

Continuing this Sabbath we are going to go on today with *Part 4* of the sermon series entitled *The Way of Peace*. I want to pick up from where we left off last Sabbath.

Last Sabbath we'd just finished reading some verses in Colossians and I'd like to go back and just read those last few verses that we were reading at that moment and we'll just continue on from there because there's something I need to pick up in those verses that we didn't get a chance to get to at that point in time.

Colossians 3:12 – Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies... over and over again God's word is so powerful if we'll just receive it in that light; but how we receive it and how we're able to receive it is really dependent upon our relationship with God...as to God's strength and God's spirit in our life and how we are able to drink in of things like this. To understand the importance of something like this; **bowels of mercies...** it's your insides: it's like this emotion, this feeling that comes so deep inside of you in your relationship with others. *Because this is about relationships*; this is about how you think about other people.

And 'mercies' is a very powerful thing here when it's talking about this; **bowels of mercies**; that which comes from inside; that *this should be a powerful influence in your life in how you treat people and how you think toward people* – willing to be merciful. Not being so quick to see justice met out, "That wasn't fair; that's not right!" and wanting to see retribution on someone, or willing to say something and ready to jump onto them for something they've done wrong. But instead, the other side of it that's willing to give time for people to change and grow; or just give space to help someone calm down, not to *add* fuel to the fire. Because that's what most people do in the world. Something happens, you take offence, and you just add fuel to the fire, you throw more into it and make it *worse*! And it's *the opposite* of producing peace.

So God has laws that He's given to us to show us how to bring about peace, what produces peace; and that's God's great desire. It *is Jerusalem!* That's a beautiful word and I hope that word means *more* to us now than it's ever meant to us. It's beautiful; it truly is. Not by accident was it given, but by *design* that name was given to a city; but it means so much more. And as we draw closer to a time that God has worked for so long to bring into existence, a time of peace for this earth; working up to a greater time of peace beyond that; and then the fullness of peace for eternity even beyond that. It's an awesome thing to understand. And so God desires that we focus on this more at this time as we enter into this final phase of what God is doing on this earth just before His Son returns and before 144,000 return with Him.

And so again, **bowels of mercies...** put yourself to the test. Is this how you respond to people in life when things flare up, when things happen around you? A willingness, a desire to extend mercy? It's a very powerful attribute, a beautiful attribute to have.

...**kindness, kindness... humbleness of mind**, willing to exercise humility instead of pride. When someone takes offense at something, it's pride! It's pride that jumps in on the scene. But a willingness to humble yourself...

...meekness, longsuffering, we talked about this last Sabbath; **forbearing one another, forgiving one another**, that's a powerful one: the ability to forgive, the ability to put something behind, the ability to *let it go* in order to be merciful, in order to exercise these other things toward someone.

...if anyone have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you so also do you. That's what God desires of us in our life: that this is the way we treat others. To put it behind, to not carry it around, to let it go! See, I have enough problems in my life dealing with (with self) that I don't have to add to it by carrying someone else's load. And neither do you; and neither *should* you in reality. Now there are times you have to become involved in situations because of relationships; but you have to do them God's way. **...even as Christ forgave you so do the same;** that's what we're being told **and that's** a powerful comparison that God has given to us.

And above all these things put on God's love; You can't do this of and by yourself physically. People in the world can't even being to start that process because they don't have access to God's spirit. Because this *requires* drawing closer to God, this *requires* God's spirit in your life – because we're talking about something that *comes from God*, just as the holy spirit comes from God, so does love/agape. His love comes from Him. You can't work it up. You can't decide today, "I'm going to go out and I'm going to have agape all day long." You can't do it! You have to draw closer to God because the source is God. So it has to be carried through the power of the holy spirit into your life. So the closer you are to God, the more you can live it toward others. So there's a *need* to be close to God.

So again, **Above all things put on/have**, in that respect, **God's love**, in your relationships with others. And that's, again, dependent upon your relationship with God! **...which is the bond of perfection.** It's what binds everything together – it's God's love. Not human love, not *philia*... doesn't even come close because it's still selfish! Only God's love can truly bind together. **And let the peace of God rule...** it's a powerful word, it's beautiful. There are words sometimes that we don't even begin to grasp what we're being told because in English they mean something different. But in the Greek, there's a lot more said here. It's a beautiful expression **...and let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which you're called in one Body; and be you thankful.** Be thankful.

So this word here 'rule'; it's quite unique when you look it up in Greek, and at first I was a little puzzled when I looked at it. I thought, "What do you mean?" Because literally this is the only place it's used specifically. It comes from another word we're going to look at in a moment, but this particular one here means 'to act as an umpire'. Now, I've seen umpires in sports, sporting events and how they call the games and so forth and it took a little bit of time here until finally... "Oh... DUH!" 'To rule, to act as an umpire', but it's toward self. It's toward self. That's the admonition here. Not toward others and not trying to rule others lives and how they're living – playing the sport, playing the game – but how we're doing it. And so Paul used a very specific word here in a very unique fashion to teach something in a very powerful way. In this scripture it's in the sense of acting as an umpire concerning matters *in your own life*.

The dictionary definition of 'umpire' is 'to supervise play in a game or sport and enforce the rules'. Well, God's given us laws and it's up to us whether we're going to live by them and what kind of *effort* we put into it and how much we put into the control in our life and seeking to control our lives and bringing our lives into subjection to God and God's way of life. And so he used a unique term here that really we can't even capture in the English language and how it was used in that part of the world at that particular time. It has to do with 'supervising or enforcing the rules' *in your own life*; whether you have

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control of your life, or whether you're seeking control of your life or whether you just let it go. Just like the verses we read earlier here...**with bowels of mercies**. Do we just ignore that and we're hard on people and harsh on people and judgement to people and don't exercise humility and all the other things involved...don't forgive people? Then we're not 'umpiring' as Paul said, 'our lives'. He said that's what we're to do.

And above all things put on God's love which is the bond of perfection and let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Should be what motivates us, what moves us...that we *want* the fruit of God's peace in our life. Peace is a fruit. It's the result of 'umpiring' your life, if you will; seeking to, in that respect, to enforce God's law in your own life – because it's a battle. It's a battle! And so Paul uses sports here in a unique way when he talks this way and when we're speaking of peace then, the need to supervise or enforce the rules that produce peace in your life. There are rules, there are laws that will produce peace in your life; and if they're ignored, you will have *war*. You will have conflict. That's why I think about the scripture back in James so often when we read things like this. I think of over the many years being in God's Church, going all the way back to 1969 when I came in and I know there are verses that people can so easily pass over because they don't grasp that this is talking to the Church. This is talking to us!

It's not talking to the world when it says in **James 4:1 – from where do wars and fighting's among you come from? Do they not come from the lusts that war in your members?** There's a battle going on in each and every one of us, inside of us, in our mind. **You lust and have not, you kill...** so we read a verse like that and think, "No I don't kill! We don't kill!" And yet when someone refuses to love someone else it's the spirit of murder! And it's so hard sometimes for us to grasp that! There's *no middle ground!* God says we either love or we hate. Mr. Armstrong put it in clearer terms; *GIVE or get. There's no middle ground!* But sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking we're okay in the middle. *What middle?* You're either one or the other; you live one or the other! You can't live both at the same time! And we do... and when we do that it's called repentance; when you see that you've done something that's wrong; but always striving to do what is right, striving not to have the war. Striving... What is the opposite of that? Peace. So **where do wars and fighting's** come from... they come from inside here (our mind), from the wars going on inside of each one of us that God wants us to bring into subjection, to bring into control, to 'rule' over in our life. He wants us to rule!

