

I would first just like to say, "Hello," to everyone out there today. I hope you are having a wonderful Sabbath.

Often times as physical human beings we lose focus, we get wrapped up in our own selves and our daily routines, we lose sight of the bigger picture, and we truly lack a balanced and proper perspective in our lives. We have a tendency in human life to forget, or to fail to see, how we were or who we were before God called us. We have a tendency to forget what we have been called to and how God has worked with us and molded and fashioned our lives. We have a tendency to forget why we were created, what our purpose is, and that we share that same purpose with each and every other human being. And finally, we have a tendency to forget, or to fail to see, our true spiritual condition. This is especially true in the context of how we view others, and it is all due in large part to a lack of perspective in our lives. Indeed, this lack of perspective affects many areas of our lives, but it is most often manifests in our relationships - our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

So the title for today's sermon will be *A Proper Perspective*, and we will focus on what it means to have a proper perspective in our lives both physically and spiritually, as it is a matter of how we see ourselves in terms of living this way of life.

So to begin let's first take a look at our relationship with God, and we will explore what it means to truly be putting Him first above all things in our lives. To do this, we will start with some very basic scriptures in Exodus 20 (that's Exodus 20), and we will take a look at the Ten Commandments as they were given to the physical nation of Israel. Now, of course, we know that Jesus Christ came along at a later point in time and magnified the reality and purpose of these Commandments, but let's begin by just taking a look at this account, and let's strive to see the greater focus, or perspective if you will, that God is giving to His people.

So in **Exodus 20:1—And God spoke all these words, saying: I am the Eternal your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.** So right off the bat God is establishing something. He says, "I am the Eternal your God," or better yet, "I am Yahweh your Elohim." And we know that Elohim refers to His family - the God Family. So God is giving us a focus here of something He wants to be established in our minds, and that is a focus on family, His Family, and the structure within that family. And what is it that family is so often founded upon? It is all about relationships. Relationships are what make up the majority of our lives and what occupy the majority of our time and our thinking. How fitting is it, then, that the Ten Commandments all deal with relationships, with the first four pertaining to our relationship with God and the last six pertaining to our relationships with one another.

So once again in **verse 2—I am Yahweh your Elohim, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.** This is so very true. Just as God has brought the physical Israelites out of Egypt, He has called us to come out of spiritual Egypt, out of the house of bondage and captivity of sin. And for what purpose? To have a relationship with Him, to share in His creation, and to become a part of His family - to become Elohim. So is it just coincidence that God uses the term Elohim just before He gives the Ten Commandments? No, of course not! God is giving us a focus, a vision, a perspective on what is important to Him, and if it is important to God then it should most certainly be important to us. In fact, these Ten Commandments should be the ten most important things in our lives.

So continuing on in **verse 3—You shall have no other gods before Me.** Ah, so this is it then, the single most important thing in our lives - the whole crux of the matter (if you will). For without this first Commandment we truly cannot have the rest. This is very much akin to number 1 of the 18 truths given to Philadelphia, which is the truth about government. For without government it is impossible to truly come to see or to know *any* of the other truths.

So what does it mean when God says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." For the physical Israelites it probably had more to do with who or what they were worshipping on a physical plane, but for us it is a matter of whether or not we are truly putting God first in our lives, whether or not He is truly in the forefront of our thinking. And that will be reflected by the choices we make day in and day out in our lives. Are we praying, studying, and listening to sermons like we should? Or do we find ourselves at the end of the day thinking, "Well, I just didn't have time for that. I just didn't have time for God." Because, truly, that is what we are saying when we fail to do these things, when we are prioritizing other things ahead of God in our lives.

Now, sometimes there are probably some legitimate reasons or excuses for not doing what we should be doing, but I would be willing to bet the majority of the time it comes down to whether or not we really want to do it, whether or not we are truly desiring God above all else in our lives. For some of you this may not be an issue at all. Maybe your prayer life is rock solid and you do some form of bible study or listening to sermons every day. Well that is truly a good thing, but you can rest assured that your battle lies somewhere else, because every time we fight against or resist God, we are placing something before Him and we are committing spiritual idolatry.

