

Is God for You or Against You?

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My grandfather, Cole Railston, was a very colorful cattleman and a rancher in central New Mexico. And he's written about in several history books, and of, course, I knew him as a little kid before he died. He was kind of a crusty, gruff, business-like grandfather. And frankly, he was not very affectionate to his children.

And at the table—I was told by my dad and my uncles; there were two boys and two girls—he liked to have the boys at his end of the table because they were within the striking distance. And if, in the conversation, any of the boys acted up, they got a backhand. And Dad said more than once he was knocked out of his chair over backwards and had to get back up and come back to the table. And my granddad was very straightforward in meeting out justice.

The cowboys called my Dad—they called him "the Judge" because he never said much. And he learned that around his father, my grandfather, because the less you said, the less trouble you got into. And, therefore, you preserved your life and health. And so, he didn't say much as a young boy. He would just sit quietly. The cowboys knew about judges and sat in courtrooms and judges tend to do that. So that's why they called my dad, "the Judge."

But my Dad had a short fuse on his temper. When he went off, he went off. And it just was an explosion that you did not want to be around. All he had to do was just bark at my brother and me and we hopped to and stopped whatever we were doing because we did not want to face his wrath. He struck fear into my brother and myself because we did not want to go nose to toes with my dad.

Looking back in your life, all of you have impressions of your father. Maybe your father was harsh or cruel or maybe he was distant. Maybe he just didn't have much to do with his kids. Or maybe for some of you, you didn't have a father. He just wasn't there. Maybe he left. Maybe he died. And so you grew up without the image of a dad.

And you might before conversion have had other experiences. Maybe you grew up in a "fire and brimstone" church. Maybe you can remember the preacher banging on the pulpit and yelling and screaming about God's wrath on those who disobey or the fact that God was just waiting for people to step out of line and the hammer was going to come down and He was going to smash them to smithereens. Many people in the early days of the Church came out of "fire and brimstone" churches.

And maybe in other areas of your life, you grew up in an environment where it was strict or harsh in that regard. When I went to Texas A&M, military school at

the time, the upperclassmen—sophomores particularly because they were freshmen the year before—were just waiting for you to screw up. Just couldn't wait for you to step out of line and they were on you like a tick on a dog. I mean they were yelling and screaming and the upperclassmen just took great delight in physically abusing and punishing the new freshmen. And so you grew up in that environment where you had the feeling somebody was looking over your shoulder just waiting. And, in fact, in some cases enjoying the fact that you screwed up and they were going to mete out punishment.

Then in the early days in Worldwide Church of God, the Church in many ways stressed God's wrath on mankind and stressed the tribulation and the subsequent human suffering. And I think we all remember the Basil Wolverton drawings of skulls being bulldozed by bulldozers into pits and skeletons of dead people just lying on the ground and all of that. And the Church stressed, obviously, obedience and God's wrath to the exclusion of God's love for mankind. And if you went through that for one or two or three decades, it has an effect.

And so if you put everything I've said up to this point altogether, all of that has an influence on how we look at God, how we look at our heavenly Father because our physical human father plus our church experience, plus our education, our upbringing, job experiences, all effect us in one way or another as to how we look at authority figures particularly our heavenly Father.

And some of God's people today, I'm telling you feel like they can never measure up in God's sight. That no matter what they do, God's not happy because they grew up in that environment! No matter what they did for their Mom and their Dad, it wasn't enough. They just never could please their parents.

And some in God's Church feel that God makes life for them an obstacle course. And that He sets up all of these obstacles that the Church member has to jump over and jump over and jump over. And God is just looking down and watching for them to fall and then to bring the hammer down in punishment because they screwed up.

And then others, maybe because they had a disinterested distant father feel that God has got so many other things to do, He's overseeing the universe, overseeing His overall plan, but He's so busy with that that He doesn't have time to pay attention to an individual, a singular Christian. Yes, we're part of His plan. Yes, maybe we're part of the firstfruits, but God doesn't really focus in on an individual Christian. He doesn't have time for it or maybe He doesn't have the love for it or maybe He's interested in bigger things and just doesn't have time to pay attention to us personally as human beings.

And many people feel, a number of people, misperceive God as harsh, cruel, distant, and uncaring. His Laws are there. His plan is there, but God personally they feel because of, as I said, their past, it's almost second-nature in a sense; it's almost subliminal in that sense that they just feel that somehow God is waiting for them to screw up and that He is too busy for any single individual.

Now the question we want to ask: Is this really true? Is this a correct perception? Or, on the other hand, is God the perfect loving Father that all of us wish we had had? Because all of our fathers are imperfect; all of us in this room our fathers are imperfect. But is God the perfect loving Father that we've always wanted to have and treats us as a perfect loving Father would treat us? Which is it?

So what we're going to do today in the sermon is investigate what God's Word, His own very Word, has to say and what it says on this whole subject. So if you want to put a title on this, we'll break it down in just the simplest level.

Is God for you or is God against you?

Is God behind you? Is God encouraging you? Is God your biggest cheerleader? Or is God against you waiting for you to screw up so He can eliminate the riffraff? And I've seen it in the Church where sometimes those in authority couldn't wait to eliminate the riffraff. And so, there again, that's another example of looking at authority.

So is God really for us? Or is God waiting for us to fail?

Now what we want to do is—we're going to have Five Points. And we're going to establish this out of God's Word. Not human opinion and not based on past experience!

And I had to come to grips with this probably fifteen years ago, maybe twenty years ago because I had a wrong view of God. My view was too shaped by my past. My view was too shaped by my father and my grandfather. And my view was too shaped by being in the military. And it took me, as I said before, "Slow learner that I am," about twenty-five years to get past this.