So either human nature, your nature, rules you, or you are learning to rule it – truly. Either we're learning to rule our lives as God tells us we must...and when we slip we repent; or we're not doing it. It's a battle and it's always a battle desiring, seeking to live God's way of life. ...**you fight and war and you have not because you ask not.** Because we don't ask as we should; because we're not focused as we should; because we're not doing it God's way. ...**you ask and receive not because you ask amiss that you may consume it upon your own lusts.** God goes on to say, **You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?**

So we have choices to make in our lives continually over and over again of how we live and so God's great desire for us is that we learn to rule. You can't rule and serve and help others in a right way unless you've begun to rule yourself in the way God says to do it. You can't serve, you can't help, you can't give to others the way God desires for us to do that, to do it and do it His way until we learn to bring this into subjection, or fight the battle; seek to continually fight the battle. So this is a unique expression that is only used in this one place specifically here.

Wanted to look at another word where this comes from; and this next word we'll be looking at is translated both times in the King James as 'prize'. But it means more than this, again, because it's

associated with the act of umpiring and it literally means when applied as Paul has used it; 'prize', yes, but more. It is 'accomplishment, fulfillment, the reward from completion as a result of something you've done in your own life'. And so in reality, more than how we might use the word 'umpire' in the sense of a game, in the sense of how it applies to our 'supervising others'. This is all focusing upon how we focus upon ourselves and supervise our own life to *achieve* the prize, to *achieve* when it's all said and done the fullness that God desires for us to that accomplishment, that fulfillment, that reward that is there from doing that. Because with it is great reward.

Let's go over to 1 Corinthians and notice these two places, because even the context itself is very revealing, because it all has to do with what we're discussing in this sermon series entitled 'The Way of Peace' and certainly Paul, as he addresses some of this, fits it all together, it all blends together, it all works together in a very powerful way.

1 Corinthians 9:19 – Paul is explaining - **For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all so that I might gain the more.** So he is revealing, talking about those things that because of God's calling, because of serving Jesus Christ and the responsibility, the job that he has been given, he goes on to talk about his desire to help others. **And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain/profit/win them who are under the law;** Rather than being offensive and not understanding who it is with whom he's dealing, he focused upon those things so that he would not be offensive, so that he would be able to be on a plane with them that they could understand and communicate with and be received by them. Because sometimes in life if somebody comes across in a particular way, if it's offensive because they are not trying to put themselves in another person's shoes as to their life and what they're experiencing...in other words, getting rid of the pride and the haughtiness that so often is exercised by human beings. We strive to understand who they are, how they think, why they think the way they do and communicate with them on that plane so that they will receive us.

Verse 21 - To them who are without the law, as without the law, then he says, **(not being without the law to God, but under the law to Christ,)** not better than them, not better than someone else. You know, sometimes people get their nose so high in the air, it's like you get this hook in there and it just kind of pulls it up in the air; and I can't stand that. I can't stand that when I see that on TV – leaders... who have this look; a 'messianic look', what the world thinks is 'messianic'. That's totally repulsive, it's sick in this world; and yet that's the way of the world, it's the epitome of the world in that respect. And that's not how to communicate with people. That's not how to help people to know that you care, that you care about them, that you want to help them.

So how do we treat people? How do we come across to people when we talk to them? Hopefully it's never with a haughty spirit; hopefully it's never with the nose up in the air in any fashion or form. Because if it is you can't help anyone; they're not going to receive what you have to say, they're not going to respect it. And I mention this not because we're doing it (because I don't see that); but because it's happened in the past. It happened a lot in the past in how people treated each other even within the Body. There were these different cliques within congregations even; some that were obviously better than others – that's why there were cliques. That's how cliques come about. Because some seem to think they can gravitate to certain ones, and because they're more on 'their level', their 'plane' of whatever that 'level' is that's better than some of the other levels out here. Sad.

We are a Family! That's what God is showing us more and more. We are a Family! ...and the same care should be amongst the Body, throughout the Body; and something like a clique, something where we

can be around certain ones but we can't be around others...that's a hideous, sick, perverted thing and yet it came into God's Church and led to... that's why the scriptures talk about in Matthew 24, 'the love of many (agape) waxed cold'. And because of that, because people weren't looking to God as they should be and filled with the spirit of God like they should it began to interfere with and affect what? Relationships in the Church! Because the love of God wasn't there like it should be. And what'd that lead to? In time it led to an apostasy! And it wasn't fun; it was horrifying, hideous what happened to God's Church.

And so Paul is explaining these things about relationships and how to win people, how to communicate with people, how to love people, how to show genuine concern because it is genuine, because it comes from within through the power of God's spirit – not put on, not fake.

Verse 22 - To the weak I became as weak, not something better, but as one who has faults, one who has weaknesses. I remember hearing some sermons going all the way back to a time in Pennsylvania when I was a minister there and we had a couple different sermons come out at different times from headquarters from an individual. Now, I don't remember if he was an evangelist at that point or not at that time, but I was struck by something that I had never heard before; and we're talking about 1985-86, somewhere in there... no, it was '87, somewhere in there...and I began to learn something in a very powerful way. This minister was getting up and talking about his battles. He was talking about problems that he has had to fight in his own life. He opened himself up in a way I'd never heard a minister ever open himself up before. That endeared me to him. I listened more closely to the message because see, I had problems and I couldn't even open myself up to people like he did. And I never had that example set for me either. So I began to exercise that. Amazing the response! Amazing the people that began to open up about battles they were fighting, things that they were going through because they realized, "You're not up on this plane somewhere better, you have battles too." We all have battles and this is exactly what Paul is saying. Who is weak? We all are; *we all are*. We all have human weaknesses, sins we battle, things in life we battle, at times we slip and fall. That's the human condition, isn't it? But we're to fight it. We're to conquer. We're to overcome. We're to rule this and keep fighting, striving to bring everything into subjection to God.

And so this is, again, what Paul is talking about; a willingness. Are you able to do that? I know people in the Church who have a tough time with this, especially because if we go way back in the past, your ability to open up, your ability to just take a zipper and unzip. Merkle is Merkle. I am what I am. I'm trying to change. I want God's way of life; I want to be a part of the Family. I want to fight to be a part of the Family and this is what I'm fighting, or this is what I'm battling...or whatever it might be. And sometimes it's hard for us to do that because we take things out of the world, or we take things from our past and we try to put across this image, this picture of what we *want* people to see cause we don't really want them to see what this is; and so we try to protect it. Do we? Absolutely. It's a tough battle learning how to open up, learning how to be yourself, learning how to understand that if you're doing things right before God that as you... that doesn't mean we should be flippant and live whatever way we want to live. We are striving to live this way of life, but we're not perfect. We make mistakes. We slip and fall. We have to repent; everybody has to. And so it's an attitude of mind and it's an attitude sometimes that's communicated to others that we're not better. No one should ever communicate that, "I don't have problems. I don't have weaknesses. I'm better than that." Because if you do that why would someone ever open up to you? Why would anyone ever come to you for help? Why would someone desire to receive something from you? And that's what we should want to share – something from God. And sometimes we can block the way to that and the ability to do that.

...to the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *people*, that I might by all means save, in other words, ‘help restore’, that’s what the word means, ‘help make well’, **help save some**. God has to do the drawing and the calling but sometimes we can be in the way, we can get in the way and we don’t want that. I think of all the new people God continues to draw in – it’s exciting. And we haven’t seen anything yet! How long will we get to fellowship? Don’t know! But they’re Family whenever that happens – always Family – because it’s God’s Family.