So that leads us into **verse 4—You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**

So it is easy to look at this one and say, "Well, I don't do that. I haven't worshipped any wooden statues today." But we know that we, in fact, *do* worship "little wooden statues" every day, but

instead of being physical in nature and taking on the likeness of a cow or a fish or whatever other nonsense man wants to worship, ours are spiritual in nature and they take on the likeness of our very own selves. Because truly, this is whom we want to please, this is whom we want to lift up, this is whom we want and desire to serve - self. It is all about the self and satisfying our own lustful wants, wills, and desires.

I mean really, just think about how ridiculous it would be to make a little statue of yourself and then to bow down to it and worship it. It's crazy! But that is exactly what we do on a daily basis. Because for us it is not that elaborate, we don't have to get down on our knees and worship, but we do it through our thoughts, through our attitudes, and through our actions. It is a matter of holding on to some form of selfishness above what God says we should. A good example of this is to consider if you have ever found yourself in a situation where you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that your attitude in a matter is just plain wrong, but you hold onto it anyways because you *want* to be mad, or because you *want* to be upset, or because you feel justified in your actions or your attitude and you just don't want to give it up. Well, that is the very definition of spiritual idolatry. That is putting something first above God. And what is that we are putting first above God? Self.

So continuing on now in **verse 7—You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.**

So again, this is not just about words and taking God's name in vain verbally, but it is about actions and bearing God's name in vain. It is about failing to uphold high standards to those around us and for failing to be a good and right representative of God's way of life. We are ambassadors to God and Christ. We stand for and represent something that is so beyond our physical comprehension, for a way of life, for a government, and for a Family that is soon to be established on this earth. We *truly* bear God's name, Elohim! I don't think we really grasp that. I don't think we really understand that the Great God of this universe has called us out of this world and given us His name, and we have a great responsibility to uphold that. It is called an adoption, but it is so far beyond that truly. It would be akin to you adopting your own children, because in an adoption there can be bias, but with God there is no bias. He loves each and every one of us equally. He calls each of us sons and daughters, and He says that He is our Father. How awesome is that? How incredible is that to be called sons of God, to get to call the great God of this universe Father? What an honor! What a privilege! But do we truly grasp it? In our physical lives, can we? So don't take it lightly, brethren, rather, seek to honor God with every fiber of your being and in every aspect of your life.

In **verse 8—Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.** So God sanctifies the Sabbath day. He sets it apart. And He says that we are to sanctify it and set it apart as well. This means that we will refrain from

seeking our own pleasures on this day, and instead, we will be seeking to honor God with how we keep the Sabbath. And this is something that we are ever growing in.

We can always do more, we can always do a better job of serving God on the Sabbath, whether that is in prayer or study or fellowship. And honestly, I think sometimes we undervalue fellowship. Maybe we say that we don't, but it most certainly comes out in our actions. Now, some of us are isolated and don't have the same opportunities for fellowship that others may have, but if we are not and if we do have the ability to gather together with others we need to be doing that. And I am not just talking about on a weekly basis or in your own area, because I know that in Cincinnati alone we have quite a few who are driving close to 2 hours one way just to get to services. And that is an awesome and beautiful thing because it adds so much to our fellowship week in and week out. Not only are *they* being rewarded for their sacrifice by getting to share with others, but we also are all being rewarded for their sacrifice, since as I said before, it adds so much to the fellowship.

You know, I think that something we all really fail to grasp the importance of is how much we can add to the overall fellowship on the Sabbath. We tend to minimize just how much it means to others that we are willing to make the sacrifice to be with them on the Sabbath day. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people say, and that I have said myself, that simply talking with and sharing with others has provided such a boost spiritually. And it doesn't have to be sitting around discussing scriptures (although that can be a good as well), but it is just in getting to know others on a more intimate level; perhaps learning their story, or their background, or their family life, or anything else because we are a family. And the true value in family is in the closeness of the relationships, and the value in relationships is in the sharing of life. It is in building bonds and drawing closer to one another.

