

Three Periods of Choosing

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To begin this Feast, it's always appropriate to turn to Deuteronomy 16 and see why we're here. I know Mr. Armstrong used to ask, "Why are we here?" and it's a very appropriate question. We're going to read verses 13-15 and I'll be reading out of the King James unless otherwise noted.

Deuteronomy 16:13 *Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine:*

14) And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.

15) Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. (KJV)

One of the reasons we are here is to rejoice. To picture in our attitudes, our behavior and our words, a time that is yet to come; a time we yearn for. We're going to be spirit beings at that time hopefully, but we want the world to be at peace, as Dave was talking about in the sermonette. During the next 8 days, adding the Last Great Day, all of us are going to have choices to make. Every minute, every second, every hour, every day, during these next 8 days we have choices to make regarding what we think, what we're going to allow our mind to dwell on. What we say, what we do and how we treat each other during these 8 days. The reality of course is, since we've been called, our life is full of choices. Every day we make choices.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but in our Father's plan for the Firstfruits, there are three periods of choosing where either the Father and the Son do the choosing, or we do the choosing. Three time periods of choosing. What we're going to do this morning is examine these three periods of choosing to see who does the choosing and why they do the choosing. I'm not talking about specific choices to be made, rather I'm talking about times where choices are made—either in the spirit realm or with us in the physical realm. We're going to talk about these three periods of choosing and then relate them to the Feast of Tabernacles here in 2023.

So the title of the sermon is:

Three Periods of Choosing

We're going to cover it in four points.

1. The first time of choosing was in the beginning when our Father chose each one of us.

We didn't know Him then, but He knew us and He chose us. Let's go to Romans 8:28, one of the most famous scriptures in the Bible. We focus on the first part of this, and rightly so. This tells us that our Father does nothing for our harm. Whatever our Father does for us is for our good.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them [here's what we are focusing on] who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)*

Our Father at some point in time made a choice that He was going to call each one of us. We don't know when that choice was made, we don't know when the switch was flipped, we don't know how long before the time we were baptized that He began to deal with us and call us, but my suspicion is that it happened very early in our lives. Of course, we didn't know Him, we didn't even know He existed, in most cases. He made a choice; He made a decision as to whom He would call. With that in mind let's go to 1 Peter 2:9. Peter is writing. I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation.

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. [Picked out by name, by our Father] You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you [He made a specific choice to call each one of us] out of the darkness into his wonderful light. (NLT)*

He has called each one of us individually, by name. We cannot forget that—ever forget that calling. Let's go now to 1 John 4:19 because this brings home the point that the Father loved us long before we loved Him.

1 John 4:19 *We love him, because he first loved us. (KJV)*

He loved us, He called us, opened our minds to His existence and then gave us His Holy Spirit so that we could love Him back. In the Worldwide Church of God, when I came in, in the mid-60's, the focus was on obedience and not on love. I'm sad to say that I bet it was 5-10 years before I told God that I loved Him. I was in fear of disobeying Him and my image of our Father was more of a task master and not of a loving God. Thankfully that has changed over time. The point is, our Father knew us before we knew Him, our Father loved us before we came to love Him. With that in mind let's turn to Hebrews 9:15, this shows His love for us. He made the choice to call each one of us and we can't forget that. This is out of the New King James.

Hebrews 9:15 *And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death [meaning His death], for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (NKJV)*

This calling that our Father made before we ever knew He existed was to the end that we would have eternal life; an eternal inheritance in His Kingdom. For a final scripture under this first point let's go to John 10, the parable of the sheepfold. Jesus is speaking. We'll start in verse 11 to set the tone and then go back and read the first three verses and then end up in verses 27-29.

John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (KJV)*

That's the standard, that's the point He's getting across. Now back to verse 1.

1) *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. (KJV)*

There are plenty of thieves and robbers who have come into the sheepfold over the years, over the decades.

2) *But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*
3) *To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. (KJV)*

What a concept to think that the very Son of God, who is eternal and sitting on the right hand of His Father, knows each one of us by name. That blows my mind. That we, temporary human beings, are known by name by the very Son of God. Verse 27 I'll read out of the New King James.