So let's establish the first point. Number One:

1. You are a special person to God.

Now I'm talking individually. You individually—male, female, it doesn't make any difference. You are a special person to God.

Now let's go back to the Old Testament and look at God's attitude toward Israel. We understand Israel didn't have God's holy spirit. We understand they were a physical nation called to receive physical blessings, but nevertheless they were His people until they broke the covenant and were divorced.

But let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 7. We're going to look at two Scriptures in Deuteronomy. Moses is summarizing all the years in the wilderness right before Israel went into the Promised Land. Let's turn to chapter 7 and we're going to read verses 7, 8 and 9. Now notice the attitude of God Almighty which we know is Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy 7 verse 7:

Deuteronomy 7:7. *The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because [you] were [the most] in number than any people; (KJV)*

They weren't the biggest, the brightest, or the best!

Deuteronomy 7:7b. *for [you] were the fewest of all people: 8) But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath [He was faithful.] which he had sworn unto your fathers, [has] the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9) Know therefore that the [Eternal your] God, he is God, the faithful God [keeping that covenant], which [keeps] covenant and mercy with [those] that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; (KJV)*

So He told Israel that He chose them because He loved them. Not because they were anything on a human level special. Not the brightest, not the most, not the wealthiest.

Now let's jump to chapter 32, the end of the book, and we're going to read verses 9 and 10. Notice what Moses says about God and His attitude toward the nation of Israel. We also understand that this has a duality because we are spiritual Israel as those people, ancient Israel, was physical Israel. Deuteronomy 32 verse 9, notice this:

Deuteronomy 32:9. *For the [Eternal, the] LORD'S portion is his people; (KJV)*

It isn't wealth! It isn't gold. It isn't silver. He says, "God's portion—the portion that God wants—are the people." Now that says volumes about God's attitude!

Deuteronomy 32:9b. *[His] portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. (KJV)*

That's what He's concerned about is the people.

Verse 10:

Deuteronomy 32:10. *He found him in a desert land [Israel—out in the middle of the desert], and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, (KJV)*

In other words, brought him out of that mess!

Deuteronomy 32:10b. *he instructed him, (KJV)*

Now notice this last sentence:

Deuteronomy 32:10 continued. *he [God] kept him [Israel] as the apple of his eye. (KJV)*

Now that's an interesting term or phrase—"the apple of his eye." That phrase is Strong's number 380 and it's a Hebrew word—one word—that means translated in English "the apple of his eye." And it means the pupil of the eye, the dark spot in the eye. And The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament says:

The pupil was considered the lamp or the light of life. Israel is depicted lovingly and caringly as the pupil of the LORD'S eye.

So much so that God is saying, "You're special to Me." In putting it in human terms, "You give Me life. I am devoted to you. I want you to have life. I want you to be My people. I want you to obey Me and I want to bless you."

And it's in a similar way that our children, our grandchildren are the apples of our eye. They bring joy to us. They bring just indescribable ... When you see your grandkids, you just kind of glow inside. Or you see your children running up to you, barely can walk. Little Hannah's just started walking and she's this baby doll that's running around. And you just have this joy inside when you see little kids having fun.

And God is the same way toward Israel and toward His people as we will see.

Now if that's the attitude of God to a physical nation with physical promises, what happens in the New Testament? Does that carry through into the New Testament? Let's go to 1 Peter 2 and verse 9 and see a very familiar Scripture. We need to understand this more and meditate on this more. 1 Peter 2 and verse 9, Peter is reminding the people a fact about God and Christ and Their relationship to us. He says:

1 Peter 2:9. *But [you] are a chosen generation, (KJV)*

Now we could stop here and go through all the Scriptures about our calling and how God chooses. He says:

1 Peter 2:9b. *[You're] a chosen generation [of people], a royal priesthood, an holy nation, (KJV)*

The King James says "a peculiar people". Now we've heard jokes in the past that yes, we are a little odd. And some of us are a little more odd than others. And that is probably true. But the New International says, "a people belonging to God." That's what it really means. "That you are a people belonging to God." Why?

1 Peter 2:9 continued. *that [you] should show forth the praises of Him." (KJV)*

Notice!

1 Peter 2:9 continued. *who [has] called you" [referring back to being a chosen generation] "out of darkness into his marvelous light. (KJV)*

And what we're being told here is that we are a people belonging to God that have been pulled out of this slimy society and have been set aside—again, not because we're any great shakes or as Israel was because they're more in number, but God loved us and is having mercy on us and is taking us out of darkness into His light.

Now with that in mind, let's go to 1 John chapter 3. We're going to read verse 1 and the beginning of verse 2. Another very familiar Scripture, but when you put them altogether, you get a picture. 1 John 3 verse 1:

1 John 3:1. Behold, what manner of love the Father [has] bestowed upon us, (KJV)

What John is saying, "We can't comprehend it!" It's just impossible to understand the depth of God's love for us. Just behold it. Look at it. Try to comprehend it.

1 John 3:1b. that we should be called the sons of God: (KJV)

I mean human beings alive on this earth today! We're all going to die. We all have a temporary chemical-physical existence, as Mr. Armstrong pointed out so many times. But he said that "we should be called the sons of God" as physical human beings in this life! "What kind of love is that?" He says.

1 John 3:1 continued. therefore the world doesn't [know] us, because it knew not [him]. (KJV)

It didn't know God, didn't know Christ!

Verse 2:

1 John 3:2. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, (KJV)

Now we understand that a good father, a loving father would do anything for his children. Not all fathers do that. Not all fathers have done that. And some of you have never experienced that but a good father would sacrifice his life for his children. And God is saying, "You are my sons. You are my daughters." And a perfect Father, as we're going to find out in a minute, did just that!