Verse 23 - And I do this for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Beautiful here of how Paul is writing and what he’s saying. I don’t have the time to go into all of it, to explain it in its depth here of what he’s saying. **Know you not that they who run a race run with all, but only one receives a prize?** Only one receives... so he’s giving the example here of people running and the entire group’s running together. I don’t know if you ever saw pictures of the Boston Marathon – talk about something that looks like an absolute nightmare... hundreds of people, thousands of people running? But only one is going to win the prize, to go across the line first. And again, this word here ‘prize’; ‘the accomplishment, the fulfillment, the reward from the competition’ if you will, or ‘the completion’ of umpiring your own life. Because it has to do with what you do with your own life. Only one is able to do that; that they have worked and trained so hard that they are able to win... and so one he says. But he makes a comparison here with what we’re doing and how we’re living our life that’s different from a race like that. He says, **So run that you may obtain**; think in those terms to your own life so that *you* can attain, so that *you* can receive that prize, so you can have that accomplishment in your life.

And isn’t that what we all desire? To be in God’s Kingdom, first and foremost, to live on into a new age as a part of that process, to become a part of God’s Family whenever that might be, to run the race. Because there are many in our history who aren’t going to have that opportunity for a long time – at least a thousand years. And then those who will be resurrected and awakened spiritually at that time... what an incredible thing. But not in the beginning of it! All of you get to experience it in one way or another, the beginning of something very great that is going to be pictured in some of the things of the Feast of Tabernacles this year. We’re talking about the Millennium that’s coming to this earth.

And so Paul is encouraging, **so run that you may obtain/that you may lay hold**, because that’s what we want to do, we want to lay hold of what God is offering to us and not let go. That’s why I say so often, especially to those of you who are new – *fight* for this way of life! You’ve got to *fight* for it! And the fight begins here, with self. You’ve got to fight self; you’ve got to *fight* your own carnality and your own mind...and fight and never give up. Keep fighting! That’s what I’ve seen through the history of the Church; people who quit fighting. They got tired of the fight! They got tired of fighting their human nature. I think of so many times I’ve heard people that had *bad* attitude and they say, “I get so tired of hearing how bad I am. I’m just sick and tired of hearing how *bad* I am! I go to church and what am I told? I’m *bad!*” Yeah, we are. Our nature isn’t good! Our human nature isn’t good, but God gives us good news – we don’t have to stay this way. But some people take offense to that. It’s like, “You’re saying I have things to change and I’m not good?” Right, you’re not good. Jesus Christ said there’s no one good.¹ Who do you think you are?! So, sometimes we miss the mark and we begin to be defensive and want to protect self. Why? Why do you want to protect self? When you put self in the water (baptism) you’re supposed to have killed the old person. Put the old self to death! And I think of whenever it tries to raise its head back up out of the water you just put your foot back down, “Get back down!” Self! About self – not somebody else. You’re not trying to put somebody else’s head back under the water! Your own – to keep the old person dead. But you can become weary if you’re not

¹ Luke 18:19/Mark 10:18

careful and that's wrong. Don't become weary in the fight. Don't become weary in well-doing, in doing what God says we are to do and what God has offered us to do and the power that He's given to us to exercise it and accomplish it!

Those of you who are just coming along right now...? In so many ways, *you've got it made!* You truly do! Now I'm not going to cry about this because I've been fighting this since 1969 and it hasn't been pretty; my nature. I *hate* it with all my being. I *hate* human nature – I truly do; because it's a source of evil, it's a source of pain, it's a source of unhappiness in the world, it truly is. And it's only God's nature that begins to change that. And He gives us of His nature; He lets us drink in of His nature. We begin to experience it. Agape is God's nature. We begin to experience it. We see how beautiful, how wonderful, how good it is and we want that. We want that for the world.

And so those of you who are new? You've got less than two years and you're going to help build a new world. Now, you're still going to have your nature, but with everyone out there striving to live this way of life as a whole, with everyone out there desirous to make this world new, to yield to God, to know about God...what an incredible thing that everybody's going to have the access, the ability to believe the same thing, to know the same thing and to know everything else that's false. I believe it with all my being, but I can't fully imagine it yet because I've never experienced it. I just believe it and you do too. So that's what we desire.

Last week it hurt to hear that four individuals have let go of the battle, that are relatively new, little over two years I think now, close to three. And I think what a horrible shame! I hope they're able to repent, but I don't think so because of how they feel about me and what they're hearing being taught. Shows they've lost a lot then if they don't understand how God is working, what God is doing in the Church. I can't give that to them. And so I think, "You had less than two years to fight this battle and look what you've allowed to happen to yourself." The ability to understand what God has given has escaped them. That's hard to understand.

If you want this way of life, no matter when it hits you, no matter when God draws you, you've got to fight it, you've got to fight for it, you've got to go to war for it and you begin warring against self first and foremost and you cry out to God for help to accomplish it because He hasn't called you without purpose. He has great purpose in why *your* mind has been opened up – the ability to succeed, the ability to do what Paul has said; to grab a hold, to attain.

Verse 24 - Know you not that they who run a race run with all, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain/that you may lay hold. And every person who strives for the mastery, fights for, contends. This isn't easy! It's not a cakewalk! This isn't an easy thing to do! It takes effort! It takes work! And sometimes that work and that effort... it hurts. It's not pleasant! It isn't pleasant seeing self. It isn't pleasant humbling self. It isn't pleasant swallowing your pride. But it's a battle that you want to fight. And the more you do it, the more you conquer and overcome.

Every person who strives for the mastery is temperate, in other words, this word in the Greek means 'to exercise self control'. We have to learn how to do that...not let the world control us, not let circumstances and people around you control you. That's why I use driving so often; because people can relate to that, unless you don't drive. If you're not careful others around you begin to affect the way you think and the way you behave. And we're not to do that, we're to be different from others around us. And so wherever it is that's in society, in the world, at the workplace... just because others are

acting a certain way doesn't mean you're to get caught up in it and act the same way. *You are to be different!* And that means that there's a fight going on inside here to become different.

...so run that you may lay hold. And every person who strives for the mastery, in other words, 'fights and contends and struggles' is in this battle, **is temperate**, exercises self control **in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown;** it's just a matter of pride as a whole; **but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; and I so fight, but not as one who beats the air:** like a boxer out here just beating the air for no purpose, no intent except for vain glory. Says it's all for a purpose by design to attain to what God is offering.

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. And it's happened to hundreds of ministers in God's Church who've gone by the wayside. Incredible what's taken place. Preaching a way of life to others; preaching to people that you shouldn't work on the Sabbath; preaching to people that you should go to the Feast of Tabernacles and not stay back and work at your job... and yet when the test came some gave into exactly those things that they preached about for so long of how others should live. Sad. And on and on it goes. How we live life, how we live life toward each other. And so the desire is not to be a castaway, not to be discarded, not to be thrown away, not to be shipwrecked.

So again, all this reflects that deep desire and commitment of 'umpiring' if we can grasp a hold of that one, one's own life. In other words, to receive what God has freely offered to us, that He's placed before us. And so much of that involves what we do to live peace as God said we are to do in order to obey that way; that we're to obey the way of peace that produces peace.

Let's go on here to Philippians 3, another place where this same word is used. In this context here in Philippians 3 Paul is explaining his life and the change that has occurred in his life and he's sharing this and teaching and preaching as he's doing so. **Philippians 3:6 - Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church;** so he's talking about how he lived before. **Concerning zeal,** as a Pharisee the things he lived through, the things he did. He was there giving his approval when Steven was stoned. He was the one who gave the approval. Incredible! **...persecuting the Church,** after the Church to destroy, seeing it as something that was a matter of heresy and wrong before God until Jesus Christ worked with him directly and communicated to him directly and Paul came to a point where he was brought to conversion and then began to serve the Church. **Concerning zeal persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless.** That's pretty powerful. As far as the outward physical part of God's law he was blameless. He kept it, he obeyed it, he lived it. Didn't say talking about the spirit of it; but just everything that was outward and how his relationship with others and how he lived his life – he was blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. That's what we all come to. What do we want to hold onto in this world? When God begins to draw us and call us...What is it that we desire to take with us? We don't want the influence of the world. We don't want to carry those things with us into a new age. On the contrary, we want to change the world, to be a part of change. And so what is it sometime that we hold onto? Because that's a lot of our battle: we try to hold onto various things out here. Change is sometimes hindered because we're holding onto something that we're not ready to give up, whatever that might be...