27) *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*
28) *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*
29) *My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (NKJV)*

Concluding this first point, this is the first time of choosing and we see our Father does the choosing. He chooses us by name. He chooses those whom He wants to be part of His family, eternally in His Kingdom. Then He turns us over to His Son, the Good Shepherd and we are to follow in the footsteps of the example of that Good Shepherd.

2. The second time of choosing involves the Firstfruits—us, today. Since the Father has chosen us to become Firstfruits, now is our time to choose.

When I say choose, I'm talking about choosing by our conduct, how we behave, what we say, what we do, what we think; we choose by doing all of those. Adam and Eve chose for all mankind all those millennia ago. They chose to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and we have to do no more than look all around us and

see the fruits of that horrible choice that they made. Then, Israel had to choose after that. Let's go to Deuteronomy 30:15-19. Moses is addressing Israel.

Deuteronomy 30:15 *See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;*

16) In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

17) But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods [put something before Almighty God], and serve them;

18) I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou pass over Jordan to go to possess it.

19) I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore [you have the opportunity to choose life, please choose life] choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: (KJV)

And of course, we know, they didn't choose life. They chose their own way just like Adam and Eve did. They consistently made wrong choices. Let's go to Proverbs 1, where Yehovah is actually speaking. Proverbs 1:23-26 and 29-33. Yehovah is pleading with Israel and Judah and obviously with us today.

Proverbs 1:23 *Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*

24) Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25) But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26) I also will laugh at your calamity [because you brought it on yourself]; I will mock when your fear cometh; (KJV)

Verse 29.

29) For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear [the reverence] of the LORD:

30) They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

31) Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

32) For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

33) But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (KJV)

This is of course where we want to be. As we know, generally speaking, Israel did not have access to the Holy Spirit. We know the prophets did, we know certain kings did, but as a result, they refused their calling. They did not have the heart; they didn't have the spirit. Today, our Father has chosen us, but in contrast to Ancient Israel under the New Covenant, He has given us His very spirit to dwell in us. Remember Christ said in John 14 the night He was betrayed, "We will come and make our abode in you". What a miracle, what a phenomenon, what a blessing for us. Because of that, now we have our Father's spirit in us, He is allowing His children to choose and we do so by our conduct. What we say, what we do, what we think, and hopefully all of those are motivated by the spirit that is dwelling in us.

In my opinion, since the breakup of The Worldwide Church of God—hard to believe it's over 25 years ago now—converted brethren are freer to make choices. With the internet, there's all kinds of options available and there are all kinds of good things and not so good things available. I think a good analogy is, our Father is allowing us to file ourselves. What I mean by that is, if you can imagine a giant filing cabinet with hanging file folders in it and each one of those folders have labels on them. One label and one folder says "Back into the World". There are some people who have left the church of God and put themselves into the file folder of going back into the world; Christmas, Easter, New Years—we've known people who have done that. Another file folder might have a label on it of "Self-righteous" or "Judgmental". Our Father is giving us time to file ourselves. He's watching to see, "Are we going to wind up in the "Judgmental file", or the Self-righteous file"? Of course, there has to be a file that says,

"Loving, Merciful, Kind, Gentle, Generous"

and that's the file that we want to wind up in. It's determined by our conduct—what we think, what we say, what we do. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 11:18-19. Paul is writing and notice what he says, we're familiar with this.

1 Corinthians 11:18 *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions ... (KJV)*

The Greek word is *schisma* and we get our English word *schism*.

18 continued) ... among you; and I partly believe it.

19) For there must be also heresies [this is not an option, there will be, there must be] among you [we have to ask, for what purpose?], that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. (KJV)

The Greek word for *heresies* is Strong's #139, *hairesis* from which we get the English word *heresy*. It means—notice the definition—"a self-chosen opinion". There must be *self chosen opinions* among you. That is another way to define heresies.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says: *It's a choosing or a choice*. Thayer goes on to say: *Dissensions arising from diversity of opinion and diversity of aim*.

Then he quotes 1 Corinthians 11 that we just read. Dissensions must arise for a godly purpose, to make apparent who is approved. Who the approved are. The Greek word for *approved* that we just read is Strong's #1384 and we've talked about this many times before, it's the Greek word *dokimos*. If we were living back in those days when this was written, it was primarily used in coinage, when talking about money. Paul is using a word normally associated with money but applying it to behavior in the church and that is interesting.

