tells me that passports aren't necessary. Hoarding money isn't necessary because God is going to take to the Place of Refuge whoever He wishes. And if you look at all the examples of fleeing in the Bible, angels were involved, miracles were involved.

And so, this Second Underlying Principle is that we know that God is, in addition to being our refuge, He will ultimately take us to a Place of Refuge or Safety. And well all eagerly wait this event.

But what about now? That's in the future. What about now? What about between now and that event that we wait for?

The fact is that God's people now more than ever need a Place of Safety or a Place of Refuge to go to from the pressures that bombard us every day of our lives. Those pressures as we know, as is prophesied, are going to increase day after day, year after year as we get closer to the return of Jesus Christ.

I mean look at all the increasing job pressures on God's people. For those of you who get the Sabbath Update that comes out (It used to come out once a week. Now, it sometimes comes out once a day almost!) where we send out prayer requests for God's people irrespective of what group they attend. But you can see that the pressures are increasing. And there are job pressures. There are financial pressures. There are health pressures. There are, as we get older, there are age pressures on all of us. We have grandparents raising children.

We have an increasingly evil world that we are living in that Ken so beautifully said, painted the picture of all of that changing. And that's why we're here and we want to look toward that and celebrate that and hope for the day when this evil world changes. But the reality is right here and right now, there are increasing spiritual pressures, mental pressures, emotional pressures from our Adversary that God is allowing as a test on all of us.

And, as a result, wouldn't it be nice to have a refuge that we can go to here and now as a shelter from the pressures that are on all of God's people? And, as I said in the title, we do. We have such a refuge and we have it now. And that refuge is the Church. It should be the Church.

Now, when I say that I know some of you are thinking, "Boy, in times past we all know the Church hasn't been the refuge that it should be!" In fact, in some cases it's been anything but a refuge. At various times and places it's been a source of tension, upset, turmoil. We've all walked into services in times past and, as the saying goes, "You could cut the tension with a knife." We've all been there. It's happened.

But now, you see we have an opportunity to never let that happen again. We're going to talk about that as kind of a beginning to the Feast. We have an opportunity to never let that happen again. We have an opportunity to make the Church the refuge that it should be.

And, as God is our refuge, our ultimate refuge, so must the Church be a refuge especially as Satan is turning up the wick, turning up the heat on all of God's people and turning up the pressure in these end days. And there is no question in my mind that God indeed has loosed a band of restraint from Satan in these last few years. And I find that he is more active in the minds and the lives of the Brethren than ever before. And God is allowing it. He is allowing it as a test for all of us.

But the key is that we have the ability to make the Church a refuge now—if **we want to**. It's up to us—if **we want to**. And if we put forth the effort, each one of us individually, and we're going to see it's an individual thing. Yes, the ministry has a part to play, but it's an individual thing. It is up to us to make the Church the refuge that it should be.

So, what I'd like to do in the remainder of the sermon is to focus on "How do we do that?" How do we make the Church a refuge? And the reason we're bringing it up now is we have a chance during these eight days to start practicing that. Right here amongst all of us to start practicing that. Okay, how do we do that? How do we make the Church a refuge?

The First Way that we can do that is:

**I. We have to make the Church a place that is:**

- **free from sin,**
- **and free from the influence of Satan,**
- **and free from the influence of the world.**

Now just as I say that, I know we can't do that perfectly. None of us can be totally free from sin. We can't totally block out the world. We can't totally keep Satan from nibbling around the edges in our lives or in the lives of all of us together.

Now, the ministry has a job to do in this because the ministry, the Bible in many places talks about ministers as shepherds. And one of the jobs of the ministry is to protect the flock—to protect the flock from sin or from the world or from the influence of Satan coming into the flock as shepherds protect the health and the well-being of the flock that they serve.

Now, we all remember—we won't turn there—but in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul cast out a fornicator because the Church was being polluted by this man's conduct. And many in the Church, if you read between the lines and read the lines directly, people were making excuses for him. And people were making excuses for his conduct. Therefore, sin was in the midst of the Church and Paul was not happy about that. Remember he said, "I don't even need to be there." He said, "I've judged already." He said, "Your glorying is not good by having this going on in the Church." He said, "Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" And then, he said, "Get the guy out" because a little leaven was starting to leaven and spread through the whole Church. And then, the Church was allowing sin in its midst. And if we want the Church to be a refuge, obviously we cannot allow that to happen.