But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered
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the loss of all things, everything in life that he'd had, and now has. You know what? It comes to a point in time in our lives where we say, "Everything is God's." Everything we do is about God. It's about God's Church. Had that conversation with Johnny today... That's our life. To think anything different is foreign. It's all about the Church. It's all about what God is doing – it truly is. In everything you do in life.

...for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but dung*: What can you compare? What is to be compared with what God is offering us? Not even your own physical life. What is it you want to hold onto? Why? If your life is in God's hands; if He has a purpose and a design for your life, for what He's offering you? That's what we're talking about. Doesn't matter what it is. Everything!

When you were baptized, that's basically what you really said to God. Sometimes it's hard for us to come to fully grasp that in all of its meaning, but we basically have told God, "We are Yours! Do with me as You will. I want to serve You. I want to grow; I desire what You offer to me."

And so he speaks pretty bluntly here doesn't he? **I count everything...** see, if I were to say the word in a modern terminology there'd be people out there listening in, who'd probably pass out. Some of the ones that are self-righteous...they would *really* pass out. "Oh, he finally did it! ...and he calls himself a minister!" And Paul just said what it is. **I count it all but dung** – D.U.N.G. – and that's not a pretty picture and it doesn't smell too good. ...**that I may win Christ.**

So what is more important and how do *you* really see everything that's out here – including your own life? In the scheme of things, when you're in God's hands, when God has a purpose for you and you give yourself and you yield yourself fully to that, the more fully you can do that – What more in life could a person desire? What is there? Because this life is a means to an end! Everything you do in this life from the time of baptism, everything that happens around you, everything that's a part of your training, is a means to an end, it truly is. This isn't it. This life is not what it's all about. This is a life we have to live to go through what we must go through for this *mind* to be changed, for this mind to grow, for this mind to be able to see what it needs to see to make certain choices so that when it can come to a point in time where God looks down upon you and says, "Now I know you." And you know how God knows you? Because He's done some moulding and fashioning in your life for a long time. It didn't happen overnight. And you're responding, you've been responding and you responded and you keep responding because you want what He has to offer, you desire it with all of your being. You 'look for a city who's builder and maker is God'.² You don't look to anything in this world anymore.

And so we go through hardships, we go through trials; we go through things that are *hard* in life. We do! My heart aches for people when I see trials that people go through. But on the other hand, I know that God is moulding and fashioning something *different* in every one of us – that's *unique to us*, that's *unique to something He has in His purpose and plan in His Family!*...*that there is no other way of developing it within us!* *What an awesome thing to yield ourselves to God so that we can be in the God Family in whatever place in His Family that He knows will be the most productive, the happiest, the fullest and be able to contribute the most within the Family.* What could we want more? That's awesome! After this Feast of Tabernacles I feel you're going to feel it's far more awesome! Far more awesome than what you can grasp and comprehend...what God is offering us, what He places before us and why we go through what we go through in life and why Paul said, **I count it as dung**. It can't be compared to what God is offering us. I don't *want* it. To really mean it, *I don't WANT it; I don't WANT*

² Hebrews 11:10

what's out there, I don't even want to REFLECT what's out there in my life. I want to SHED it, and I want to reflect to others what is right, and what is good.

So, incredible what we go through, the things we experience in life. And so again here, Paul is very descriptive of what he's saying.

Verse 9 ...that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, because that isn't righteousness before God, it's just self-righteousness like Job. ...**but that which is through the faith of Christ,** Isn't that an awesome thing? I think about that every once in a while. I just marvel, I look forward to understanding it more deeply: that by believing what God gives to us because He opens up the mind and we believe it (and we choose to fight then for it), and through the believing that's what He attributes to us for righteousness. Because, see, I know I'm not righteous. I know I have battles I have to fight in here and fight them I do, as you do. But to understand what an awesome thing it is, what He offers us, and that because we believe and live our lives like we are, accordingly – we do the things we do. You have food saved up, you do different things – whatever it might be. God accounts that, attributes that to you for righteousness; that you believe what He's given to you, you believe where we are in time, you believe the things He's shown to you about His way of life and you seek to embrace them and live them. And God attributes that to you for righteousness. It's an awesome thing! And it becomes more awesome the more you understand who you are, what your nature is and that without that kind of mercy and without that kind of plan you could never make it.

Verse 10 - That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, there's a fellowship in His sufferings. One of the things that I have learned that is probably one of the hardest things in life 'to have fellowship in His sufferings' is betrayal. It hurts. Those you love, those you thought you were so close to. And there are people in our past, some of us who've been around for a long time, we've experienced those things – what it's like to have a knife stuck in your heart from behind and twisted and twisted and twisted to where you hurt, where you hurt so deep inside over and over and over again. But we learn from that, don't we? We learn what human nature is like and we look forward to the time people are able to see that nature and conquer it and overcome it because it's an evil in this world that is truly evil; of what human nature is like and what human beings will do when they live the life of pride without God.

So we suffer. There are things you will experience in life that aren't always pleasant, about human nature, your own nature...but in the nature of others as well. And how you respond to that nature depends upon the sermon context of what we're going through here today about peace and what you're striving for. I don't think of a few, I think of many people when making comments like this about betrayal; and I'm overwhelmed again inside because it hurts. And I think of those close relationships and I have nothing bad toward them; and there are a smear of people out there who've done a lot of cutting. I hurt for them, what they have done to their own lives because they're not able to share with me anymore, they're not able to share with others of us anymore, those who knew them, different ones that are out there. And that's the way we should think toward them and I look forward to the day they have their minds healed so they don't feel that way any longer.

But betrayal is a hard thing. Jesus Christ was betrayed. You remember Judas? And that was just the beginning, because for 2,000 years He's been betrayed over and over and over again. God the Father has been betrayed longer – going back to Lucifer. It's been a long time. God has experienced much betrayal. Us? We only live in this body for 60-70-80 years or less. Amazing!

That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend, seize, to lay hold, **that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus.** So he's saying that Jesus Christ pulled him in, apprehended him, took hold of him to do a job and he's using that comparison then of that which he has taken hold of and wants to take hold of in response.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended: but one thing I do, in other words, we're not there until we're there. You've got a battle ahead of you. Those of you who are younger, and those of you who are just coming along... you have years of growth in front of you and you have to keep fighting even into a new age, you have to keep fighting self; just thankfully a lot in the battle is going to be made better, not going to be as difficult, not going to be as hard. Mainly because one sick mind is going to be removed from this world and all his little cohorts; it's going to be removed from this world for nearly a thousand years. He's not going to have influence over people anymore because they stir things up, they like to get involved in wars and disputes and human nature and pride. They like to stir things up. They like to get people upset at each other. They love it! They relish it! Sick minds!

So he says, **I do not count myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before,** Are we looking behind or are we looking ahead? Are we keeping focused on the goal that God has placed before us? I know we are even more so now because we believe where we are in time, we see that we're close to the return of Jesus Christ, we are excited by that, we look forward to this Feast of Tabernacles, not knowing whether we'll have another one. Some this year talked about that they didn't know if we'd have another one this year – we're having another one... well, at least for right now we still are. That could change tomorrow. That's where we're living in time. Will we have another one? Possibly. Impossible? No it isn't.

.. reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize, - there is the accomplishment, the fulfillment, the reward from the completion of it all, of umpiring your own life, of enforcing, seeking to enforce and bring all things into subjection to God... **of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.** It is a 'high calling' from God – an incredible calling indeed.

