

Church of God, The Eternal

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What Is God Like?

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Well for the message this afternoon. I picked by title what will appear to be a very simple concept. I've titled it, "What is God like?" What is God like? Even from the title you are not going to be able to tell, specifically, what my point is until we get into it. But hopefully soon you will see.

How do we think about God? When you think of God in your mind, when someone mentions the name of God what is it that comes to mind? What is it that we believe about the character of God or that Being we refer to as God? What are the things that come to mind when we think about that Being. There are so many attributes that are assigned to God by people in this world. And even if you read the word of God—that Scripture that was preserved and inspired—it's very, very easy to be confused about how to sort all of those attributes of God and really understand what that Being is—what He is like, who it is that we're really claiming to worship. There are seemingly so many contradictory attributes assigned to God, how can we know what He is really like?

I want to give a little bit of a test just to start off this afternoon. To have each one of you evaluate in your own minds exactly how you perceive God. What are the things that you attribute to God as His greatest, most significant characteristics? Each one of us have something, or some set of characteristics that automatically come to mind that we ascribe to the character and nature of God. What do we think His strongest and most dominant traits are? Take this little test, ten questions, and see how you answer. This is like one of those tests that you would have in school, a multiple choice test. Two possible answers for each of ten questions. We'll take the test and then see how you rate yourself. Here's the question: Which attribute best defines God? Number 1: Benevolent or austere? Number 2: Which attribute best defines God? Demanding or charitable? Question 3: Which attribute best defines God? Compassionate or uncompromising? Number 4: Inflexible or empathic? Number 5: Lenient or exacting? Number 6: Severe or patient? Number 7: Tender or unyielding? Number 8: Rigorous or tolerant? Number 9: Sympathetic or stern? Number 10: Strict or clement?

What did you think of that test? Well if you had difficulty in answering any of the questions then you are on the right track because there are no right answers to those

questions that you could have selected. Sorry to be a little devious but I wanted to make a point in getting into the scriptures for this afternoon—to let you know even by that demonstration that there are probably some of those questions that you did jump to a particular answer and felt, yes, between these two I believe He's more this than the other. But I can guarantee you, brethren, in every single case, for every single question, there is no distinction in those characteristics. They are all—every single one of them—a part of the character and the nature of God—the God that we serve. He is incredibly merciful, he is incredibly lenient, benevolent, charitable, compassionate and empathic, patient, tender, tolerant, sympathetic, and clement. And at the very same time He is also austere, and He is demanding and He is uncompromising, He is inflexible and exacting and severe. He is unyielding and rigorous and stern and strict. Is that the way we view God? Can we truly picture and fathom and reconcile all of those different characteristics into that single entity that we call God? Human beings have an incredibly difficult time in attributing all of those things to the God that they claim to serve. And if you're like me, you're probably even still challenged day by day to be able to put all of those things together and think about God in truly the correct way, because according to our own thinking and our own minds we find it hard to have both soft characteristics and hard characteristics at the same time existing together. More than likely we attribute an individual—any individual, spiritual or physical—with having either a bent toward hardness or a bent toward softness. And to say that an individual—especially a Heavenly Father—has all of those attributes at the same time, is something that escapes our ability to fathom in these human minds, except if we are led by the Holy Spirit and we are given an opportunity to understand and have the relationship with that God, to have our minds opened to receive that Truth. We do have the capacity, then, through that Spirit to come to know that God and to understand what He is really like.

Why is it important to know what God is like? Because our hope for salvation, brethren, has everything to do with becoming just like Him. The example of Jesus Christ who was sent as a forerunner, the life He lived in the flesh as a human being on this earth was to set an example for us to show us exactly how to follow in His footsteps, that we too might ultimately become part of that Family—to have exactly the same character, to have exactly the same traits. And the admonition is that we put on that character and those traits now, that we begin to emulate the perfect character of that Living God who has called us. And that means, brethren, to be able to appreciate every characteristic that is a part of His perfect rationale, His perfect orientation, His thoughts—everything about Him. And that means we cannot pick and choose and we cannot separate out those characteristics that we think according to our own minds are the best. Because as we will see as we go on, some of the most serious mistakes that have been made—and those things that even will threaten us before the return of Jesus Christ—that leave us open to that adversary and the potential of being deceived, is when we fail to see God and we fail to recognize all of those things that are part of His character upon which we need to be focused.