So when we are unwilling to make the effort to get together with others, regardless of the reason, we are not just robbing ourselves but we are also robbing an entire congregation of people of the opportunity to share in life. And if we think that we have nothing to gain by traveling to certain areas outside of our own, we are absolutely wrong. As is often the case in life, so much of what we get out of something depends on what we put into it. So if we are not putting in the effort in fellowship then we will get nothing out of it, but if we *do* put forth that effort we will not only be blessed but we will also be able to add so much to others. We will have the opportunity to add to their Sabbath day and what more could we ask for?

Okay, so the main point of looking at *these* scriptures was to set the foundation for our relationship with God. He calls us out of this world and gives us His spirit, and with that comes the responsibility to live His way of life. It's about putting God first in our lives, seeking to get rid of the self, upholding high standards, conducting ourselves in a worthy manner, and honoring God on the Sabbath day. This is what God says we are to do if we are to enter into a true relationship with Him, if we want to be called sons and daughters of God, and if we want to be able to call Him Father. It comes down to how we think, because it is our mindset that drives our actions, and to have that mindset means that

we truly see how blessed we are to live this way of life. It means that we truly have that proper perspective in our lives.

So now, if you will, please turn with me to Mathew 22:35-38. As you turn there I would just like to share with you something that stood out to me as I was going through this process, and that is that the Ten Commandments have never changed. They have been the same since the day they were given, with all of the same magnitude and depth of understanding contained therein, and they will continue to be the same on into the future. However, what *has* changed has been our ability to understand and grasp them throughout time, due in large part to our limited physical capacity. So just as with the 57 Truths, the Ten Commandments are a matter of a progressive revelation through time, as God has had different purposes for what He is working out in the lives of His people, and they truly are a great example of the present truth and how it is revealed through time.

So in **Mathew 22:35**—Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, **Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?** And Jesus said to him, **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and great commandment.** So Christ sums this up so much better than I can, and He really gets to the heart of the matter. This is essentially the first four Commandments all wrapped up in one, or really, just the first Commandment with all of its intended meaning and purpose expounded upon. To truly do this, "to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our mind," is something that cannot be attained in this physical flesh, but it *is* something that we should all be striving for and working toward. And the way we can go about doing this is through prayer and repentance and seeking to change, to overcome the self, and to become something more.

It is that transformation process, that metamorphosis, that we must all go through before we can truly do what this scripture says, and it is then only accomplished through God's great power and desire to bring about His family. God's desire is for you, He wants you to succeed and to overcome and to become a part of His family. Strive to understand just how awesome that is and have the confidence in what God is doing in your life.

Let's turn now to Ephesians 1:1-5. That's **Ephesians 1:1**—Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.** Now, let me stop there for just a second. God says that He blesses us "with every spiritual blessing." Do we see that? Do we understand just how truly blessed we are? It is far beyond what anyone else in this world has, because this is truly about a mindset that we are able to have if we can see it. It is truly about understanding what God is offering you and being ever thankful for it. We have to be thankful and grateful to God in our lives. It is so very important because it truly shapes the thinking and produces a mindset that is not only humble, but also one that is positive. And that is another thing that should all be cognizant of - positivity in our lives. The importance of this cannot be overstated, especially in our prayer lives. We should go before God with thankfulness, and gratitude, and positivity that we are able to repent, to

be forgiven of sin and to have His spirit continuing to live in us. Truly, how happy would you be if the bank called you up right now and said, "Hey! By the way, that mortgage you owe us? Forget about it! The debt has been forgiven." We would be ecstatic! Yet this is what God tells us every day when we repent of sin. And not only that, but He says, "Oh, and by the way, here is an endless pile of treasure that extends beyond physical existence." Good deal, right? I mean, who wouldn't take that? But sometimes we fail to "see" this. We don't truly grasp the worth of what God offers us.