Let us therefore, as many as who seek to become perfect, that's our desire, to be perfected. We know we never will be in this life, but when we have attained, when we've finally gotten there, when we've finally come to that point that our change can come – then we'll have attained and we will be there... **as many as seek to become perfect be thus minded: and if anything you be otherwise minded God shall reveal this, even this to you.** So it's a desire that God has, that we be of the same mind; and if it's different, then God prayerfully will show us our failings, our weaknesses so we can repent and be of the same mind.

Verse 16 - Nevertheless, where unto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things. In other words, have the same focus, to be of the same mind. How often do you hear me saying that? To be of the same mind; to be in harmony and unity and oneness with everything that God has given us to this present time. Not something in the past, but at this present time where we are now with what God has given to us that we be in unity and oneness because God has blessed us with maturity and growing – truly has.

So he says here, **Brethren, be followers together of me,** he always said, as he followed Christ. But to follow that which he teaches, which he has taught; he knows where it comes from and that's his desire,
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to follow that, to follow me as I follow Christ. **Brethren, be followers together of me and mark them who walk so**, in other words in this manner, **as you have us for an example**. And so look to those, look to those who've been around for a longer period of time, learn from them, learn from those who are ordained in the Church, learn from those who God has given you opportunity to learn from.

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: they once at one time were not. They once were in fellowship, that's what he's showing. That's what I was talking about earlier; **Whose end is destruction**, without repentance that's what's there, **whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation/conduct**, as it is; so often comes out in conversation, how we think, how we are, how it's communicated, what's communicated. **For our conduct is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:** and that's what it should be. In other words, it better be in unity and oneness with God and with the way of life that God is showing to us.

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious Body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue, what's that word mean? ...'to bring into subjection' ...**all things unto Himself**. It's a process of something that God is doing and we choose to yield our self to the process, to bring this (self) into subjection. That's how it's done; one person at a time... one person at a time because it's my choice to be in subjection and it's your choice to be in subjection; and you can't change anyone else. *You cannot change, you cannot give this to anyone else*. Sometimes we get wrapped up in wanting to change others; you *can't* change anyone except to have an influence in whatever that influence that God has given to you to exercise and that's it. Do you realize the greatest opportunity you have for change that God offers you is to do what you hear Sabbath by Sabbath because it's your choice to receive it and to yield to it. It's the most powerful tool that God has given to us, in that respect, from week to week to week. It's a powerful thing, it truly is, it's an awesome thing.

So peace is a powerful theme throughout the Bible, it truly is. It's there, turn the page – it's there, turn the page – it's there. It's throughout the Bible, page after page after page, a very powerful theme of something that *God looks forward to* in His Family and it begins here in His Family as we yield ourselves to that process. It's far more important to God than we have truly known. He's letting us see it in a greater way and it's far more important for us that we really get this message and seek peace far more zealously in our lives; to exercise it more zealously in our lives because that's what God is offering us and that's what God expects. Because with the greater knowledge and the greater insight through the power of His spirit that He offers us that we take hold of it, then we must exercise it. And that's where we are and God has a desire that we exercise it far more in the Body of Christ in the Church of God.

I Peter 3:8 – so going back here into the flow of the sermon about peace, it says - **Finally, be you all of one mind**, it's amazing how often that is in scripture, over and over again, harmony, unity, oneness, one mind...*one mind*, the mind of God, the being of God, the word of God, the way of God. It's a powerful, powerful, powerful thing, it truly is. **Finally be you all of one mind**, it's a choice we have over and over again because it's a matter of being in unity and oneness with God; **having compassion**: God has great compassion on us. Each one of us, as God works with us and moulds and fashions us, sometimes I am dumbfounded by His patience, mercy and great compassion. It's great, far better than... and sometimes that's difficult for us because we haven't experienced the same thing in this physical world. That's not our experience with the world. And so sometimes for us to understand the true definition of God as our Father sometimes is a difficult thing in life for people because of things they've experienced in their life in relationships and things that have happened. And so there are some things that are difficult to

understand about God. It takes God's spirit, candidly, to learn those things; it takes His help to help us to grasp and comprehend things about His *compassion*, His *mercy*, His *love*.

...having compassion one of another; So do we have that? Are we exercising what God has given to us? Because that's what God has given to us over and over and over again. Just like we were told earlier about forgiveness – just as Christ forgave us, are we forgiving toward others or do we hold things in, do we hold things against people and won't forgive, and won't put it aside, and bring it back up and remind them or hold it against them to where our relationship can't be what it should be because we're still holding something against them? Now, there's a balance in that too. There's a soundness in that too. It's about your attitude toward someone else. Just because you've forgiven someone doesn't mean that you enable them to do evil, to do wrong, to do things that aren't right...which might include what they might do to you to hurt you. So there's a balance when we're talking about that... sometimes people get guilty and they think, "Oh, I did so and so and I haven't forgiven them and..." No, there's a balance in these things. And I hope you're able to discern the difference, and you can with God's help, with God's spirit. And that's what you have to ask for – to handle situations accordingly and to understand it's about *your* attitude toward someone else. Because what does it reflect? It reflects whether you're angry with someone. If you don't forgive someone you're angry still, there's something wrong inside, there's something where you don't feel justified yet or something isn't right and you want to make it right and there's an attitude then toward someone else that's not right with God. Forgiveness doesn't have to do with letting someone have their way, to just beat the tar out of you! But again, I hope you understand what I'm talking about. There are situations where you can be stupid and dumb and let people take advantage of you and we're not to do that either.

Do you understand the difference here about forgiving people? ...of what we're talking about here? It's about your attitude, that you don't have *bitterness* and *anger* in your heart. That's the problem for people that don't forgive; it's about your attitude toward someone. It's not about the fact that there are situations where you are not to be around someone, or let someone take advantage of you. On the contrary! Because this happens over and over again through God's Church in every area we go to and things that people experience in their life and it's like we can't separate the distinction and make a difference here. Please! It's about your heart, it's about your feelings toward people, it's about whether you're right or wrong before God and how you think toward them.

See, if you're holding something against someone generally there's an attitude there. It may be jealousy, might be envy, just a bitterness that you *just can't stand them* because everything they say and do just rubs you the wrong way and you can't get rid of that in your mind. Where does that come from? Anger toward someone? Where does that come from? A desire to see someone be *punished*, to receive some kind of *retribution* of some sort? That's why it talks about Christ... when He's reviled, He didn't revile back.³ He forgave, He let it go, He didn't let it affect Him. He didn't hold something against the individual to where *He* sinned. It's about your attitude and your mind and how you think that's important in this when we talk about forgiving others. Again, I can't give this to you; this is something you have to ask God for because I know there are people who have a difficult time making a distinction in the two. Ask God to help you make the distinction, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.⁴ And I don't care how long you've been around God's Church, sometimes people still don't get it fully. Just because we've been here for a long time doesn't mean we fully grasp and comprehend these things.

³ 1 Peter 2:23

⁴ Matthew 10:16

It's in the context, because this is the context, because this is what it's about ...**have compassion one on another**, talking about empathy in that respect, understanding, identifying with someone, someone else's situation, the feelings, motives. ...**having compassion...love as brethren, be pitiful**, this word here means 'kind-hearted, tender-hearted, compassionate', a willingness to be compassionate; **be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil**, because that's how human beings are so often when they've been offended by something – a desire to get back at, or to say something back, to correct, to make it right. Whatever it is sometimes that goes through people's minds, **not rendering evil for evil**. Now sometimes you may have to deal with something that's unpleasant; but don't do it out of maliciousness, don't do it out of an evil heart. That's the difference. It's your motivation of why you're doing it. Some things you must deal with in life, some things you must address in life...not let the world run over you like a freight train. There are some things you're to address on the job, in family, in home, whatever it might be, with your neighbour, with brother... but do it God's way, not having an evil heart toward them, **not rendering evil for evil**.