Let me read a paragraph from Donald Barnhouse. He was an American theologian and pastor and he was actually an early radio pioneer. He was born in 1895 and died in 1960 and he's talking about this *dokimos*.

In the ancient world, there was no banking system that we know it today and no paper money. All money was made from metal. Heated until liquid, poured into molds, and then allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges that resulted from the mold. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely.

In other words, a coin designed to be "this" big now became "that" big and somebody kept the shavings.

*In one century, more than 80 laws were passed in Athens to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity who would accept no counterfeit money or shaved coins. They were men of honor who put only genuine, full-weighted money into circulation. Such men were called *dokimos*, or approved. They were approved money changers; they were approved bankers and the coins that they passed through their system were legitimate and approved as being of that particular value.*

So when Paul was using the term *dokimos* to apply to Christian conduct, he was saying our Father was watching to see if we will choose to behave in a manner that He approves of, that makes us a legitimate Christian—not a fake Christian. We choose every minute of every day whom we will serve. Every glance, we make a choice. Every thought, we make a choice. Every word, we make a choice. Every deed, we choose. Will we serve our Father or will we serve ourselves and then who is behind ourselves? Satan, motivating us to not serve the Father.

Here at the Feast, including today, we have 8 days ahead of us and we will make choices. What will we do if when we see somebody off by themselves? Nobody around them, they're just sitting there by themselves. Will we just walk on by or will we sit down and get to know them? What if we see somebody looking a little sad? Maybe they have received some bad news. We could just blow it off or we could go over and ask if everything is okay. You're looking a little down today and then find out. Or we could see a teen or a young person off by themselves—a little kid—and we could ignore them because they're a little kid or a teen or we could go over and get to know them and in doing so they would have a better opinion of our Father's church. We hear someone

whose money is a little tight for them this Feast. We could ignore it or go up and invite them to lunch or dinner. As I mentioned earlier, hearing that somebody is at home and can't be here—sick, too old to travel—and sign those cards. Or find their phone number and call them from the Feast and wish them a happy Feast.

Last night for those who were here, a phone was passed around with Skype with the Kenavans down in Australia. It was 9 am their time when we were having dinner here and people were saying “Hi” to them. They were all by themselves. What a wonderful idea that was. We choose what we do with the information we have. Do we just keep it to ourselves and do what pleases us or do we ask, what would Jesus do right now? What would the Father want me to do right now?

Let's look at a scripture—for time's sake we won't turn there—it's Matthew 25 and you know the scripture. Jesus is saying that He is going to come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him—I'm paraphrasing Matthew 25:41-46. He's going to separate the sheep from the goats; goats on His left hand, sheep on His right hand. Then He says to the sheep,

“Come with Me, I have a present for you. I have a reward for you.”

They don't understand and then He explains...

“When I was thirsty, when I was hungry, when I was a stranger, when I was sick, when I was in prison, you looked after Me, you took care of Me.”

They said... “We never took care of you.”

He said... “Yes, you did because, when you took care of the least of these My brethren, you did so to Me.”

Then He looked at the goats and said... “You're cursed and going into everlasting fire, the same fire the devil and his angels—the demons—will receive.”

They asked... “When did we do this to you? When did we ignore you? When you did it to the least of these My brethren.”

This is a very clear scripture that applies to God's children at all times, but particularly at the Feast since we're all together. All the actions of the sheep and the goats involved choices over time. God is so merciful, He gives us time, thankfully. In my case thankfully, decades, to get hit over the head and finally wake up and understand what He's trying to tell me. The actions that contributed to the end result for the sheep and contributed to the end result for the goats were choices made over time. During this second period of choosing, we're right in the middle of that. We're choosing our future, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. So, at this Feast, let's make the choices that the sheep made. Getting our minds off ourselves and looking after and caring about

other people, to make their lives better by the fact that we are here. That would be very pleasing to our Father.

That leads us to the third point. First the Father called us—He made the choice. Then we make choices in the lifetime we have on earth.

3. In the end, our Father and His Son make another choice.

I think you know where we're going with that. They make another choice of those He has called—are they goats? Do they go into the goat pen? Or do they go into the sheep pen? Let's go to Matthew 22:14, just one verse.