One of my wife's favorite scriptures is in Psalms 23 where it says, "My cup runneth over." And it is a beautiful scripture because it perfectly encompasses that mindset that we are to have. Truly there has never been a point in your life since you have been called into the Church that this scripture has not applied to you. And we need to be able to "see" that. No matter what we have gone through, or what we are going through, we are so awesomely blessed in this way of life. Truly, the worst day that you have ever had is probably *still* better than 95% of the world, better than the reality of life that people face on a daily basis. And because you have God's spirit it is truly better than 100% of the world. That is a fact! And we need to have that perspective in our lives. Mr. Weinland is in prison right now, but I guarantee if you ask him he would say that he is blessed beyond measure, that *his* cup is running over, because once again, it is about a mindset, a way of thinking that we must have.

So continuing on, **Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.** God's plan is *for* us. He knows the end from the beginning, and in the end is His family. That is our purpose. That is what we have been called to. **...that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, through repentance and forgiveness of sin because of God's great mercy and love towards us. Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.**

It is through Jesus Christ that this is being accomplished, through that sacrifice that was made for us, by our elder brother, to be able to become a part of God's Family. How awesome is that brethren? How awesome is that family structure that God has given to us? With God as our Father, the Church as our mother, Jesus Christ as our elder brother and the head of the Church, and all of us, who have been called to be brothers and sisters to one another. Not in some syrupy Protestant way, but in a way that is true and right and far beyond our physical families.

As we said before, it is called an adoption, and the online dictionary gives three definitions for the word adoption. Number 1 is "the act or process of adopting a child." So this is something that we readily understand in a physical sense, but we must also grasp it in a spiritual sense. God calls us out of the world. He chooses us, just as much as any parent whom when adopting a child puts a lot of time and effort and preparation into that child. Or in other words, they think on that child, and most certainly God thinks on us.

The second definition is "the act or process of beginning to use something new or different." And this one goes both ways. We must choose (adopt), something new and different, and that is the very thinking and ways of God. And if we do this, then God will choose us (adopt us), and begin using us as a new and different tool in His hands. I liken this to a carpenter who gets a new tool, and although he already has a variety of tools, and each one with a different purpose, when he gets a new tool he wants to use it, so he puts it to the test. And the tools *only* job is to be of good use.

So finally we come to the last definition and that is "the act or process of giving official acceptance or approval to something," and I can add to this "or someone." God is giving us the opportunity to become Elohim. He brings us into His Church and we are tried and tested until we can come to that point in time when God can give us His official acceptance and approval, when He can say to us, "Now I know you." So for the 144,000 this has already taken place. Their adoption is complete. They are simply awaiting the day when their change will take place and they can fully become a part of God's Family. The rest of us have to wait until that time comes for us. But whether or not we get there will depend on the choices and decisions we make in our lives.

So let's quickly reread the last part of that scripture again where it says, **Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.** So applying this to the last definition of adoption we can see that acceptance into God's Family is only made possible through the process - which is to say only by and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Moving on now, let's turn to Romans 8:14-17. So that's **Romans 8:14—For as many as are led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God.** Once again, "sons of God." Over and over again God uses these terms and hammers home that focus we are to have. **For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.**

So the sacrifice of Jesus Christ - the one by whom this process of adoption is made possible - is what gives us the ability to repent of sin for the purpose of allowing God's holy spirit to live in us. And it is through that process of God's spirit living and dwelling within us that witnesses (gives evidence or proof) that we are the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ. And what are we heirs to? What is our inheritance? It is the Family of God. It is to become Elohim. That is what we are being called to. Understand that, cherish that, have that proper perspective in our lives. God says that we are joint heirs with Christ and that is no small thing. Do we "see" that? Do we *know* what is in front of us? And if we do, do we understand that it carries with it a great responsibility that requires much hard work and effort?

Okay, so now if you will, please turn to James chapter 1, James chapter 1, and we will look in verses 1-8. The purpose of going through this next set of scriptures is to hopefully gain some understanding

into how God works with us. We have already looked at the importance of our relationship with Him, how that's where everything starts, and we have also looked at the tremendous focus on family that we are to have that God gives to us. And now we will look at James and seek to gain some understanding into how God molds and fashions our lives and helps us to become a part of His family.