Let's look at some of the scriptures in the Bible that talk about these different characteristics, those that appear to human beings to be contradictory—being attributes of the same Being. Let's begin with Luke 6 and verse 35:

But love ye your enemies [*Love* ye your enemies] and do good and lend hoping for nothing again and your reward shall be great and you shall be the children of the Highest. For He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

What is the characteristic that we're talking about first concerning this God that we serve? It says that He is "kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Is that how we think about God? "Be you therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful." So whoever this God is that we claim to believe in and to love and to serve, He is the totality of the concept of mercy. And it says He grants that mercy not only to those who "deserve it," but even to those who are unthankful and to those who are evil. Keep it in mind.

Now let's turn to Psalm 21 and verse 8:

Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies. Thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger. The Lord [that means "the Eternal"] shall swallow them up in his wrath. And the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee. They imagined a mischievous device which they are not able to perform. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted, Lord [be thou exalted, Eternal] in thine own strength. So will we sing and praise thy power.

Here's a different side to that very same God. Who is that Lord? Who is it that is being described here? It is the *YHVH* of the Old Testament. It is the very same Being who became Jesus Christ—who we just read about in Luke 6 as the personification of a merciful God. And, yet, here in Psalm 21 and verse 8 we find a totally different side to that very same Being who is full of strength and power. This is not a wishy-washy God. This is not a wimp and a weakling, much as people of this world try to ascribe to Him when they think about Jesus Christ and that Being they call God, who they consider their Savior. And, yet, they don't know anything about His character. He *is* capable of wrath. And, yet, that wrath also is a part of His perfect character. So somehow, brethren, we have to be able to reconcile how a perfect God who is full of mercy can also have wrath in His capability as He exercises power.

And it was amazing to me—and I'll stop right now and comment about the very appropriateness of the opening prayer that we had this afternoon as we heard a supplication

to that Heavenly Father who is the God of the entire universe and everything that was created—and the power and the scope of all that He holds within His hands. Yet at the very same time how He grants mercy to men. Keep it in mind.

Hebrews 2 and verse 16:

For, verily, he took not on him the nature of angels. But he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. To make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

Most human beings would think you were talking about a totally different individual than that *YHVH* we just read about in Psalm 21, who is capable of using His power even for wrath against certain individuals. But here He is, the very same one, ". . . made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God."

Deuteronomy 7 and verse 1:

When the Eternal thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it and have cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perrizites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou. And when the Lord thy God . . .

Who is it that we're talking about? The Lord, the Eternal, the *YHVH*. "Thy God." What God? *Elohim*—the plural form which denotes the godhead, consisting of the Father, and God of the second part who became Jesus Christ. And so when you read, "The Lord thy God," who are we talking about? We're specifying first that we are talking about that union of the Father and the one who became the Son in that singular godhead called God, and yet specifically, The Lord, the *YHVH* of that *Elohim*. We are talking about the one who became our sacrifice and our Savior. And when the *YHVH* of *Elohim*—the Lord thy God—"shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them. Thou shalt make no covenant with them nor show mercy unto them."

Wait a minute. Didn't we just read, this Being is the one who has given ultimate personal sacrifice and mercy? And, yet, here we find the very same Being instructing His nation the Israelites, ". . . nor show mercy unto them. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son." We can't dismiss it, brethren, there has to be a way that we can reconcile these different—seemingly contradictory—attributes assigned to the very same Being. Keep it in mind.