Now let's understand that the firstfruits are His special people, but we should not get puffed up about it. And I think sometimes in years past we did get a little puffed up about it. That "We're so special and I'm so good God called me. God recognized my goodness and so therefore, He called me. So that I can look down on all these other people in the world He chose not to call." We can't do that because 1 Corinthians 1 verses 26 through 29—we won't turn there—but "you know your calling, Brethren, how not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble have been called. And that the weak have been called to confound the mighty." So we can't get puffed up about it, but we can be overjoyed about it. We can be thankful about it that God looks upon us as a very special people, His firstfruits. But it's not because of anything inherently good or wise or powerful with us.

Let's go to Psalm 115 and notice something about God and how He views us as some very special people. We're going to read verses 12 and 13 of Psalm 115. This was true back then and is true today. Probably more so true today because of the society in which we live where there is so much evil and it's so easily accessible. Psalm 115 verse 12:

Psalm 115:12. *The LORD [has] been mindful of us: (KJV)*

Now that word "mindful" means just what it says. We have been on His mind! He has been thinking about us.

And any parents just have their children on their minds at all times. I don't care if they're little kids or they're adults. You have your kids on your mind. You worry about them. You think about them. You want to talk to them. And the same is true for grandchildren.

And we're being told here that:

Psalm 115:12b. *The LORD [has] been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. 13) He will bless them that fear the [Eternal], both small and great. (KJV)*

There is no respect of persons with God. We won't turn there—as a reference Romans 2 and verse 11 and Ephesians 6 and verse 9 and there are other scriptures. There's no respect of persons with God. And in His firstfruits, His called-out ones, we'll all in the same boat, which is a good boat. He loves every one of us. He doesn't love one more than another. He doesn't cut some people some slack and allow them an easier path than he does somebody else. What God is doing is preparing us all to be the Bride of Christ and giving us what we need so that we can change to become in the image of Jesus Christ and then we can marry Christ. That means we're all individual and we need different training, different experiences, different trials, different tests so that we can overcome and be at the same place when it's all over with and that's at the marriage supper.

So understand in Psalm 115 it tells us that God watches us. We're on His mind. He's concerned about us.

Let's go, a final Scripture under Point Number One, John chapter 10 and we'll read the first four verses and then jump to verse 14. This is the parable of the sheepfold. And we'll just get the context in the first four verses and then jump to the conclusion in verse 14. John 10 verse 1:

John 10:1. *[Truly,] I say unto you [Christ is saying], 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)*

And He's referring to Satan. He wants to kill, to steal, and to destroy in other parts of this parable. Verse 2:

John 10:2. *But he that [enters] in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3) To him the porter [opens]; and the sheep hear his voice: (KJV)*

Notice what it says here:

John 10:3b. *[He calls] his own sheep by name, (KJV)*

Now you can't get around—the only conclusion we can draw is that Christ is the Shepherd and He says, "I know My sheep by name." It's not just a gob of people and just potluck. He takes some. He calls. He deals. He encourages. He molds and shapes each one of us because He knows each us by name.

And He says:

John 30:3 continued. *and [He leads] them out. (KJV)*

He calls by name and they come out. Verse 4:

John 10:4. *And when he [puts] forth his own sheep, he [goes] before them, and the sheep follow him: [because] they know his voice. (KJV)*

They know the Shepherd's voice. They recognize when His voice is being spoken, when they read it out of the Bible or when they see somebody's conduct that would be Christ living in them.

Notice verse 14:

John 10:14. *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, (KJV)*

He just said He knows them by name! And He says:

John 10:14b. *[I] am known of mine. (KJV)*

This is an awesome revelation when you figure that Christ knows each one of us by name. He called us individually. He leads us individually in the sense that He structures our life, our tests, our trials, the good, the bad in order to mold us and shape us to be in His image. But it's a personal thing.

When I first came in the Church, the Worldwide Church of God was tens and tens and tens of thousands. And you look around and you're just kind of this little small cog in this gigantic wheel and how can God pay attention to all of us? And besides we were focusing on doing a work and preaching the gospel and all of this and we were just kind of foot soldiers that were down in the trenches and God couldn't recognize us. God wouldn't pay attention to us. He was paying attention to the evangelists and the people on television and radio and all of that, writing the articles, but didn't really pay all that much attention to each one of us. And it was a common perception.

These Scriptures say different and we need to make that part of us so that we recognize that and understand that.

So the First Point is:

I. Yes, we are a special people to God. Not because of our might, but because of God's mercy.

Point Number Two:

II. God sacrificed His Son for you and for me—each one of us!

He sacrificed Jesus Christ. He allowed His Son to die for each one of us. And it's a personal thing. We take Passover personally. We take Passover personally. We wash feet personally. And Christ died for us personally.

Now He sacrificed His Son for each one of us. Notice what is said to the Church in Romans 5 and we're going to read verses 8 through 10. Paul understood this. He's trying to get this across in this epistle to the Brethren at Rome, many of whom had come out of pagan religions. Romans 5 verse 8:

Romans 5:8. *But God [commends] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (KJV)*

That was true in that day. We could say, "Before we were ever born, Christ died for us!" Verse 9:

Romans 5:9. *Much more then, [now being] justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (KJV)*

Through that death and through that blood—each one of us saved from wrath! Verse 10:

Romans 5:10. *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (KJV)*

And individual salvation, an individual sacrifice! It only happens once. Christ doesn't sacrifice Himself twice for an individual. That's why once somebody turns and rejects God and rebels against God, there's no more sacrifice for that. But Christ died for us personally.