Let's go to Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 10. This is just a principle. This is something that the ministry takes very seriously that we, as good shepherds—you want to be a good shepherd. Christ is the Good Shepherd. All we are is just lowly little old assistant shepherds, but Christ is the Good Shepherd. Christ is the Shepherd. [We] can't ignore that fact or diminish that fact. Proverbs 22:10 comes to mind as far as protecting the flock. It says:

***Proverbs 22:10.*** *Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; [yes, he says], strife and reproach shall cease [if you cast out this scorner].*  
(KJV)

Now, the Hebrew word for "scorner" is Strong's #3887. Translated into English it's the word *loots*, kind of unusual. And it literally means "to make mouths at;" somebody that makes mouths at people. In other words, gossips, talks about people, and causes trouble and division. It can also mean "to scoff."

And so we're told here that it only takes one or two to start doing this, and it causes problems within the flock. And so, the ministry has to be careful about that. That's why sometimes—hopefully, not very often—the ministry has to prohibit somebody from attending in order to protect the flock.

Now, that's the minister's job, the ministry's job, but we all have a job to do to make the Church a refuge and to have it as a place that is free from sin and free from the influence of the world. Each one of us individually has a job to do.

We won't turn there, but in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 18, Paul says, "Flee fornication." Well, by extension, that means flee all manner of sin, all kinds of sin. Flee. Run away from it. Don't let it near you. Don't let it become part of you.

But let's go to Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 11. Paul is talking to the Church in Ephesus. He's talking to the Brethren. He's talking to all of us. He's talking to each one of us. Ephesians 5 verse 11, he's encouraging the Church. He says "For your protection, for your safety," he says:

***Ephesians 5:11.*** ... *have no fellowship* *with the unfruitful works of darkness,* (KJV)

Now we know who the author of darkness is. That's Satan. He says, "Don't have any fellowship with Satan at all."

The word "fellowship" means—it's Strong's #4790 if you want to look it up sometime, but—it means "to share company with" (like to have over to your house), "to communicate with or to be a partaker with."

And he says, "So, don't be a partaker of unfruitful works of darkness." Don't allow it whether it's coming in through the TV set or the cable or the satellite dish or the influence of other people. And it is an individual responsibility to stay away from these unfruitful works of darkness. And Satan is very subtle. It can come



into a commercial. It can come into a magazine. It can come into your mind in many different ways. And it's an individual responsibility to all of us to flee from the works of darkness.

So, the Church, therefore, must be a place that's free from sin, and free from the influence of the world, and free from Satan. We know we will never get there perfectly because we're all human beings, but this is something we must really strive to develop. And we must really be to the place where we're not mingling with sin. And we're free from abusers or those who would take advantage or free from those with agendas or who cause division.

And so, the first way that we can make the Church a refuge is to not have sin in our midst, in our personal lives, in our collective lives and how we conduct ourselves. And we have the opportunity to do that today, tomorrow, through the rest of the Feast. We have an opportunity to make this place—Kellogg, Idaho—a place that's free from sin and from the influence of the world.

The Second Way we can do this:

**II. We have to make the Church, and it's an individual responsibility, a place where God's people will be sheltered and fed and will flourish.**

I'll say it again.

**II. We have to make the Church a place where God's people will be sheltered; they will be fed; and they will be allowed to flourish and blossom and grow—obviously spiritually we're talking about.**

Now, again the ministry has a job to do in this. You remember Peter in John 21? Peter was told three times by Christ, and by extension the entire ministry, Christ said, "Feed my flock. Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs." And He was looking right at Peter and He says, "You do this. You feed the flock." And Peter got the message because in 1 Peter 5—let's turn back there, we'll read the first two verses. He got the message and he had a ministerial meeting, a group of elders together, and he was repeating the same thing. He understood. And I think if Christ looked at any of us and pointed His finger and said, "Feed the flock," I think we'd get the message. We would indeed.

1 Peter 5 verse 1 and 2, Peter is telling them, "Look we're all elders together." Yes, his job description was apostle, but he said, "Were all elders." He says:

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

Notice verse 2. He passes the message on. He says:

***1 Peter 5:2. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, (KJV)***

That really means "not because you have to" or somebody's got a gun to your head.

**1 Peter 5:2b.** *...not by constraint, but willingly; not for [money], but [with] a ready mind [an eager mind, an enthusiastic mind]; (KJV)*

And it refers primarily to feeding the flock spiritually. It also includes physically as God provides the means to do so.