Don't sin in what you're doing; be right before God because you have a responsibility to address something, maybe going to a brother alone. But you don't have wrong feelings in your heart toward them, you're not angry toward them, you're not *indignant toward them*... "*How can they be like that? How can they do that in God's Church?!*" Well, I know how people can do things in God's Church because I've done things in God's Church and had to repent of it in relationships and things I've had to grow up with since 1969, that period of time when I came into God's Church. I've had to *learn* about right behaviour, things you should say and things you shouldn't say and how you must have a right heart and a right mind toward one another and to love each other.

Not evil for evil or railing for railing: nothing justifies railing back at someone because they're railing on you. Just because they're having a time of their life tearing you apart doesn't mean you get caught up in that. What should you feel? You should feel compassion; to understand how their hurting themselves, how their hurting their heart and their mind and their relationship with God and they don't know it.

I hate to see people get caught up in things where they hurt their relationship with God and they sin and they don't even know what they're doing and after a while they become so spiritually weak and if they're not careful they're going to be *gone*. I've seen that too often in my life in the Church. People who are gone... and as I mentioned, I continue to mention: *This won't stop!* I'm telling you – there's some out there listening to me today that will turn from this way of life before this is over. It's been that way since I've been in the Church. It's been that way going far back in time. We all have choices and no one else can make choices for you. But it is the way of things and we learn through it and it's hurtful, it's painful, I hate to see it. I hate to see people go by the wayside. They start suffering anyway and then they go into *greater* suffering! The farther you get away from God; the farther you turn from God – the more suffering you enter into, the more you rip your life out, your heart out, spiritually speaking. What a horrible thing to see someone go through in life and none of us should want to see that in anybody in the Family...if your heart is right. We want to see people repent, to change, to grow, to overcome, to be happy, to be filled with peace in their life, to have good relationships, healthy relationships, to be cheerful, to be happy and rejoice in this way of life that God has given us.

Just like at the Feast of Tabernacles! I hope all of you are able to go to the Feast of Tabernacles and truly *rejoice* in the Feast as God commands you to do. Because He commands us, it's not a suggestion. But how do you do that if your heart isn't right toward each other or something is wrong or something is said and there... And we have this to fight a lot don't we? So it's not, **railing for railing; but**

contrariwise blessing; how you think toward someone else, **knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing**. So what is the blessing that you can pass along to others? To do this God's way. To live God's way toward one another; the way that produces peace. Not the way that stirs things up, not the way that makes things perpetuate or continue on instead of being put away like it should be. That's not God's way.

For he who will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, that's what God calls it. If what comes out of this mouth is not right toward others God says it's evil. ...**and his lips that they speak no guile**: no deceit in other words, not fully truthful of a matter or truthful with self. Sometimes we can't be truthful with self. Sometimes it's hard for people to be truthful with themselves. That's a toughie sometimes with human nature – to be able to be truthful with yourself. Like I mentioned in the beginning of the sermon, sometimes it's hard for us to open ourselves up because we're protecting something, we're protecting because we don't want to be hurt and so we're too busy sometimes protecting self. And sometimes by doing that we're not able to accept the truth about ourselves and who we are and what we need to repent of and we're not able to be truthful with ourselves then before God.

Let him eschew, means 'to turn away from', **let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace**, I think of things that Christ said about being a peacemaker. Right from the very beginning of His ministry; a way of life, a way of thinking, about seeking peace ... **and pursue it**. Because it's God's way, it's what God *longs for in ways that you cannot begin to comprehend*. You can begin a little bit and He's offering a little bit more to you; but it is so deep in God, it is so much a part of God that it's difficult for us to grasp – it truly is. His yearning, His desire, His *long* desire and I mean *LONG* desire for peace.

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them who do evil. And he's just described what that evil is. It has to do with relationships and how we think toward others and how we speak of others and so forth.

II Peter 3:13 - We, nevertheless, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells/lives/abides righteousness. And we do. We look forward to the first great phase we're getting ready to go into, the thousand years. But that's not it yet. That's not fully it. That's not the new heaven and new earth; but it's getting closer, it's on the way. And then the Great White Throne...that's not it yet, but it's so much closer, *so much closer*...and then finally when there's not one human being left – *finally* we're there. Because as long as there is a human being alive we'll not be there; because in human beings there exists that which is not peace until it's *fully conquered*, until *we* have fully conquered self, if we're a part of what God is offering us. And so, again, **we look for new heavens and a new earth**; we look to God's Family, we look to God's Kingdom, we look to 'heavenly' as it talks about in various places 'Jerusalem'; of heaven, the way of peace in the Family of God for eternity, or age everlasting.

So it has to do, **abides righteousness**, talking about right living toward one another, the fulfilling of the law. **Wherefore beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent**; it's not just going to happen. It doesn't just mysteriously happen, you've got to work for it, and you've got to fight for it. ...**be diligent that you may be found in Him/of Him in peace**, and that's what God is offering us more of right now if we will embrace it even more so within the Family, within the Church, within the Body so that we can treasure it more and look forward to the time... and as God begins to draw more, that more are able to experience that as well, **without spot**, without sin, and that's what we've got to fight against in self, **and blameless**. In other words to be at peace is to be without spot and blameless before God and *that* is a **The Way of Peace – Pt. 4**

war, a different kind of war; not the war that comes from lust and pride, but a war that you willingly enter because you're willing to fight against self, a real battle truly, the greatest battle of life – it truly is. It's the greatest battle ever fought.

Whenever you look at self, whenever you look at your own nature, whenever you see and realize certain things it's not to become discouraged and down and feeling negative about life as though you have no hope. On the contrary, that's what God *gives* to us, He gives us hope that we can change, that we don't have to remain the way we are, thank *God* I don't have to be the way I started out as; been able to have growth throughout the years and I won't always be in this either. I'm looking forward to a far greater change. And so God gives us hope, He gives us help to change, to grow, to overcome, to become something different... and you know what? The more you do it, the more this becomes your life; the Church, the Family, God, Jesus Christ; the more fulfilled your life is. That's where real happiness and fullness of life comes from – from God. You can't have it in this world, *from* this world. There is nothing you can go out and have in this world that will give you this – truly nothing.

Solomon's life was something like that, where he came to the point that he realized that there is nothing out here that gave him that. It's this, it's God, it's God's way, it's the mind, it's the way you think, it's the way you are that reflects God, that's able to be at one with God. That's where joy, real joy and happiness comes from, and that's what everyone wants to have. You want a happy, fulfilled, joyful life. You want others around you to be filled with that. That's what we all desire. We want to be at peace. We don't want to have disputes and hard feelings and hurt because that's what happens, sorrow. So often there are things we do in life because *we've been hurt* so many times in our life. And so sometimes we pull into a corner or we retract or we put up this barrier and that's why we can't be ourselves, we can't open up because we're so trying to protect self because we've been hurt so much in life. And sometimes it's difficult to realize we have hurt others as well, we're guilty of the same thing as the hurt that's been done to us and we want to stop the cycle. And God offers us that. What a beautiful thing! And this is where happiness is, this is where fullness of life is, and you live it and your life is rich.

Marriages; if *only* ... if *only*, and it's coming more in time where it'll be taught better, where it'll be taught more, where it'll be of one voice, one way to be taught in the world, what produces it. But marriage, the fullness in life that God gave people to have in life – it comes from living God's way of life. And the more it's lived, the more fully it's lived, the more fulfilling it is. It's a circus out there today. It takes two! It takes two to respond, two to do God's way, to have what God wants us to experience and have in life that should be the richest of life. And then family that comes from that and the family that's there as a result of that; that should be ever so very powerfully close in life. And yet in the world it's not there as a whole. And God calls us out of the world and so we bring along baggage, we bring along things that have to be changed and conquered and overcome and become something different. But we can have it more and more and more; and the more you live this and the more you do it, the more you'll experience it. Not without pain, not without suffering, but you'll have it.