Matthew 22:14 *For many are called, but few are chosen.* (KJV)

The context is coming to the Marriage Supper, the marriage feast, without a wedding garment. Jesus is saying, there are a lot of people called and given the opportunity but few are chosen to enter into the Kingdom of God. Now let's go two chapters further into the book, Matthew 24 in verses 37- 41 and then verses 44 - 51.

Matthew 24:37 *But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

38) For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark ...
(KJV)

Scary thought for us today. Stuff going on like normal.

39) And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40) Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41) Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42) Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (KJV)

Things are going to be like normal and two people are going to be standing side by side and one is going to be taken and one is not. The definition for the word *taken* is Strong's #3880 and it has an interesting meaning. It means "to receive near". In other words, Jesus is taking someone to bring them near to Him.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says, *to take with oneself, to join with oneself to an associate or to a companion.*

Taking somebody to be His companion or to be an associate. Jesus said He's going to take some to be *near* Himself when He comes. Obviously, that has to refer to a spiritual resurrection. So we see that there is a time coming when those who are *dokimos* will be resurrected to join Jesus. There will be some left. The Greek for *left* is Strong's #863.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says: *To leave one by not taking him as a companion; to abandon or leave destitute.*

So, one is going to be taken *near* Jesus, the other is going to be *abandoned* and *destitute*. Pretty severe choices, right? Pretty severe consequences. None of us wants to be abandoned by our High Priest. None of us wants that. Going on in verse 44.

44) Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

45) Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? (KJV)

Verse 46 I'll read out of the New Living Translation.

46) If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward.

47) I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.

48) But what if the servant is evil and thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,'

49) and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk?

50) The master will return unannounced and unexpected,

51) and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (NLT)

Only our Father can do the taking. I hate to say it, but it's a tribute to the arrogance of man when some leaders in the greater church of God say, I'm going to pick who will be the bride of Christ. I've heard that said. "I'm going to pick who will be the bride of Christ." That's a tribute to the arrogance of man. We don't have the capacity or ability to do that. Only our Father and His Son do. It's interesting that every major taking, when one is taken and one is left, in the Bible it comes with supernatural intervention. You remember Lot fleeing from Sodom? Two angels literally dragged him out. Israel coming out of Egypt to all the miracles—the death angel, the Father in the front, the Son in the rear. Then in Acts 12 remember Peter was in jail and the angel came and opened the gates and the chains dropped off him? Let me read from Josephus in his book War of the Jews. He says this about angelic intervention:

Moreover, at that Feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the Temple [he's referring to the time of 70 A.D.] they said that in the first place they felt a quaking and heard a sound as of a multitude saying, "Let us remove hence." "Let's get out of here before the Temple is destroyed."

So, in this third period of choosing, our Father does the choosing. Not men, not the head of some physical corporation; our Father does the choosing. He will choose who will be the bride of His Son. That is His choice, not ours.

We've seen now there are three periods of choosing. In the beginning the Father chooses us, in calling us to salvation. Then we choose every day of our lives, while we're being judged. Then finally, the last period of choosing, the Father and the Son will choose once again who will be the Son's bride.

The fourth point, now we get down to the nitty gritty.

4. On what basis does our Father and His Son choose?

Who will be the bride of Christ? Who will obtain eternal salvation? Let's go to Luke 21:34-36.

Luke 21:34 *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

35) *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.* [It's going to be unexpected]

36) *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.* (KJV)

We're told, *Watch—that you can be accounted worthy*. The Greek word for *watch* is Strong's #69 and in The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates, says this about that word—he quotes this very scripture.

Spiritually to be watchful [We're not talking about watching Fox News] *and attentive to spiritual things*.

That's the meaning of the word. So many people have said, "I have to watch TV 8 hours a day so I can keep up on world events." No, that's not what it's talking about. We need to watch ourselves spiritually as to how we measure up to the image of Jesus Christ. Not talking about national news.

Then the Greek word for *worthy* is very interesting, it's Strong's #2661 and The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament again by Spiros Zodhiates says:

In the New Testament it means to be accounted worthy by the Father and His Son.

How are we accounted *worthy*? We have already talked about—it's how we conduct ourselves over time, what we think, what we say, and what we do. So, what is the purpose of our watching and praying? It's to become like the Son of the living God. To be counted worthy, to avoid all the horror that is coming our way.