Now notice what Christ says, however, in Luke chapter 19 and verse 27. This is very telling and this is something we have to understand because the Protestant world and the Catholic world say, "Once you're saved, you're always saved. Once you accept Jesus Christ, then you can live any way you want. You can do whatever you want and you're saved." Luke 19 verse 27, Christ says:

Luke 19:27. *But those [my] enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, I want you to] bring [them here], and [kill] them [in front of] me. (KJV)*

Now what that tells us is that once we are called and once we accept Jesus Christ and acknowledge that He died for us—we do that at baptism—then we have a job to do and we have to live according to His Law. But if we refuse on down the road, if we refuse to have Christ rule over us, we don't want anybody telling us what to do, we want to do our own thing, then Christ says, "Okay, you're free to do that but the consequences are that, at some point, you will die. And I am going to watch you die because you wouldn't have Me rule over rule."

So we have to have this right balance. But in the early days of Worldwide, we ran away from God's love because it was Protestant. And many of us, most of us came out of the Protestant religion or the Catholic religion. And we were way off balance in overstressing God's wrath, but the fact is that at some point, those who won't have Christ rule over them are going to die. That's just a fact and we have to accept that.

But with that understanding, we have to realize that it's Christ's ultimate purpose *to save all mankind*! Not just the firstfruits, but all mankind, every one! The Buddhists, the Muslims, the Eskimos, the American Indians, all of the Africans, all of the Aborigines in Australia—every one Christ has in mind for them to be saved!

Look at John 3 and we're going to read verses 16 and 17, again a very familiar Scripture, but let's understand God and Christ's attitude toward the firstfruits as well to all of mankind. John 3:16:

John 3:16. For God so loved (KJV)

Not the Church, not the firstfruits!

John 3:16. For God so loved the world, (KJV)

And that includes this miserable world we're living in today!

John 3:16. ... that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [believes on] him (KJV)

Down through the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment Period, anyone who is willing to repent of what they have done and willing to change who they are and believe on Christ:

John 3:16. ... should not perish, but have everlasting life. (KJV)

Verse 17, this is something we need to understand.

John 3:17. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; (KJV)

Yes, this world deserves a lot of condemnation and yes, there's a lot wrong with this world, but that wasn't the purpose of Christ just to come and shout at the world and tell them how bad they were. His purpose was:

John 3:17b. *but that the world through him might be saved. (KJV)*

By a change of heart, by conversion, by the indwelling of His spirit! So let's understand that Christ's ultimate purpose in His sacrifice is to save everybody—firstfruits included.

One final Scripture here under this Second Point, let's go back to Psalm 149 and verse 4 and see Christ's attitude—the God of the Old Testament—toward His people, toward us today. Psalm 194 verse 4, notice this!

Psalm 149:4. *For the LORD [takes] pleasure in his people:* (KJV)

Just like parents take pleasure in their kids, watching their kids grow up, watching their kids make mistakes, watching their kids fumble with words.... Little Hannah was out before services and she went right down on her rump and then back over on her back and had this big grin on her face! And so you kind of watch that and just smile. You're taking pleasure—not in the fact that she stumbled and fell—but she's trying.

And so we're told here:

Psalm 149:4. *For the LORD [takes] pleasure in his people:* *he will beautify the meek with salvation.* (KJV)

That's obviously a key. So under this Second Point, let's understand that Christ gave Himself—and the Father had to watch it—for each one of us. So does that sound like a god that's out to get you? Does that sound like a god who is waiting for you to screw up so he can punish you? Doesn't sound like it to me.

Third Point—hopefully they build one upon another and follow in logical progression—is that:

III. God promises to take care of you and me—each one of us!

He promises to take care of us. He said that back in Isaiah chapter 41 in the Old Testament. He was talking to physical Israel, but let's understand we are spiritual Israel. Let's go to Isaiah 41 and we're going to read verses 8 through 10. He's addressing Israel and we should understand that it can be applied to spiritual Israel today. Isaiah 41 verse 8, Christ says:

Isaiah 41:8. *But [you], Israel, [are] my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.* (KJV)

Wouldn't it be wonderful to talk to God and have Him call you, "Friend"—or Christ—and say, "Friend"? Because that's the way He views us. He told His disciples that. "You're no longer My disciples, you're My friends." He said that the night He died.

Verse 9:

Isaiah 41:9. *[You] whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called [you] from the chief men thereof, (KJV)*

Meaning: from out of the high and the mighty.

Isaiah 41:9b. *and said unto [you], [You are] my servant; I have chosen [you], and not cast [you] away. 10) Fear [you] not; for I am with [you]: (KJV)*

In the world that we live in we need to understand that! No matter how bad this world gets, we have to fear not because God is with us!

Isaiah 41:10b. *be not dismayed; for I am [your] God: I will strengthen [you]; [yes], I will help [you]; [yes], I will uphold [you] with the right hand of my righteousness. (KJV)*

We have several people that have their lives on the line—Carol Schmidt and Jason Scher and Veva Eichler. And the list goes on and on and on. And you talk to each one of them and they know this. They understand this! God is with them. They're in God's hands and they're not scared and they're not worried because God promises to take care of us.

That's not the way it is in the world. And that's not the way it is in our human experience. Let me give you an example.

In the military—for those of you who have been in the military you understand this—that all the soldiers in the military, airmen, seamen, soldiers, we're all expendable. Absolutely expendable! And we had Veteran's Day this past week and many stories were told about experiences in the war, particularly World War II as those men are dying out very rapidly.

But to just give you one example: The Eighth Air Force was in Britain during the dark days of 1943. And this was a very bad time. Hitler was on a rampage and he conquered Western Europe and was threatening—bombing Britain in the Blitz. And the United States sent airmen over and formed the Eighth Air Force to begin a bombing campaign against Germany.