But we all have a job to do. Not just the ministry. We all have a job to do to make the Church a place where people are sheltered and fed and are allowed to flourish. Each one of us, it's an individual responsibility.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and we'll read verses 25 and 26. I think sometimes back in the old days, the common phrase was "The Brethren had to pray and pay. And that's all the Brethren were required to do." And that is absolutely not true. We all have a responsibility. We all, before God, have a responsibility to make the Church a place of shelter and a place where people can flourish and where they will be fed. 1 Corinthians 12 verse 25, notice what it says:

**1 Corinthians 12:25.** *That there should be no... (KJV)*

The King James says "schism." It means division.

**1 Corinthians 12:25.** *There should be no [division] in the body; but [rather than have division, he says,] that the members should have the same care one for another. (KJV)*

This is an individual responsibility.

The Greek word for "care" means "to be anxious about." Meaning: to worry over, to fuss over, or to take thought of. In other words, they are on your mind. They're in your prayers. Your mind is always on your brothers and sisters in the Church.

Verse 26 and he says:

**1 Corinthians 12:26.** *[When] one member [suffers], all the members suffer with it; (KJV)*

Because we care for each other and because we think about each other. And there are people that.... I can think of individuals that I spent hours praying over. They don't know it. But then, I'm sure with you. There are individuals that you pray about many, many times every day because you have care and you have concern.

Then he goes on to say, of course,

**1 Corinthians 12:26b.** *[When] one member [is] honoured, all ... members [should] rejoice with it. (KJV)*

But when one member suffers, we all suffer along. And that is our responsibility. And care can be through prayer, concern, thought. Or it can be through communication. It can be through help, physically or spiritually.

Let's go to the next book, 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and we'll read verse 4. This is a principle, a spiritual principle that God gives us to show care for other people and how we do that. It's very short, but you could make a whole sermon out of this one verse. 2 Corinthians 1 verse 4, it says, "Who" referring to the Father.

**2 Corinthians 1:4.** *[The Father comforts] us in all our [trials and] tribulation, (KJV)*

Now, let's just stop there. How is that done? It's done through His holy spirit. God comforts us. We can have cancer. We can have terminal cancer. We can be facing death and still have peace and comfort because it comes through God's spirit in us that we can look at the end of our lives, which could be next week or the next month, and not be worried. And be comforted and be relaxed and be tranquil and be at peace through God's spirit that He gives to us.

But notice we're not to just hold that and be selfish with God's spirit. That's not what this verse says. Notice it says, "God comforts us:"

**2 Corinthians 1:4b.** *...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, (KJV)*

So, when God comforts us... And we know how that feels when you're in a huge trial. And I think we've all been there. At some point you just give up and say, "God, I'm at the end of my rope. I can't do anything about this." We've all been there. And "You just please take care of me and please watch over me." And you have faith that God will do that and all of a sudden, you just relax. You're just at peace. And God is going to do what He's going to do, but we know it's for our benefit and not our hurt. And once we get to that point, then we can relax. It is done through His holy spirit.

And so what we do then is take that comfort and that peace and we do all in our power to give it to others when they're suffering. Because we've been on the receiving end, we want to help give it to them.

Zodhiates says that the Greek word for "comfort" is consolation and encouragement. So, what we're being told in this one sentence is that God encourages us and comforts us for a reason. And that reason is so that, in addition to comforting us on the receiving end, that we can take it and comfort other people. That we can get beyond ourselves and go out of ourselves and serve others and encourage others and help others. This is God's spirit in action. This is far different than just knowledge. This is far different than just getting facts. It's far different than knowing some meaning of an obscure prophecy. This is God's spirit in action. This is what we are called to do.

So, we all, under this Second Point, have an opportunity and, frankly, a duty to make the Church a place of shelter and nourishment for God's people. And we can begin today. We can do it today and for the rest of the Feast and for the rest of our lives.

Now that leads us to the Third Way that we can make the Church a refuge.

### **III. We must make the Church a place of peace.**

That's what it's supposed to be. And I know some people say, "Yeah, right." As I've said before, many times in the past the Church has been anything but a place of peace. There has been strife and fighting and gossiping and agendas. And we've all experienced that, but it doesn't have to be that way. That's not the model that God wants. That's not what God wants. And that's not, frankly, I don't think what any of us want. None of us wants fighting. None of us wants contention. None of us wants upset. None of us wants turmoil. We want peace.