Let's ask another question. Will God choose us just because we're in a certain group? Because we warm a seat in a certain group? If that's the case, then our main job is to

find the right group. Rather than make ourselves ready to be like Jesus Christ, we better start scurrying around trying to find the right group. Then we can do whatever we want as long as we're in the right group. That's not to say that being with the right group is important, because it is. We all have influence on one another and we have an influence in shaping one another. We want to be where there is a good influence of course, to be the bride of Christ. Our Father will choose because He only can know. He only knows our inner most character and thoughts. Humans can't know that. Let's go to Romans 11:33-34. For a human to say, I'm going to decide this or I'm going to decide that, in God's stead, needs to read this.

Romans 11:33 *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*
34) *For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*
(KJV)

Only the Father and His Son are qualified. Only they know our inner most heart. Humans are not. We won't turn there for the sake of time but in 1 Samuel 16 when Saul had disqualified himself from being king and Samuel is searching for the next king and he thought standing before the sons of Jesse, one by one he kept looking at their height, their stature, their tone of voice and how muscular they must have been, what a good soldier they might have been and Samuel says, surely this is the one. God says "No." "This one look good," and God says "No." Finally Yehovah whispers in his ear,

"You don't see what I see; you can't see what I see. Yehovah—I look on the heart, you don't. You can't see the heart. You can't see their inner most being. So go anoint this one over here—the last one, the youngest one out attending sheep."

Our Father is the only one who can know and we're trying to investigate what characteristics that we have to have to be deemed acceptable—*dokimos*—to Him. On what basis will He choose? We can discuss many perimeters. But in my 50+ years of being a minister, I've come down to three over the years. We're going to talk about them very briefly.

I think as we end our days, as we're getting older, these are the three most important that we need to focus on if we want to be in the Kingdom of Almighty God. The first, point A is:

4A. Faith and trust.

Not faith in a man; but trust in God Almighty. In Psalm 118, we won't turn there, in verse 8 it says, *It is better to trust in Yehovah than put confidence in a man.* We got away from that in Worldwide. The focus was on a man or a series of men or Headquarters or whatever the local condition was. The pastor I served under as an Elder, I moved into the area and asked him what he wanted me to do and he said, "I want you to focus the people on me and I will focus them on Headquarters". God wasn't in the picture. The

Father wasn't in the picture. *It's better to trust in Yehovah than trust in a man*, we're told. Let's go to Matthew 6:25-34, I know this is very familiar. The fact is, these words apply to us every day and we can get so wound up in all the little trials and tribulations of the day, frets and the bad news we hear every day, it can take our mind off these very substantial, very simple facts.

Matthew 6:25 *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"*

26) *Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* (NKJV)

Of course, we are.

27) *Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

28) *So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;*

29) *and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* (NKJV)

30) *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* (KJV)

We sometimes lose sight of that fact, don't we?

31) *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

32) *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.* (KJV)

The question is, do we really trust in that or do we rely on ourselves, or rely on men, or rely on the government to provide for us? Do we deep, deep down rely on our Father to provide for our needs?

33) *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

34) *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* (KJV)

We need to get to the basics of trusting our Father. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 5:5-10. I'll read this out of the NIV. Paul is making some very basic points.

2 Corinthians 5:5 *Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

- 6) *Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.*
- 7) *For we live by faith, not by sight.*
- 8) *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [Rather than fighting the fights we have day by day]*
- 9) *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.*
- 10) *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (NIV)*

Let's go back a chapter, 2 Corinthians 4:18, just one verse. I'll read this out of the New Living Translation.

2 Corinthians 4:18 *So we don't look at the troubles we can see now [tie ourselves up into little knots by focusing on the trouble we have now]; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen [the Father and His Son and Their Kingdom]. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (NLT)*

One of the keys of pleasing our Father is having total faith and total trust in Him, that He will provide for everything that we need. He will rescue us, He will save us, He will come to our aid whenever we ask.

The second big one, just in my experience:

4B. Humility

We should not be so arrogant to think that we have a lock on the Kingdom of God. I've already preached so many times, we're in the right place, we're going to be there. You're sitting here, you tithe to this corporation, you're going to be in the Kingdom of God. It doesn't work that way. Let's go to Proverbs 18:12. We all want to receive honor from our Father and think of this in reference to the Kingdom of God.