And the British at that time were flying bombing missions at night. And they would go bomb into Germany at night because that was the safest time to do it. And Luftwaffe and technology at that day, you didn't have the ability as a pilot of a fighter to go fly at night and fight at night. If you couldn't see them, you couldn't shoot them. And radar was in its infancy. And so the night was safe.

But the U.S. took on the task of bombing Germany in the day. The Eighth Air Force was tasked with that. They would go and precision bomb German factories and munitions and railroad facilities and marshalling yards and oil refineries. They would bomb them during the day. At that time, the Luftwaffe was the most powerful air force in the world! And the problem was that there were no long-range escort fighters at that time. The fighters could only take them

a few hundred miles into France and then they had to turn back because they didn't have enough fuel. So the bombers, after the first leg of the trip, were on their own!

And the bomber pilots, the crew, many of the officers felt that this was absolutely suicidal. But everybody also understood that Germany had to be defeated and the only way you're going to defeat them is to deny them of their war-making capability and deny them of producing munitions for war. And so the U.S. began doing so.

And in 1943 in that summer and on into the fall, they suffered horrendous losses because the Luftwaffe waited until the escort fighters turned back and then came after them with a vengeance. Many missions of these young men—and they were all teenagers and early twenties—many missions they lost thirty to forty percent of all of the planes in the air on one mission. Now you think about that! You're taking off today and there's hundreds of bombers—dozens in the beginning, then later hundreds of bombers—and you know that twenty, thirty, forty percent are not going to land in a few hours. They're not going to come back.

The worst was called by historians as "Black Thursday". That was October 14 of 1943. That was sixty-seven years ago last month. It's hard to believe it's that long. But it was a raid over Schweinfurt, the ball-bearing factory in Schweinfurt. They lost in that mission—sixty-five bombers and there's ten people to a bomber—650 crew in one mission! And over that whole period of time in World War II, seventy-five percent of the crews did not make it to their twenty-fifth mission. You could go home after twenty-five missions. Seventy-five percent of the crews did not make it to twenty-five missions. They were either dead; they were wounded; or they were in captivity in a German concentration camp.

And in fact—most people don't know this—that in the few months of 1943 that we were just talking about, the U.S. Air Force lost more men than the Marines did in the entirety of World War II. Now think about that! All of the Pacific campaigns—all that! In just a few months, six months or so, in 1943 the Air Force lost more soldiers than the Marines did in the entire war.

Now all of those men were expendable. And they knew it! They went out knowing that a great number of them weren't going to come back, but they also—to their credit and that's why we honor them—is they had a mission to perform and they were going to go do it!

Now that's the way it is with the world. Men, humans, individuals are expendable. It's that way in business. It's that way in the military. They're expendable.

But we have to understand it is different with God. God is not that way!

And yet for those in the military, you realize you're expendable and it's easy to transfer that idea to God and say, "Well, you know I'm just a grunt. I'm just a soldier in a trench. God doesn't really care that much about me as an individual

as long as the greater purpose comes to pass." We can say that based on human experience because the United States says, "The losses are acceptable as long as the overall goal is reached." And we can apply that to ourselves. And that is wrong! God does not deal with us that way!

Let's go to Luke chapter 15. Let's apply this Scripture to what we just talked about in World War II and see the difference. Luke 15, we're going to read verses 3 through 7. Christ again is teaching with a parable. And He's teaching us that no one is expendable. Luke 15 verse 3:

Luke 15:3. *And he [Christ] spoke this parable unto them, saying, 4) What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he [loses] one of them, [does] not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he [finds] it? 5) And when he [has] found it, he [lays] it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6) And when he [comes] home, he [calls] together his friends and [his] neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me [Be happy with me. Have a party with me]; for I have found my sheep which was lost. (KJV)*

So Christ then turns it to the Church in verse 7.

Luke 15:7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that [repents], more than over ninety-nine just persons, which [don't need] repentance. (KJV)*

That says that every time we repent every time we turn, there is joy in heaven for an individual occurrence for an individual Christian! And one is not expendable! Ninety-nine aren't expendable! In World War II, everybody was expendable, but with God, no one is expendable!

And then if you go on in the chapter—we won't take the time—but verses 8 through 10 talks about losing one coin out of ten and a great rejoicing when the coin is found. And therefore in heaven—drawing an analogy to God's people—a similar occurrence that we just read about. And then verse 11 and on talks about the prodigal son who turned around. And how the father embraced him and threw this gigantic party because this sinner repented and turned and changed.

So no one is expendable with God. And let's understand that. He is looking after each one of us individually, wanting us, pleading with us, encouraging us, helping us through trials and tribulations, yes, to be the Bride of Christ.

Now let's jump back now to Matthew chapter 7. Let's understand this. God is willing and ready to take care of us and to give us what we need. Not what we want necessarily, but what we need. Matthew 7 verse 7, very familiar Scripture again:

Matthew 7:7. *Ask, and it shall be given [to] you; seek, and [you] shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (KJV)*

Do you think for a minute if God heard one of His children saying, "Please give me more of Your spirit. Please give me more of Your love. Please give me more patience and kindness and gentleness and goodness," do you think He would say, "No" to that? Obviously not!

Look at verse 8:

Matthew 7:8. *For every one that [asks receives]; and he that [seeks finds]; and to him that [knocks] it shall be opened. 9) Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, [would] he give him a stone? (KJV)*

You know kind of laugh and give you a stone when your stomach is in a knot because of hunger! God doesn't work that way. When you're hungry, it's a need. It's not a want. It's a need.