Last night, I was looking around the room and just watching people talking to each other. And they were happy and excited. And you look down at the little kids and they had a whole line of them up right up here on the stage. And they were just talking to each other, going back and forth like this, and just having a good old time. And there was peace and there was tranquility and there was happiness and there was unity. And that's what the Church should be.

I keep getting back to the point that we have an individual responsibility to make it so. Christ told us in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Why? Because they will be called the children of God. Absolutely!

Now, notice what Paul tells us in regard to this. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 33. This is a Scripture we usually refer to to talk about confusion, but we often neglect to read the latter part of that Scripture. 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 33, it's talking about God being an "author." And there's a negative and there's a positive. We often focus on the negative and ignore the positive. 1 Corinthians 14 verse 33, it says:

**1 Corinthians 14:33.** *For God is not the author of confusion, (KJV)*

Okay, that's the negative part, but let's read the positive part.

**1 Corinthians 14:33b.** *...but [for God is the author] of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (KJV)*

Paul is saying, "The true Church." And when we talk about that or we say, "The Greater Church," we mean God's people wherever they are totally ignoring corporations, legal corporations, organizations, and all of that. God's people wherever they are, we're being told here that's the Church, that's the Body of Christ. And God is the author of peace in the Body of Christ.

Now, if there's no peace in the Body of Christ, then, that tells us that God's not part of that because God is the author of peace. He's not the author of confusion and turmoil and trouble.

That's, frankly, the main reason that we picked the name "Pacific" because when Pacific was formed two and a half years ago, all of us had been through a lot of turmoil, a lot of tension, a lot of trouble. And we'd all had enough fighting and enough of that. And the word "pacific," most people when you think of Pacific, you think of the Pacific Ocean. But the word "pacific" really means peace.

Ferdinand Magellan the Portuguese explorer, when he came into the Pacific Ocean, he named it that because it was so different from the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic Ocean is stormy and choppy and ugly many times. And when he came around South America and came into the Pacific Ocean, it was calm, it was peaceful, didn't have the storms that the Atlantic Ocean had. And he named it Pacific, meaning peace.

And we have the opportunity to make the Church a place of peace. Because Trumpets was a one-time event and, as Ken talked about, that is going to be turmoil like we've never seen before. But peace will rule in God's Kingdom. And, therefore, peace should rule in the Church today. And we have the opportunity, we have the duty to make it so—to have peace rule.

But, let me tell you, peace takes work. Never forget that. Peace takes work. Most of think, we'll say, "Ah! I'll be at peace." That means just to lie down on the couch, close your eyes and do nothing. "Then I have peace." No. To have peace it takes work. It doesn't just break out. Peace just doesn't.... Flowers don't just break out without nurturing and work in advance. You don't have a crop without planting things and fertilizing things and watering things. They take work. Fruit takes work. And peace takes work.

Let's go to Philippians 2 and verse 3. I'll read this out of The Twentieth Century New Testament. It makes it a little [clearer] in modern English. Philippians 2 and verse 3, notice what we're told. He's talking to a Church and by extension to the entire Church and by extension to those back then and to us today. Philippians 2 and verse 3, we're told:

***Philippians 2:3.*** *Nothing should be done in a factious spirit... (TCNT)*

That means a divisive spirit.

***Philippians 2:3.*** *Nothing should be done in a factious spirit or from vanity, but each of you... (TCNT)*

He's talking to individual members of the Church.

***Philippians 2:3b.*** *... each of you should with all humility regard others as of more account than [yourselves], (TCNT)*

Look up to others. Don't look down on others. And we've had that in the Church for the last twenty years. People throwing rocks at each other. People looking down on each other. "Well, you're not with us. And, therefore, you're a nobody." Or, "You're not going to the Place of Safety because you're not part of our corporation. You're not warming a seat here. Therefore, you're a nobody." And that's a factious spirit as we're told here.

We have to account others better than ourselves. And I'll tell you just personally, "There are many people sitting in this room that I look up to and wish I could be more like them in certain areas of my life." There are folks sitting right out here that have humility that I aspire to have humility like they do, or aspire to have love like they have, or aspire to have faith like they have. And we need, rather than throwing rocks at each other, to look at each other and esteem others better than ourselves because we all have talents, we all have gifts. And we need to focus on those and to try to use those as a model to be more like Jesus Christ.

Now, with that in mind, let's go to Colossians chapter 3 and we'll read verses 12 through 14. Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 through 14. Paul is encouraging the Church at Colossae, and by extension us today. He says, "You need to do some things. And I need to do some things. All of us need to some things." I'll read it out of the New King James. It says:

***Colossians 3:12. Therefore, as the elect of God, (NKJ)***

It's obviously referring to Church members, to all of us.