Hebrews 12:11 - Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: those are the times it's difficult because whenever you look at your own life and you see certain things that must be changed – that's when it's hard, that's when it's difficult. But the more you do it and the more you yield yourself to the process, and the more you humble yourself before God to receive that and to acknowledge it and accept it... God knows us inside and out but He wants us to admit it. He wants us to tell Him, "I get it. I see what I am." He knows. It's not a mystery to Him when you're telling Him who you are and what you are. He already knows it; it's just that that's our duty as a part of our growth that we have to share that with Him. "I see it. I know what I am. This is what I am." And you start telling

Him. “Glad you see that – be free.” That’s basically what God tells us. “Be free.” The more you can do that before God, repent, see what you are, acknowledge it, accept the responsibility, accept the blame that’s yours and yours alone and not someone else’s...that’s where change comes from. And then the joy is the fruit of it, peace is the fruit of it.

So in the moment, it says here, for the present isn’t joyous when it’s happening, when we’re suffering. There are times when you’re sharing with God those things that are between you and Him that hurt. There are times when tears will flow from your eyes because of what’s inside of you; and God tells you basically that’s where you unload; before God, not on somebody else...but before God. ...**but grievous:** the harder you look at self and acknowledge what you are and who you are – whew! ... **nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit;** peaceable fruit. There’s fruit there, something that God can begin to work with more, take you to another plateau, take you to another level of more conquering – to draw closer to Him, to become more at one with Him. The more you fight against this, the more you see self and acknowledge it before God and seek to overcome, because when you doing that you’re seeking help to be something different, to change. Because that’s what you’re doing, you’re asking God to help... *you’re repenting!* “I don’t want to be like this, I want to conquer this!” And the more you do that the closer you draw to God. *That’s* where the fullness of life comes from – the closer you are to God. Every step closer you get means life becomes richer.

...**afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby.** Some won’t exercise that in their life; it’s too hard, it’s too difficult; maybe because there’s too much pride, have to start there.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; there are times to have that in life that’s healthy spiritually. **And make straight paths for your feet,** straight paths...the way of peace. **Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men,** and how do you do that? Take the lead, work on self. The desire is to be at peace with all men, with all people, and that takes work on your part because it depends on your spirit, your mind and your attitude toward others around you as to whether or not you’re going to have peace with them and whether they might have the potential then of responding and having peace with you. You won’t always have peace from them, but God wants you to exercise peace, the fruit of peace in your life. **Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord:** and so, what an awesome thing that God has offered to us – what we’re going toward, what we’re working for.

This isn’t easy; God didn’t call us to something easy. We have to go through this to get to where we’re going and there is absolutely no other way to get there. That’s what’s so incredible when you come to understand it more fully. *There is no other way* but to live in this life, to fight this in order to attain what He’s offering to us; and it’s an incredible thing to understand – it truly is. And the more you see it and the more you understand it and the more you enter into that fight the better your life becomes, the richer your life becomes spiritually before God.

Philippians 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord always: Thank God! Have your prayers filled with gratitude and thankfulness. How often in prayer do you just thank God for what you have, for what He’s given you? Physical and spiritual in life...how often do you truly thank God because you are thankful? Not because you’re supposed to do it, not because we know that we’re supposed to do it, but because we’re learning to do it because it’s a part of us, because we really believe it. There’s a big difference there - truly is. So when you pray to God ask Him for the help to become more thankful, to see Him in your life, to see what He’s placed before you, to help you to have a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness because that’s

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something that's deeply lacking in this world today; a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness. People don't have thankfulness and gratitude toward things done to them. It's almost as though people expect things today, "I expect..." People have the attitude of *expecting* things, they truly do. It's a sick attitude. It's a sick mind in our society today where the mind has become demanding. Its like, "This is owed to me!" We have that kind of mentality in this world today. You pay for something, or whatever, and you may not even pay for it... you may want someone else to pay that for me... but it's an attitude of mind of how people think. It's an 'owe me' society and an 'owe me' world and we expect things from others. No, *you're supposed to give!* Our mind is to *give*, to be giving in our thinking, not taking.

So we live in a world that's filled with ingratitude. It's one of the greatest sins that there is – it truly is. Spirit of ingratitude! How much gratitude and thankfulness do we *truly have* for everything that God has granted us? For this way of life that He's placed before us, to be here at this time – *so close* to something the world has looked forward to... I think about when it says things that the prophets desired to look into – they desired to see more and here we not only get to *see it*, we get to *live it!* *How blessed are you* to be living in this time at the end of an age? I often think about, truly, what an incredible thing to live *now*. If I had 7,100 years *to pick*, this is the time right now as a physical life that I would choose. I'm dumbfounded by it, I truly am! Of where we are in time. Things that others...they're going to get to be told about it. There are some who are going to be resurrected at the same time I am that never experienced this period. They're going to learn about it, they're going to be told about it but they never get to experience it. I get to live it! And I think, "How rich is that? How incredibly awesome to live at this time, to be called at the end of an age, to see what the world has come through with the technology like we have..." Like Johnny was talking about this morning here, "Can't imagine riding around on a donkey for transportation." Things that people have lived through.

Think about the last 100 years, the last 200 years. Technology and what we have out here and how padded we have it and we don't even understand that sometimes. *How thankful are you to God for everything you have?* When you're able to go out here and you're able to see things that are beautiful in creation, to thank God you're able to drink it in, the colours, the flowers, the trees, the water... God made it for our pleasure. The old expression, 'stop and smell the roses'. It's true, so often we pass things up that are all around us – God's creation; and we don't think about the beauty of it and what God has given to us. The ability to see colour...the richness of life...how do we think about it? How do we think about God? So in everything give God thanks and truly mean it with all of our being. And you start practicing that, you start praying that way...that which takes place in your mind of thinking that begins to change more and more: that you practice it and live it and cry out to God that it become more a part of you, you'll be dumbfounded at things you experience in a relationship with God – truly. The more you do it the more it becomes a part of you.

See, sometimes you do things and you practice things and they seem fake, they don't seem real; but you keep doing them because they're right. In the beginning they are fake because they're not a part of you yet. Does that make sense? You don't do something, it's really not a part of you, but the more you do it after a time, because it's right and good and you know it's right and good because you believe what God says and after a time it becomes more a part of you and then it becomes beautiful because now it's a part of you. I've heard people talk about "Well, it seems hypocritical to do this, or do that, because I don't really feel that way."

"Well, then don't do it by all means... don't do what God says because I don't want you to feel hypocritical?!!!!" We miss the mark if we say such things. On the contrary – yes, you're going to be a little bit because it's *not* you yet... that's why God says to do it! And the more you do it then it can

become a part of you. What a beautiful thing then, see? I've heard people say things like that. They're lying to themselves. *They're lying to themselves.* They know!

Rejoice in the Lord always: and it means *always*... and it means 'in the Lord'... I hope we understand what that means. Every time I see the word 'in' in the New Testament anymore when it talks about 'in Christ', 'in God', it has a special meaning to me because outside of that you can't do it. You have to live 'in', you have to dwell 'in' God, 'in' Christ, and they in you. IN you and you IN them...otherwise you can't have these things. You can't experience these things, you can't have peace, you can't have agape; you can't live right toward one another unless you're 'in God', 'in Christ'. It's a spiritual thing; it's a spiritual relationship. We don't have the ability; we don't have the capacity to do those things on our own power, that's why we have to stay close to God.