Proverbs 18:12 *Before destruction [if we're talking in reference to the Kingdom, this would reference the lake of fire] the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility. (KJV)*

Before the honor of being the bride of Christ, being in the Kingdom of God, is humility. The ultimate honor is to be in the Kingdom of God. Before that comes, humility must be present. Let's go to the very familiar scripture of Micah 6:6-8. I love it when in scripture a direct question is asked and a direct answer is given and it's unequivocal. You can't wiggle and twist out of these scriptures.

Micah 6:6 *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?*

7) *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

8) *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*
(KJV)

Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. If we are going to attain the Kingdom of God and going to please our Father in this life, humility is absolutely essential. We should know that selfishness will keep us from the Kingdom of God. Putting ourselves first will keep us from the Kingdom of God.

The third and last and you know where we're going before we go there because it's the most important of all.

4C. Love

Paul wrote in Romans 13 that love is the fulfilling of the law. Everything is wrapped around love. Let's go to Luke 10:25-28. Again, here's a direct question and an answer is given directly. Yet sometimes it's so easy for us to ignore these simple truths.

Luke 10:25 *And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? [This is the key question]*

26) *He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?*

27) *And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.*

28) *And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*
(KJV)

Not talk about it, not think about it, but do it. God's way is really so simple. There's a simplicity in Christ—we won't turn there, but it's mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:3—and it all boils down in our mind, "What would Jesus do here? What would He say? What would His attitude be? What would His approach be?" Another question is, "How would I want to be treated? I don't know how to treat this person. How do I want to be treated?" and then treat the person how you would want to be treated. Our Father is going to choose who has demonstrated that they are ready to be the bride of Christ. Meaning, Jesus would look on them and say, "*I recognize you as My bride because you are like Me. Same attitude, same thoughts, same emotions, same deeds.*"

Our Father will choose those who have demonstrated those who are ready. We find that process in Colossians 3:8-10. Ephesians 4 talks about it also. Colossians 3, Paul talks about how this process occurs to be ready to be the bride of Christ.

Colossians 3:8 *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.*

9) *Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;* (KJV)

That's the process—putting off the old carnal, selfish person.

10) *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him [Jesus] that created him [the new man]:* (KJV)

In other words, our model, the perfect example, is Jesus Christ so we have to walk in His footsteps. Our Father will choose those who have demonstrated over an extended period of time that they are ready to be the bride of Christ.

Let's conclude now. We've seen that there are three periods of choosing. The first period is that our Father has chosen us. In the beginning He chose, before we knew He existed. He loved us before we ever came to the point of loving Him. The second period of choosing, we make the choices to show Yehovah where our heart is. Will we put Him first? Will we love our neighbor at least as much as we love ourselves? He watches to see what we choose to do in the time He has allotted us. Then the third period of choosing is when He and His Son choose who will be His Son's bride and who will be sheltered from some of the evil to come.

We've seen also the three bases, in my mind anyway, that I try to emphasize of trust, humility and love. As we begin this Feast in 2023—who would have thought we would still be here, but we are—many of us are the walking wounded but still here. Let's think about these choices that we will make in this time and in this place over these next 8 days. Let's have the goal of showing our Father that we love Him above all else. That we love each and every one here in this room and we love those who are not able to be here in this room. We love all our brothers and sisters no matter what group they are with all over the world. Thereby, if we do that, we show Him that we want to be part of His family for an eternity. Would God choose somebody to be part of His family for eternity who is currently lobbying ICBMs at other people in the church, or other groups in the church? What are we demonstrating to our Father if we are showing hate or being judgmental toward others of His children. What we have the opportunity to do here at the Feast is to behave like Jesus Christ would. To show love to every brother and sister that the Father has called. If we do that, the Father looks on us and says, "They're ready to have eternal life; they're ready because they already love one another, there's no more training that has to be done, there's no more trials to put them through to teach lessons so they learn to put Me first and to love their neighbor as themselves". As we talked about in the beginning, as we read in Deuteronomy 16, we are here to rejoice. We are here to be happy and rejoice in one another's company. Let's rejoice too in the fact that we have decisions to make and that we can make them for the benefit of everybody here and during this Feast, we need to make it our goal to show our Father that we will put Him first, we love our neighbor as ourself and that we are ready to be the bride of His only Begotten Son.