***Colossians 3:12b. ...holy and beloved, (NKJ)***

And sometimes it's hard for us to realize that we are holy and beloved to God. "Beloved" means to be loved. God loves us. And we have His holy spirit in us. And that means that to God we are holy and we are beloved. That's a hard concept for me and others I know to realize that God views us as holy and beloved.

He says, "Okay, holy and beloved folks of mine," He says:

***Colossians 3:12 continued. ...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; (NKJ)***

The Greek means "patience." Verse 13:

***Colossians 3:13. bearing with one another, (NKJ)***

The Greek means figuratively "to put up with" one another because we all have our faults. We all have our flaws. We all have our moments sometimes. We all wake up on the wrong side of the bed. We all get cranky from time to time. And he says:

**Colossians 3:13.** *bearing with one another [putting up with one another], and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (NKJ)*

He says, "Do it. Forgive. Be patient. Be kind. And above all," he says:

**Colossians 3:14.** *...above all these things put on love [agape is the Greek], which is the bond of [perfectness or] perfection. (NKJ)*

Love is the glue, the bond, the adhesive that pulls us together.

Because if God looks at me and I know He sees all my faults and all my sins, and I look and think how patient and kind and gentle He has been with me over decades of making mistakes, of over decades of slipping and falling, and yet He didn't.... Sometimes I look and say that "If I was God, I would blast Rick out of existence." But God didn't do that.

And He looks at the big picture. He looks at.... His movie is like this. We look through soda straws like this. But God sees the big picture. And God is so patient and so gentle because He's looking at the end. He wants, His goal is to.... And He sees the end, the end result of us being in His Kingdom and so to get us there patience, kindness, gentleness, mercy.

He's just saying, "Okay, I've done that to you. Maybe, just maybe you ought to do it to others." What a concept! Instead of throwing rocks at them, maybe we should be that way toward others.

But to have peace in the Church, sometimes it's necessary to make some unpleasant decisions. The ministry has to do that occasionally. Look at Romans 16 and verse 17. But in too many cases, it's all been put on the ministry and not on individuals. And I want to show you that this Scripture refers to individual Christians. This is not a Scripture to the ministry. It is to individual Christians. Sometimes we have to make some unpleasant decisions. Romans 16 and verse 17, Paul is saying to this Church in Rome and to all of us, he says:

**Romans 16:17.** *Now I beseech you, brethren, (KJV)*

So, we know who he's talking to. He says:

**Romans 16:17b.** *...mark them... (KJV)*

Now, the Greek word for "mark" means, it means nothing more than "to pay attention to, to take note of." It doesn't mean stringing somebody up in a tree. And it's not some ceremony or something. It says, "Just take note of, pay attention to those:"

**Romans 16:17 continued.** *... [who] cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which [you] have learned; and [he says,] avoid them. (KJV)*

Just avoid them because if you don't, then you're going to be influenced in a wrong way. You're going to be influenced to follow in that path. In principle this is up to the individual, as well as, obviously, to the ministry. It's painful to do, but occasionally necessary. And it's done not because one person is superior to another one or one group is superior to another group. It's not done that way at all, but because we are all influenced by the company we keep. We can't help it. We can't avoid it. Whoever we rub shoulders with and we come in contact with on a daily basis, they will have an influence over us. And that's, as you know, that's part of the battle of keeping the daily influence of the world out of lives, the daily influence of Satan out of our lives.

God noted that principle in Proverbs. Let's go to chapter 22 and we'll read verses 24 and 25. This is an example of a certain type of individual, but we want to focus on the principle behind it. Proverbs 22 verses 24 and 25. The subject is an angry man, but we want to talk about the principle behind the anger and how it is dealt with. Proverbs 22 verse 24, we're told tremendous advice.

***Proverbs 22:24. Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man [you shall] not go: (KJV)***

Now that's pretty clear. There's no wiggle room in that Scripture. Somebody who has an angry spirit and a furious spirit, don't make friends with them. Now, the principle behind it is in verse 25.

***Proverbs 22:25. Lest [you] learn his ways, and [it is] a snare to [your life]. (KJV)***

So what we're being told here in the example as an angry person, but it could be any number of other examples, but if you make friends with somebody who is angry, then you're going to become angry. You're going to become testy and hostile and irritable. And you're going to look on the negative side. And everything's negative. Nothing's going to work out and suspicious and all of that, angry.