Verse 10:

Matthew 7:10. *Or if he ask [for] a fish, will he give him a [snake]? 11) If [you] then, being evil, (KJV)*

And we have human nature which is evil. And we have Satan's influence which is evil. And we have the world's influence which is evil.

Matthew 7:11. *If [you] then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father [your perfect Father] ... in heaven give good things to [those] that ask? (KJV)*

God promises to provide for every one of our needs. Every one of them! And I know sometimes, in the middle of a trial, it's hard to realize that, but God does. And the trial is for us and it's for those around us to help us grow in compassion and love and care for one another. When one member suffers, we should all suffer.

So let's understand under this Third Point:

III. God promises to take care of us. He promises to provide for our needs.

That leads now to the Fourth. As we asked in the title, the Fourth Point is:

IV. God is not out to get you!

He doesn't take some perverse kind of pleasure in smashing us. God is not like some of us when we were kids to take a magnifying glass and focus the light of the sun and burn ants, or to pull the wings off flies. Kids have done that.

And God is not that way! God doesn't do that! Look at Isaiah chapter 54 and we're going to read verses 5 through 10 and then jump to verse 17. Isaiah 54 verse 5, does this sound like a God that's out to get us? Does this sound like a God, Jesus Christ, who was willing to sacrifice Himself for us? Isaiah 54 verse 5:

Isaiah 54:5. For [your] Maker is [your] husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and [your] Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; (KJV)

This is a hint of Christ being the God of the Old Testament because there's only one Redeemer. That's Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 54:5. The God of the whole earth shall he be called. 6) For the [Eternal has] called [you] as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, (KJV)

Yes, many of us when we were called, we were forsaken and grieved in spirit.

Isaiah 54:6b. and a wife of youth, when [you were] refused, [says our] God. 7) For a small moment have I forsaken [you]; (KJV)

And, yes, He did with ancient Israel because they broke the covenant; because there was a divorce. And so in the terms of eternity "for a small moment" God walked away from Israel to teach them lessons.

Isaiah 54:7b. but with great mercies will I gather [you]. (KJV)

During the Millennium and the White Throne Judgment time. Verse 8:

Isaiah 54:8. In a little wrath I hid my face from [you] for a moment; (KJV)

The Tribulation! God doesn't rescue them in the Tribulation. They have to go through that. But notice!

Isaiah 54:8b. with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on [you], [says] the [Eternal your] Redeemer. 9) For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be [angry] with [you], nor rebuke [you]. (KJV)

Verse 10:

Isaiah 54:10. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from [you], neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that [has] mercy on [you]. (KJV)

Physical Israel and spiritual Israel!

Verse 17:

Isaiah 54:17. No weapon that is formed against [you] shall prosper; (KJV)

What a relief!

Isaiah 54:17b. and every tongue that shall rise against [you] in judgment [you are going to be able to] condemn that]. This is the heritage of the

servants of the [Eternal], and their righteousness is of me, [says] the [Eternal God]. (KJV)

God is not out to get His people. He is not out to get Israel. He's not out to get the world. He wants all to come to repentance.

Notice what David says in Psalm 103. Notice what he says. We'll skip through this psalm—just a half a dozen verses. Psalm 103, we'll begin in verse 2. Notice what David says, a man who had been through so much, much of his own doing. Verse 2:

Psalm 103:2. *Bless the [Eternal], O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: (KJV)*

Verse 3:

Psalm 103:3. *Who [forgives] all [of your] iniquities; (KJV)*

And a lot of us have in our lives have had awful sins, but He says, "I'll forgive every one of them!"

Psalm 103:3b. *who [heals] all [your] diseases; (KJV)*

Verse 10:

Psalm 103:10. *He [has] not dealt with us after our sins [Thankfully!]; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. (KJV)*

That's a promise! That's a statement of fact. God does not come after us according to our sins because none of us would be here if that was the case!

Verse 11:

Psalm 103:11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12) As far as the east is from the west, so far [has] he removed our transgressions from us. (KJV)*

Some of us have a hard time understanding that and believing it. I do because I look at myself and how many times I have failed and fallen and come short and sinned. And I go to God and I say, "How can you forgive me of all this?" And yet He promises to do just that! And so, obviously then we should do that toward one another.

Verse 17:

Psalm 103:17. *But the mercy of the [Eternal] is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, (KJV)*

That's our responsibility—to fear God!

Psalm 103:17b. and his righteousness unto children's children; 18) To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (KJV)

And it is true no matter what our previous life has been. It is true no matter what we did yesterday. That if we repent and turn to God, God is very quick to remove our sins from us.

And He is not out to get us! Does this sound like a God who wants to hold our sins over our heads for an eternity? I know husbands and wives do that to each other. They hold out what happened ten or twenty, or thirty years ago. My mom did that to my dad. To the day of her death, she could remember his shortcomings and was fairly vocal in telling him so. And yet, God says, "I don't do that to you. I'm not going to do that to you." We shouldn't do it with each other.

Now let's go to Lamentations. We don't often go there. It's between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Lamentations of Jeremiah and we're going to read a few verses in chapter 3 of Lamentations. It talks about God's nature. The fact, that we're going to see in another Scripture, that He's not out to get us. He doesn't take some perverse pleasure in punishing us. Lamentations 3 verse 22:

Lamentations 3:22. *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, (KJV)*

And boy is that ever true! It's God's mercy that we're not consumed:

Lamentations 3:22b. *because his compassions fail not. (KJV)*

Verse 23:

Lamentations 3:23. *They are new every morning: great is [Your] faithfulness. (KJV)*

God in that sense, if we look at it, gives us a do-over every day. We screwed up yesterday. It's a new day today when we get up. And we have an opportunity to change what we did yesterday. In that sense, we get a do-over. In many cases in this world, you don't get a chance for a do-over, but God gives us that opportunity every day!