Rejoice in the Lord, you can only rejoice in the Lord when you're 'in the Lord', when you're 'in God' spiritually, otherwise it's fake, it's like Traditional Christianity. People out here start talking about, "Oh, how sweet it is... I just love Jesus. Don't you *love* Jesus..." and that can come to a point in time where it's blasphemous and doesn't mean a thing and it's a lie. The only time you can love Jesus, truly, is if you dwell in God and God in you. The world thinks they love God and love God's way of life...and then you start telling them about God and about what God says to live.

"Oh, then you keep the Holy Days."

"What's that?"

Rejoice in the Lord, again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation, your 'yielded ways', that's what this means in the Greek here especially, 'your yielded ways, your gentleness' **be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.** More now than ever before. But whenever you're called He's at hand - truly.

Be careful for nothing; in other words don't be overly anxious about matters and things to where you get into worry and excessive thinking of things you can't control in life anyway. Look to God and be thankful for what you do have. **...but in everything by prayer...** I think about Job. 'God gives and God takes away, blessed be the name of God.'⁵ What do we deserve? Do we deserve something more? Do we think we should *have* certain things in life? One time we may have and another time we may not have...thank God. Whatever I need, whatever it is I must have in my life in order to change and conquer and overcome, thank God - so be it.

...but in everything by prayer, by your relationship with God because it's about a relationship with God. You've got to develop that to have a right relationship with others. Because if this one isn't right, nothing else is going to be right. **...but in everything by prayer and supplication...** Oh, here it is again - **with thanksgiving,** you ever have prayers that aren't with thanksgiving? You need to think about that. If you have prayers that don't have something in it with thanksgiving to God, something is amiss in your life, you're *missing* something in your life and it is in your attitude toward God and the ability to see God for what He's truly giving you and placed before you and the gratitude that goes along with that. So always make sure – examine yourself in your prayers today when you pray to God, and tomorrow when you pray to God... and make sure there's gratitude and thankfulness there; something said that comes out of your mouth and says, "Father thank you." I thank God often for Passover, my Passover, because without Him I wouldn't be here – truly. All of our life, the blessing of being able to be forgiven of sin – how thankful are you for your Passover?

⁵ Job 1:21

Be careful/overanxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. In other words, our prayers had better be mingled with gratitude and thankfulness to God and growing in that.

And the peace of God, that's the peace, that's where it comes from, that is the source, it comes from God, it comes from His way of life, it comes from Him. **And the peace of God which passes all understanding**, it's not in the world, the world doesn't understand it; that's why Jesus Christ said, 'Peace I give to you, not as the world gives peace give I unto you...' ⁶ it's His, it comes from God. It's a different kind of peace than what the world understands. The world doesn't get it. **And the peace of God which passes all understanding**, we're talking about some things here throughout this entire sermon series that has to do with things the world doesn't grasp, but we grasp it, and we can live it and we can exercise it in our lives. What an awesome thing! **And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through/in**, 'in' is the word, **Christ Jesus**.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; what's good to report? *About others! ...whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise, think on these things.* How do we think about one another? Merkle is Merkle; I love Merkle. You may get tired of that, but it's true. Do we accept one another for the past and the hardships that have made you who you are? Do we accept one another because we see God has a plan? Because we see that God has brought us together as a Family? And God is telling us... "*This is My Family... do you love Me?*" It's pretty big! It's pretty big, isn't it; because if we don't and we don't think right toward His Family, we're not thinking right toward Him. And that's what we must see. If we don't think right toward one another in His Family we're not thinking right toward Him; *and God loves His Family!* Far more than we can grasp and comprehend – truly...far beyond our ability to grasp and comprehend.

So we need to make very certain in things we think, in things we say, in things we do that we accept His Family members and not be so quick to judge, not be so quick to be harsh in judgement toward them in things we think *they* should be doing in their life and changes we think *they* should be making and *they* shouldn't be doing this and *they* shouldn't be doing that and how could this happen and how could that happen and they should be doing this instead... I have enough on my plate with the big one standing right here in front of you... this, me. And you do too, pretty big what you have on your plate. You've got a lot of work to do without worrying about anyone else. If you have a responsibility in a certain situation, so be it, but as a whole you've got your plate full with yourself. I have my plate full with myself and because I see that I tend to have more mercy, I'm learning mercy more and more and more. I've learned a lot of mercy over the last many years in ways that I can't even begin to tell you and also patience that comes from God. I know where it comes from because I know it didn't come out of me.

And so we learn that more and more and we learn about one another in God's Family and we have a special feeling then toward each other because we see each other as God's children. He says, "*This is My Family.*" And you know what? *I love His Family because I love Him.* And He knows it. He knows those things are true. And that's the way each one of us has to be toward God. There can't be one member in His Family that you don't love, that you don't have respect toward being God's child, God's Family member that He wants you to love.

⁶ John 14:27

And so that's why it says this right here. This is a tall order because it's something you can't fulfill, or you can't fill without God's help, without being in God and God in you and you have to be very close to God then in these matters to have this kind of thing. **...whatsoever things are true...** sometimes we hear something...the first thing we hear if we're not careful we latch onto. If someone tells us something about someone else...and if we're not careful... we have to be so careful of those things – truly.

Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just... you have to examine that and be sure in your heart and mind about how you're dealing with knowledge.

...if something is of a good report... You know what? It's pretty easy to find bad report. Look at the websites that mention me. It doesn't take long... it's bad, bad, bad, bad, bad. And that's the way human nature is. It's pretty easy to find a bad report about someone. You know what's amazing above and beyond that? How easy it is for people to say, "It's written, it must be true... and more is written so it *must REALLY be true!*" That's the way people think. It's comparable to what happens sometimes with children, they'll come to the parents because they had a fight. The first one that gets to tell you the story... be careful. Sometimes it's pretty easy to believe the first story you hear. I hope no parent is that foolish. Or someone else will want to share with us a story of something that's happened to them, that something happened and they want to share this with you and sometimes stories are clouded by emotion and feelings and prejudice – especially if people are wrapped up in something emotional. You have to be very careful you don't take it all hook, line and sinker; back away from it and don't let it affect you in a wrong way. I hope you understand what I'm saying. We have to be careful of judgement.

So how often are things of a good report about one another? Looking at the good things that are being done and accomplished? Because human nature tends to want to gravitate toward the other because it's juicier, makes us sometimes feel better in a perverted way. We've got to be careful!

If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, God says to, **think on those things.** Look at the potential. Look at what God is offering. Look at what God is giving. Look at the changes taking place. That's why I love going from area to area. We're so blessed to be able to travel from area to area about every 6 months at least, sometimes more, sometimes less... and we're able to see the change and the growth in people. The change is there because of God's spirit, because of people yielding to God's spirit. It's the growth that's taking place. And every time we go anywhere we're encouraged because we see change. People that come together on a regular basis don't necessarily see that over a period of time, but we're blessed because we get to. Things that are spoken, things that are done, things that God gives perception spiritually to see and discern. It's exciting, it's inspiring. And that's how we all need to think and ask to think before God toward each other.

If there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which you have both learned and received and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you... So he's saying this is how it's done, do it, live it.

We aren't through with this series yet...and to me this is *good news*. This is an exciting series, it really is. This is an incredibly powerful subject and one to be embraced in a very powerful way; and I think especially as we're getting ready for the Feast of Tabernacles and being able to be together and the admonitions like we had last year of the importance of being at one. There are two great important things at the Feast.

1. What God feeds us in the sermons.
2. The power of the fellowship of being together with each other, of learning and growing and sharing time together God's way.

It's a powerful, powerful thing that God gives us in the Feast of Tabernacles and there are many of you in the last three years... you haven't had this experience for eight days. If you have the opportunity to do it, it is such an *incredible* opportunity – it truly is. And it has so much to do with this sermon series and how you *live* the Feast of Tabernacles.

~~~end