And I've known angry people. I'll tell you the people that associate with an angry individual become angry themselves. So, the principle is here. We need to be very careful who we associate with. And, as we read in Romans 16:17, we're told to take note of those who cause trouble, who cause sin, who cause problems, who cause divisions, who are offensive to God's Word and just take note and stay away—avoid. Otherwise, you can become like them. It applies to me. It applies to all of us.

God wants His people—the reason for that is God wants His people to be like-minded. One of the ways to have peace is to be like-minded. And God wants us to be like-minded. So with that in mind, let's turn to 1 Peter 3 and we're going to read verses 8 through 11 out of the New King James. 1 Peter 3 beginning in verse 8 and this is addressed to the Brethren, all of us as individuals. 1 Peter 3 verse 8, He says, "Finally." He says, "I'm summarizing here. I'm reaching a broad conclusion. He says:



**1 Peter 3:8.** ...all of you... (NKJ)

No wiggle room there!

**1 Peter 3:8.** ...*all of you be of one mind*, (NKJ)

That's what we have to work toward—being one-minded, like-minded.

Now, he goes on to explain what that like-mindedness is.

**1 Peter 3:8b.** ...*having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;*  
9) [*don't return*] *evil for evil or reviling for reviling*, (NKJ)

"Reviling" means to speak evil of. So if somebody speaks evil of you, don't go back and do the same thing in return. He says:

**1 Peter 3:9b.** ...*but on the contrary [bless them]*, (NKJ)

And we're told in Romans 12, Paul says, "Bless those who come after you." Christ said, "Bless those who curse you and spitefully use you," in the Sermon on the Mount. He says:

**1 Peter 3:9 continued.** *but on the contrary [a] blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing [by blessing others, even your enemies].* (NKJ)

Verse 10:

**1 Peter 3:10.** *For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.*  
11) *Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* (NKJ)

We're talking about how peace takes work. He says, "Pursue it." And the Greek word for "pursue" means to press forward, like you're pushing a load up a hill. You're pressing on. And that takes work. And it takes work to do these things, to be tender-hearted, to be courteous, to not return evil for evil. It takes work on our parts. Peace just doesn't come as a natural thing. It takes work to achieve.

Now we do that by being like-minded but if we're like-minded with Satan as the author of our like-mindedness that's not going anywhere. We can't do that. Our like-mindedness should come from Romans 8 and verse 6. Let's go there, Romans 8 and verse 6. We have to have a certain kind of mind. And we're here at the Feast looking forward to the Millennium and we're here to practice that type of mindset, that kind of mind. Romans 8 verse 6, we are told—we know the Scripture—it says:

**Romans 8:6.** *For to be carnally minded [or fleshly minded] is death; but to be spiritually minded is life...* (KJV)

Guess what?

***Romans 8:6b. ...and peace. (KJV)***

Not only eternal life at the end of the road, but it gives us a peaceful life today, if we are spiritually minded. And we know what that spiritual mind is. Don't we? We know the Scripture by heart—Philippians 2 and verse 5. "Let this mind be in you." Remember? And what mind should that be? It was the same mind that was in Jesus Christ. So, if we are spiritually minded with the mind of Jesus Christ, then we will all be like-minded.

Now think about this. Christ is up here. We're all down here. We have the Democrats and the Republicans down here. We have the conservatives and the liberals. We have the people that eat anything and the people that eat health foods. And we have people that are well-educated and maybe never graduated from high school. And we have people that may be relatively well-off and people that struggle. And we have all—we're all different in that. We have different backgrounds. We have different ethnicities. We have different influences through our parents and our lives.

So, we're all down here in this gigantic mixture. And we have differences of opinions about different things based on our past, based on our DNA, based on who knows what of the influence of the world. But let's understand that Christ is right here. Now if we're going to be like Christ, that means we have to start coming to the center where Christ is and we need to rise above and get closer to Christ.

Now guess what happens if Christ is here and we're all intermingled down here? As we start becoming more like Christ, guess what we're doing? We're coming closer together. Aren't we? Because we're being more like Jesus Christ. That is what we should be doing as God's people. If we are spiritually minded, if we have the mind of Christ, we will be like-minded and, therefore, we will have peace. Don't ever forget that. We have to be spiritually minded with the mind of Christ. And if we do that, we will be like-minded and have peace in the Church.