So in **James 1:1—James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.** Now, this is difficult to do. Truly, it is easier said than done, because trials are hard. It is difficult to go through things in this physical life, whether it be on the job, or at school, or at home. And trials come in all shapes and sizes - some are physical, some are spiritual, some are more serious and difficult to go through while others are more of a nuisance, perhaps a broken down car or a missed flight. Really, anything can become a trial if we allow it. So much of the time it has more to do with how we respond, with how we react to certain situations in life that matters. But the funny thing about trials is that they are all about perspective. It truly comes down to our vantage point, the way we see the world and how we perceive ourselves in it.

I remember when Mr. Weinland first went to prison. I was writing him a letter and I was sharing with him some so-called trials that I had been going through, and then I stopped and thought about how ridiculous that was. Here I was writing a letter to a man in prison, a man who I knew should not even be in there, yet I was the one complaining. How pathetic! But that is how we are as human beings and our so-called trials in life are always relative to our condition of life. And when you get down to it, they really aren't even trials at all, they are distractions at best. Things that if we let them will pull our focus away from God and put it back on ourselves.

It is like I mentioned earlier, the worst day you have ever had is nothing in the scheme of things, because you probably still did it with a full belly, with a roof over your head, with clean clothes and running water. All things that we take for granted, brethren, especially in this country where we have been blessed to have so much. But we are truly like spoiled children. We have been given so much that we can no longer truly appreciate what we have. It's sad, really, and it is our ingratitude in life that shapes our outlook on it.

So again, your worst day is not so bad. We all go through things, but that is the point. That is what produces growth in our lives. And that is what has molded and fashioned who we are and has brought us up to this point in time where we are now. And where we are now is *so* far beyond our comprehension. We have God in our lives and we have God on our side. And we have God to lean on and count on and focus on when life gets tough. That is a blessing that is so far above what anyone else in this world has. So if you are in the Church, if God has called you and is working with you, then it doesn't matter who you are, or where you are, or what you have gone through, or what you will go through, you are still blessed beyond all the peoples in this world. I don't care if you are like *Slumdog Millionaire* and you are living in a garbage dump in India, if God is calling you and working with you, and feeding you on a spiritual level then you are so awesomely, incredibly blessed! *That* is the perspective that we must have. *That* is how we must see ourselves and view ourselves. That is what

will allow us to maintain an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness to God in *all* that we have been given.

So verse 2 again—**My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.** And patience is such an underrated aspect of our spiritual lives. We have to be able to understand that we are physical, that change doesn't take place overnight, and we must allow ourselves time to change. This shouldn't be used as an excuse, but it is a matter of perspective because sometimes we can be so hard on ourselves and expect too much. Just do your part and let God do His and try not to let the highs be too high and the lows be too low. **But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.** This scripture always makes me think of a Japanese business principle that I learned when working for an automotive manufacturer, and that is the idea of "Kaizen," which is the practice of continuous improvement. I like this concept because it encompasses so many principles that are important in our spiritual lives. For starters, to acknowledge the need for improvement shows the humility, the desire, and the willingness to learn, to change and to adopt new strategies. Secondly, it acknowledges that in striving to perfect a practice there will always be room for improvement. And lastly, it is an acknowledgement that this is a process of time, which will require great foresight and patience to accomplish. There is an understanding that there will be much trial and error along the way, but there is also the perspective that those are necessary steps in a continual path of improvement. In other words it is a methodical and patient approach. And that is how we should be in our spiritual lives - methodical and patient.

Continuing on... **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.** It has to be 100%. There is no room for doubt. But understand that God is faithful to do what He says He will do. You cannot be halfway committed and expect to gain anything from God. **For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.** Because you allow your own thoughts and attitudes and emotions to sway your thinking. You get fixated on self and you lose sight of God, and rather than trusting in God and sticking to the course you have set out on, you find yourself being tossed about at the will of the sea. **For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.** So again, if we allow ourselves to be tossed about, to lose focus, then it is impossible to receive what God wants to give to us.