Verse 31:

Lamentations 3:31. *For the Lord will not cast off for ever: 32) But though he cause grief, (KJV)*

Sometimes we have to go through pain and suffering to learn a lessons.

Lamentations 3:32b. *yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. (KJV)*

Verse 33:

Lamentations 3:33. For he [does] not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men [willingly]. (KJV)

He does it for our good and for our benefit and that's one of the things we have to learn when we go through trials and troubles is that we're in it for a reason. There is a purpose—sometimes for ourselves, sometimes for those around us, sometimes for the Church itself.

Now let's go to one of my favorite passages in the Bible. And I think we can all put ourselves in this position. It involves a woman, but we've all been there. We have all been there. Let's go to John chapter 8. If this doesn't show that God loves us and isn't out to get us, isn't out to condemn us, I don't know what Scripture does. John 8, we'll read the first eleven verses.

John 8:1. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. 2) And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. (KJV)

Big crowd! A lot of people around! The religious leaders of the day were all around because they had a set-up going.

John 8:3. And the scribes and [the] Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the [middle—in the middle of this big group; Christ was in the middle.] 4) They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. (KJV)

Kind of makes you think about how that all came into play. But nevertheless she committed adultery in the act. There were witnesses. And she was now there in front of Christ. Verse 5:

John 8:5. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such [a person] should be stoned: but what [do You say]? 6) This they said, [testing] him, that they might accuse him. (KJV)

She was just a pawn in the whole deal.

John 8:6b. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he [didn't hear] them. 7) So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone [on] her. 8) And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. (KJV)

You know speculation; it's not a long stretch that He's writing their sins on the ground in the sand, one by one, name by name.

Verse 9:

John 8:9. *And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning [with] the eldest, even unto the [least]: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the [middle]. (KJV)*

Just the two of them! The whole crowd left. Just the two of them!

John 8:10. *When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are [your] accusers? [Has] no man condemned [you]? (KJV)*

And then she knew something was going on; that this was no common man, and "She said, No man, Lord." Now Jesus could have ripped into her as being an adulteress, a whore, or whatever. He could have just run roughshod over her. And that happened a lot back in the Worldwide days. And I've been ripped up one side and down the other.

And when you look at this example, this tells us that's not the way to handle it because look at Christ's attitude. He says, "I don't condemn you either. I'm not going to gossip about you. I'm not going to talk behind your back. I'm not going to remind of you this six months from now. I'm not going to hold it over your head for the rest of your life." He said, "The only thing I want you to do is go and don't do it again! Don't do it again. God will forgive you. I will forgive you."

And we need to understand that that's the mind of Christ! No matter what we've done, no matter how bad it has been, no matter how much we kick ourselves—and I'm speaking to myself more than anybody—no matter how much we kick ourselves, Christ said, "Look! Pick yourself up. Learn from your mistakes. Don't do it again! And I am not condemning you as long as you make progress, as long as you walk down the path toward salvation." Now you turn around and go the other way, then He says, "I'm going to watch you die in front of Me." We read that earlier. But this is Christ's attitude.

This clearly illustrates that Christ is not out to get us! The Father is not out to get us! All He wants is for us to love Him with all our heart and to obey Him with all our heart by our intent. Not to obey because we want to get something, but to obey because we want to please our loving heavenly Father and Jesus Christ!

So let's understand this Fourth Point that God is not out to get us. In fact, it is just the opposite.

The Fifth and Final Point is that:

V. God wants you, wants me to have eternal life in His Kingdom. That is the goal!

Not to pull wings off flies. Not to burn ants with a magnifying glass, but to shape us and mold us so that we can be fit to marry His Son and to be eternal in His Kingdom.

Look at 1 Timothy 2 and verse 4. We're going to cover three Scriptures that say the same thing in different words, but we cover all three because we need to understand that this is God's attitude. It is very important to understand that God wants all to be saved—blacks, whites, yellow races, red races. It doesn't make any difference—all different religions, all different creeds, and clans. 1 Timothy 2 and verse 4:

1 Timothy 2:4. *Who will have all men [women, mankind] to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (KJV)*

Everybody will be given that opportunity! Therefore sooner or later, everybody's going to be our brothers and sisters. And I made the point a while back that we can't hate our brothers and sisters no matter who they are! We can't hate mankind. They're deceived just like we were deceived before we were called. So who are we to hate them who are going to be our brothers and sisters in a few short years.

Now he said that to Timothy. Look what Peter says in 2 Peter 3 verse 9, talking about promises that Christ, the Father have made. Verse 9, 2 Peter 3:

2 Peter 3:9. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; (KJV)*

We've all been promised. Our fathers have promised. Ministers have promised. Bosses have promised. Husbands and wives have promised and have gone back on those promises, but we can't equate that to our Father. We can't equate that to Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:9b. *but is longsuffering toward us, (KJV)*

Now the word for "longsuffering" is Strong's 3114. And it means to have long patience or to patiently endure. And sometimes I'm sure God shakes His head at us and He's enduring our mistakes and our sins and our foibles and our faults, wanting us to change and giving us time to change.

2 Peter 3:9b. *but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (KJV)*

An analogy would be like us demanding that our children walk perfectly within the first week of them getting on their feet for the first time. That's not going to happen. And you can't expect perfection out of a little child that's just learning to walk.