Okay, the Fourth and Last One:

#### **IV. We must make the Church a place to prepare all of us to be the Bride of Christ.**

The Church should be the place that helps us become the Bride of Christ. It's like the school, or it's like the refuge where we can come out of the world and be together to learn more about how to be the Bride of Christ.

What did Christ say on the Sermon on the Mount? He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Righteousness is to be like Christ. He said, "They shall be filled." And we, as a Church, need to have that hunger and that thirst to be like Jesus Christ. That should be our goal every day. That should be our prayer every day.

And at the end of the day when we look back on the day and we reflect on the fact that "Boy, I wasn't like Christ here. And I wasn't like Christ there. And I didn't think like Christ over here." We repent and, as my good friend Harold Lee likes to say, "We get a do-over the next day." We get a chance to do it again. And we do. So, we can do better the next day to be like Jesus Christ.

The ministry has a job to do in this, yes, to prepare the flock to be the Bride of Christ. Let's go to Ephesians chapter 4, a very familiar Scripture. We'll read verses 11 and 12. The ministry has a job to do, indeed. And we take it very seriously. Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12 and it says:

***Ephesians 4:11.*** *And he [referring to Jesus Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV)*

Now, and I'm just speaking my opinion. In the past, in years going back into the 50s and 60s and so on, we viewed this as "ranks." But they're not. They're job descriptions. That's all they are—job descriptions. Peter said, "I'm an elder just like the rest of you." Now some have job descriptions of apostles. Some have job descriptions of prophets. Some have job descriptions of being pastors and others are good teachers. They're job descriptions.

But what is the point, what is the purpose for these job descriptions? Verse 12:

***Ephesians 4:12.*** *For the perfecting of the saints [to be more like Jesus Christ], for the work of the ministry [meaning these job descriptions are to help the ministers do their jobs], for the edifying of the body of Christ [the instruction, the teaching of the Body of Christ in order to become more like our Master, the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ]: (KJV)*

Now that gets us to a very important point. You ask the question, "What should a minister's main goal be? What should His overriding goal be? What is the overriding goal of a minister?" The Bible says very clearly. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. Paul says, "What is my hope? What is my joy? What is my crown? What am I trying to do?" in his job. He asked that question, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 19. He says:

***1 Thessalonians 2:19.*** *For what is our hope, [what is our] joy, [what is our] crown of rejoicing? (KJV)*

"What is the ultimate for us?" He says:

***1 Thessalonians 2:19b.*** *Are not even [you] in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (KJV)*

That should be the goal. The overriding goal of every minister is to assure everybody in the Body of Jesus Christ is there when Christ has the crowns and begins placing them on the heads of His people. And the greatest joy as a minister would be to watch a crown go on every member of the flock. None lost!

None fallen. None tripped up. And he says, "That's why we work. That's why we're here. That's why we be, so that we can at the end of the day watch the crown go on everybody's head." That should be the goal.

Not backing some organization. Not doing some kind of this or that, but looking at God's people who have been given to the shepherds by Jesus Christ with the goal of assuring as much as we can that a crown of glory goes on everyone's head. Preparing the Bride, that should be the goal.

But we all have a job to do—all of us. Now let's talk about our individual responsibilities in making the Church a place, a refuge to prepare the Bride. Let's go to Ephesians 4 and verse 16. We were in verse 12 a little while ago. We'll just jump to verse 16. Notice what this says, because sometimes we probably don't focus on this enough. Ephesians 4 verse 16, we're told:

***Ephesians 4:16.*** *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint [supplies], (KJV)*

Each joint, ligament, tendon, bone, all have functions.

***Ephesians 4:16b.*** *...according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, [makes] increase of the body [Notice this!] unto the edifying of itself in love. (KJV)*

So, this tells me anyway, that it's an individual responsibility of each of us to edify and lift up each other. This word "edify" is Strong's #3619 and Zodhiates says it means "a building up." And we have a responsibility to build up one another, and, thereby, build up the Body of Christ. In building up, we're helping each other prepare to be the Bride of Christ. We have an individual responsibility. Yes, the ministry has a responsibility. No doubt about it. But we all have an individual responsibility to make that happen.

We need to encourage one another to seek first the Kingdom of God. When we get—and we all do—we get so focused on the little twigs and branches, and nuts and bolts, that we lose the big picture that we're here to become like Jesus Christ. We're here to seek the Kingdom.

And sometimes it takes a good friend to grab somebody by the collar and "Bam. Bam. Bam." like that. And say, "Now wake up here! You're getting down here in the mud over here. Get the big picture. What's our big picture? Why are we here?" A friend can do a friend a marvelous service in that way.