Let's turn now to Hebrews 12:1-12. So that's **Hebrews 12**, and beginning in **verse 1—Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.** So again, it's about patience, and understanding that this is a long race, a marathon not a sprint. But that does not mean that we can coast. Truly, we should run like it is a sprint the whole time, yet all the while knowing that it is a marathon. But we run to obtain the prize, to win the race. It's not about just finishing, because in this race if we start to let up or start to take it easy for a lap or two, we won't make it to the finish. So run with everything you have all the time, always looking to God to

give you the strength and endurance you need to make it. And if we are running with all our might than God will give us what we need. **Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith,**” because it starts with Him, with His sacrifice, and it ends with Him, when God's Family is complete.

Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the stake, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. This is another way of saying that you really don't have it that bad. Look at what He went through for what He believed. Our "trials" seem to pale in comparison, do they not? Again, this is about having a right outlook and giving our trials a proper place.

You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. Every time I read this scripture now I can't help but think about Jeremy Weinland's sermon, when he said, "So, unless you are struggling and start to perspire blood, then you can be assured that you can probably give it just a little bit more." I love this because it is a statement of perspective, and it helps us to understand that we can always do more.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. This can be a difficult thing for us in life. It is never easy to take correction, but in reality it should be. Is that not what we want? Is that not what we pray for on a continual basis, asking God to show us the error of our ways, asking God to help us to change? Well, change is *all* about correction. Repentance is admitting we are wrong and asking God to forgive us, and then, if we are able to, and if we have a humble spirit, we can receive correction and begin to change. But for some reason it can be harder to take correction when it is done face-to-face, when we are directly confronted with it. And, really, it just comes down to our stinking, rotten pride. In reality we should just accept it for what it is, understanding that it comes from God, the Great God of this universe, who loves us and cares for us and wants us to succeed. So we make the changes necessary and we seek, through repentance and prayer, the understanding necessary to accept it, because in the end it really just comes down to our attitude in the matter. Are we willing to change for the sake of changing because we understand God's government and that all correction comes from Him? Or are we holding onto and clinging on to our own selfish thoughts and justifications? It is really ridiculous when you think about it, to desire course corrections and then to be discouraged when we receive it. On the contrary we should be thankful for it, thankful that God has shown us yet another area of ourselves that we can shed and get rid of and draw closer to Him in spirit and thinking.

For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. It is always done out of love and outgoing care and concern; we need to understand that. God is not malicious; He wants what's best for us. **If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?** This is what is reasonable and to be expected. Just as much as we can see that our own children need correction, we, too, should be able to see that we need correction from our heavenly Father. **But if you are without chastening, of which all have**

become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. If we do not receive correction then we cannot be called sons of God.

So do not despise correction but rather seek to embrace it. Shouldn't nature itself show us that this is a good thing? Have you ever had a pleasant experience around a really undisciplined child? Of course not! On the contrary, it is usually very frustrating and unpleasant. Most of the time you want to snatch the kid up and give them a bit of discipline yourself. Of course you can't do that. But unfortunately, this seems to be more and more the way of the world, where children are undisciplined and really just out of control. This comes down, for the most part, to lazy parenting, and we can be 1,000% certain that God is not a lazy parent. He will not have undisciplined children.

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? We should always be able to "see" the bigger picture in correction as well. It extends far beyond our physical lives. God's concern is with our spiritual lives and the end result of it all. He wants us to be a part of His Family.

For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. So if we yield to the training, the process of correction in our lives, then we will be able to produce fruit. Truly, that is the only way to produce fruit in our lives, through constantly seeking to change and correct our thinking, to bring it into unity and harmony and oneness with God. And God says that we must produce fruit, therefore, it is imperative that we receive correction.

Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. Be strong and courageous and walk confidently in God's way of life. As it was mentioned before, we bear God's name, and we can't do that in some feeble "woe is me" type of manner. Truly, just picture someone walking around like this, hunched over and wobbly with his or her hands scraping the ground. Would you look at that person and think, "Wow! He has it all figured out! I need to be doing whatever he is doing." No, of course not! On the contrary, we would want to steer clear of them and whatever they are associated with. So we can't be like this, brethren. We need to get over ourselves, to stop feeling sorry for ourselves, and to understand that God's way of life does not revolve around us as individuals. We all have a part to play, and we cannot play it while we are stuck in our own little bubble of sorrow. You know, Jesus Christ is our example to live by, and His greatest example was one of sacrifice. It was a complete and total sacrifice of self in order to give to others and to love others. And that is what we must also do, that is what we have been called to, to sacrifice for others. Do we see that? Do we understand that? I think of the Weinland's and the Harrell's and the Matthew's, and all I see is sacrifice. Their whole lives are dedicated to serving the Church, to making the way easier for you and me. The Church does not exist, and operate, and function by some fluke. It takes a lot of hard work and effort, and above all, sacrifice. So whether we are in the ministry or not is inconsequential, because no matter where we have been placed in the Body we have been called to

sacrifice. That has to be our mindset, our focus, *and* our perspective. We have to, each and every one of us, be willing to give up the self in order to better love and serve others.

And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. "Making straight paths for our feet" requires constant course corrections. It is like driving a car; you constantly have to make minor adjustments to keep it in the proper lane. You can't just take your hands off the wheel and mash the accelerator and hope it stays on course. But we have to continually be guiding it, accelerating when needed, decelerating when needed, but never stopping, always moving forward. Or as Johnny Harrell more accurately puts it, we are really only on the straight path when we are careening from one ditch to the other! Either way it comes down to our desire to stay on the path, to make course corrections, and to continue to press forward.

So for our final set of scriptures today, please turn to Romans 13, and we will look at the perspective we are to have in terms of how we view others and our relationships with them. We didn't quite make it as far as I thought we would in this particular area, but we have already hit on much of this, and I feel as though we made it as far as we were supposed to.

So in **Romans 13**, and beginning in **verse 8—Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.** To owe someone something usually means that we have incurred a debt, and a debt requires some form of repayment. Well, just a few chapters back in Romans 8, God says that we are debtors, "not to the flesh but to the spirit." We know that we have been purchased by God, and that a price has been paid for us. And God says that the way that we can begin to repay that debt is to live according to the spirit. This means that we are living according to His law, according to His 10 Commandments. And as it was mentioned earlier, these are all based on love. The first four are about how to love God, and the last six are about how to love others. So it means what it says here, that, "he who loves another has fulfilled the law," because the law is based on love and it is fulfilled by living love - agape (God's love) towards others.

For the Commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet, and if *there is* any other Commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore, love *is* the fulfillment of the law. To "love someone as yourself" means to place them first (above self) in your thinking, and this requires a total outgoing care and concern for others.

Okay, so the focus of this sermon has been about having a proper perspective in our lives. It is about seeing ourselves for how we are, who we are, what we have been called to, and the opportunities that are set before us. It is about understanding why God has called us, and what our purpose is. It is about seeing how God works with us, how He molds and fashions our lives, and having the patience and foresight required to stay on our path of continual improvement. It is about loving others, with a godly love, and sacrificing our own selves in order to better love and serve them. It is about understanding that we are a physical family (as a Church) and heirs to a spiritual Family.

This last point makes me think of (if you have ever had the privilege to see), one of Mrs. Weinland's post-sermon talks. We often joke about how she gets up there and calls everybody out. But what she is really doing is sharing with us some personal accounts involving different individuals in an effort to show that we are all connected, that we are all in this together, that we truly are a family, and that we always need the constant support of one another. So seek to have this perspective in your lives, seek the understanding, the wisdom, and the foresight that God offers us. And above all, seek to better love and serve God (our Father) so that we may better love and serve one another.

So in parting I will leave you with the next few verses, as I feel that they are extraordinarily relevant and pertinent to our time now. **And *do* this, love one another, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed.** And how close is it now? It is just around the corner. **The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.**