The same with us! Our conversion doesn't mean that we just wave the wand and everything changes overnight. God gives us decades to change and He patiently helps us along the way. That's not an excuse for us to slack off, but the fact is, in God's view which is an eternal view, He looks at our beginning, He sees out toward our end, and He sees where we are. No, we're not perfect yet, but He is longsuffering and patient toward us if we pick ourselves up through His spirit, dust ourselves off, ask for forgiveness and then go on down the path that we

should be going on. He is longsuffering and He doesn't want any to perish! Does that sound like a God that's out to get you?

Final Scripture under the Fifth Point is Luke 12 and verse 32. God doesn't reluctantly give us the Kingdom. God gives us the Kingdom with joy. What a time when the Kingdom is given to the saints! Luke 12 and verse 32, we need to understand the first part. He says:

Luke 12:32. *[Don't be afraid], little flock; (KJV)*

We're a little flock, tiny little flock.

Luke 12:32b. *[Don't be afraid, He says] ... for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (KJV)*

That's God's goal and He does it with pleasure and joy and happiness to give us the Kingdom. And if you've been in a situation where one of your children marries somebody that you highly admire and highly approve of, that is a joy to know your child is being married to the right man or the right woman. And in our case, God's children are going to be married to His Son. And then He knows everything is alright. So can anyone doubt that God loves us with a perfect love and wants us to be His children? I don't think we can doubt that. And I've only covered a thimbleful of the Scriptures that relate to this subject.

So we have seen the following—let's just kind of summarize—that you individually, you, me are a special person to God. We're in a special category. Not because we're better than anybody else, but because of God's mercy and His love for us. God sacrificed His Son. Christ willingly gave up His divinity, His eternal life, to sacrifice Himself for us. God promises to take care of us and watch after us. And God is **not** out to get us! And He wants us to have eternal life in His Kingdom.

Now let's understand that God's love and Christ's love is stronger than any force in the universe! Let's go to Romans chapter 8 and we'll have two verses in closing. Romans chapter 8, we're going to read verses 31 through 39. Paul asked the question:

Romans 8:31. *What shall we then say to [all] these things [that he said previously]? If God be for us, (KJV)*

You know the eternal Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ and God the Father if they are for us:

Romans 8:31b. *who [on earth] can be against us? (KJV)*

What human can be against us?

Romans 8:32. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us (KJV)*

Meaning: for our benefit, for our good.

Romans 8:32b. *how shall he not with him also freely give us all things [eternal life in His Kingdom]? (KJV)*

Verse 33:

Romans 8:33. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect [the firstfruits]? It is God that [justifies]. (KJV)*

It's God who takes us from sinners in slime and wallowing like a pig in its slop, pulls us out, and sets us apart. That's what justification means—to be set apart and have your sins washed and your sins forgiven.

Verse 34:

Romans 8:34. *Who is he that [condemns]? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also [makes] intercession for us. (KJV)*

Meaning: individually. Because Christ knew what it was like to be tired. Christ knew what it was like to be in pain. He knew what it was like to be discriminated against and accused and gossiped about. He knew all of that. In that sense, He goes to the Father and says, "This is what I felt when I was on the earth and this is what she's feeling right now or he's feeling right now."

Verse 35:

Romans 8:35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (KJV)*

Who can do that? Nothing can do that is what he's saying. He says:

Romans 8:35b. *shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (KJV)*

And Paul had been through all of those himself. Verse 36:

Romans 8:36. *As it is written, For [your] sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (KJV)*

We're willing to sacrifice ourselves for what we believe and we're willing to do so knowing it would be part of God's plan. God would allow it just like He allowed Christ to die. Not that we're expendable! But it's for a reason, for a purpose.

Verse 37:

Romans 8:37. *[No], in all these things we are more than conquerors through (KJV)*

What?

Romans 8:37b. him that loved us. (KJV)

We can't forget that!

Romans 8:38. *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (KJV)*

Of a physical nature or a spiritual nature—that means we have power through God and Jesus Christ, we have power over demons, over Satan, over this world if we call on God and call on Jesus Christ.

Verse 39:

Romans 8:39. *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (KJV)*

And so we're told here that Christ and God love us with this love. We're told that nothing can separate us from that love except us, of course, if we turn and go the wrong way. But the fact is that it's up to us. It's in our hands. And if we continue following in that path, that means we're following in the love of the Father and the Son and nothing will separate us from that love.

One final Scripture, we're going to close in Psalm 56. David is speaking here in Psalm 56. We're going to read verse 11 and then jump up to verse 8 and 9. Psalm 56 verse 11, David says:

Psalm 56:11. *In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid [of] what man can do unto me. (KJV)*

And we're going to be in that position. We're going to be placed in that position. We're in that position now is that men are going to do a lot of things to God's people. Men are going to threaten a lot of things to God's people. And we have to put our trust in God and therefore, we need not be afraid.

Verse 8, David says:

Psalm 56:8. *[You tell] my wanderings: [You put] my tears into [Your] bottle: (KJV)*

Now that tells me that when we cry—and we've all cried, we've all been down on our knees in tears—we're being told that God is so focused on our tears, on our situation, on our crying, on what is disturbing us that He can count the tears individually! If He knows the hairs on our head, it's not a stretch to say He knows how many tears we've shed either. And David said, "You know that! In fact, they're in Your bottle."

Psalm 56:8b. *are they not in [Your] book? (KJV)*

Meaning: He keeps a record of it!

Verse 9, I'll read out of the Revised Standard Version.

Psalm 56:9. *Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call.*
This I know, that God is for me. (RSV)

Now we cannot forget that! No matter what the trials, what the tribulations! When we get down or we get depressed, when we feel overwhelmed by the world and the life that we're going through and the trials that we might be presented with at any given moment, we have to remember that these Scriptures—all of these Scriptures, and there's many, many more—we must remember them and conclude absolutely without any doubt that:

God is for you!