We need to be so converted, we need to be so converted that others see Christ in us. What's the old saying? "I can't hear your words because your actions are drowning out your words." We need to focus on our actions and who we are and who we become. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 10. We need to be so converted, so much like Jesus Christ that others can hear our words or see our actions and they come to the conclusion that, "Hey, I just saw Jesus Christ. I just heard Jesus Christ." When somebody does something horrible to an individual

and they don't return evil with evil, but they return evil with good, you just saw Jesus Christ in action. 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 10, it says:

**2 Corinthians 4:10.** *Always bearing about in the body... (KJV)*

That means our body, our own individual bodies, and in the Body of Christ as a whole.

**2 Corinthians 4:10b.** *...the dying of the Lord Jesus [Christ], that the life also of Jesus might be made... (KJV)*

The King James says "manifest." It means "apparent."

**2 Corinthians 4:10 continued.** *...that the life of Jesus might be made [apparent] in our body. (KJV)*

The life of Christ! That means His thoughts, His words, His actions, how He treated other people, how He was free from sin, how He was not angry and condemning and all of that, how He forgave, and on and on and on. It tells us that the life of Christ needs to be manifest or apparent in our own bodies individually—individually. We need to make our conduct and our conversation godly, uplifting and inspiring.

And we have the opportunity to do that right here today, starting right after services for the next eight days and then for the rest of our lives.

So, let's summarize. As God is our refuge—we've established that. God ultimately is our only refuge—the Church also must be a refuge. God is the ultimate refuge, but the Church can be a refuge especially in these end times as Satan turns up the pressure on each one of us. And Satan is going to do everything he can to prevent the Church from being a refuge. And he's done, frankly, a pretty good job of it since the death of Mr. Armstrong and even before that.

We won't turn there, but in John chapter 10, Christ is talking about the sheepfold and there is a gate, the door. And the sheepfold holds the sheep and the sheep are peacefully in the sheepfold. And He says, "The thief who climbs in—he doesn't come through the door, but climbs over the wall of the sheepfold—comes to do three things. First, to steal, take them out of the sheepfold. Then, to kill, physically kill. Then, to destroy—that means to be wiped out forever. That's what Satan wants to do—steal, kill, destroy. Read that parable in John chapter 10 with that in mind. And we know Satan wants to do that. And he is pushing God's people and pressuring God's people. Let's understand that.

But it's up to each one of us to turn that around, and to thwart our Adversary, to make that sheepfold a place of refuge, a place of peace. And we've seen just a few things—I gave you four. You can think of many others of how we can do that. We've got to be free from sin and free from the influence of Satan and free from the influence of the world. We have to make the Church a place where God's people, the flock, are sheltered and fed and flourish. And then, we must

make the Church a place to prepare the Bride. And we must make the Church a place of peace.

So, here at the Feast, let's all redouble our efforts personally, each one of us. It's up to us, individually, personally to make the Church a refuge for every single member of it.

Now, let's turn with one final Scripture, Romans chapter 12 and verse 1. Here's how we do this. It takes work. Here's how we do it. Romans 12 verse 1, final Scripture, Paul says, he says, "Brethren:"

***Romans 12:1. I beseech you therefore, (KJV)***

And he says, "Brethren,"—all of us.

***Romans 12:1b. ...by the mercies of God, that [you] present your bodies a living sacrifice, (KJV)***

That's the opposite of being selfish. That's the opposite of just looking to what's in it for me. But a sacrifice for our brothers and sisters in the Church. He says, "Make it not a dead sacrifice." The animal's throat was slit. Now, it's dead. He says, "I want you to be a living sacrifice in your words, in your deeds, in your conduct, how you treat people, how you relate to Me. Do you love Me with all your heart? Do you love your neighbor as yourself?" Make your bodies a living sacrifice:

***Romans 12:1 continued. ...holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (KJV)***

The King James says, or "your reasonable way of serving God."

A living sacrifice to make the Church a true refuge, a place where God's spirit leads, where it flourishes, a place that is God-centered and Christ-centered and not man-centered. Not physically-centered. Not organizationally-centered. But God-centered and Christ-centered.

So, let's dedicate our time here at the Feast to make this happen. And it's up to each one of us to make it happen. Let's make this Feast a refuge for all of us—a peaceful, wonderful, friendly, kind, gentle refuge for all of us. And let's remain in our City of Refuge, the Church, until Christ returns.