Let's keep going, Luke 13 and verse 34. Here was that Jesus Christ even grieving for the hardness of the hearts of the people for which He came to sacrifice Himself and to teach. And what did He say?

O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets and stones them that are sent unto you, How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen dost gather her brood under her wings and you would not.

Here we see the compassion, and the leniency, and the desire to give, in the character of that Being. Deuteronomy 32 and verse 9, continuing with the same thought:

For the Eternal's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the waste howling wilderness he led him out. He instructed him. He kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stireth up her nest . . .

And look at the imagery that is created by this example to describe that God. What is God like?

. . . as an eagle stireth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings, So the Eternal alone did lead him. And there was no strange god with him.

Is there any better illustration of the love and concern and compassion and mercy and longsuffering of that Being than in that which He was willing to give to those chosen people?

Luke 19 and beginning in verse 20:

And another came saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound which I have kept laid up in a napkin, for I feared thee. Because thou art an austere man, Thou takes up that thou layest not down and reaps that thou didst not sow.

So here was an individual who we will find, did not fulfil his responsibility toward God and in this parable we find ascribed to God the attribute of being austere. What did Christ say? Did He deny it? Let's see. "And he said unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee thou wicked servant. Thou knewest I was an austere man." He did not deny that austerity was an actual part of His character. No, He didn't correct him. He used it to condemn him.

Thou knewest I was an austere man [He absolutely is austere, brethren] taking up that I laid not down and reaping that I did not sow. Wherefore, then, gave

not my money into the bank that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten pounds. And they said unto him, Lord he hath ten pounds.

In other words, "This man's already got more than enough. He's got ten and you're going to take away the one pound, the only pound that this man has?"

For I say unto you that everyone which hath shall be given and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.

Reconcile that attribute, brethren, into your concept of God along with the merciful and the longsuffering, the gentle, the meek attributes of that Being we call God. Somehow we must be able to do it because they are all—every single one of them—absolutely characteristics of the very same Being.

Psalm 91 and beginning in verse 2:

I will say of the Eternal, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God. In him will I trust. Surely he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wing shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the arrow that flies by day.

Another assurance—a direct assurance for someone—of the protection and the peace and the defense—of the mercy and the love poured out by that very same Being.

Isaiah 13 and verse 9: "Behold, the day of the Eternal comes." Again, for anyone who thinks that we're dealing with a pansy or a pushover or anything else with the machinations of the minds of men when describing the Being who was called Jesus Christ, here's a prophecy for the last days:

Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the

heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished.

Who is that Being, my dear brethren, who we call God and we claim to serve? Is this the God that you think of, or at least, entertain when you bow before Him in prayer or when you consider the direction of your path day by day? Or do we think only of a wishy-washy pushover of a Savior?

On the other hand, brethren, if we are ones that have a natural tendency to think about Him only as an austere and vengeful and an uncompromising and an unyielding God, what about Romans 5 and verse 5? Let's turn there.

And hope makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength. In due time, Christ died for . . .

For the righteous? For the people that were trying very hard to live up? The ones who were accomplishing great things in the Christian endeavor? No. ". . . for when you were yet without strength. In due time Christ died for the ungodly." He did not hold up to us the requirement of spiritual accomplishment before He was willing to sacrifice Himself totally for us. While we were ungodly, while we were totally separated from Him—every single one of us, brethren, without exception—He was willing, because He loved us that deeply and that perfectly, to pour Himself out that we might have an opportunity, yet, to share all of eternity with Him in that perfect Kingdom. That's how much. That's how much He loved us.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die. Yet, peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended his love toward us that while you were yet sinners . . .

That means you were breaking His commands. It means we were all breaking the perfect commands of God, violating every principle of that Way of life, separated from Him, seeking our own way. Christ died for us in that state—in that very state, brethren.

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.

Do we consider, brethren, that we were really ever enemies of God? Do we really stop to think about what we were really like, and maybe what we're still like to a great degree? And, yet, how much mercy and how much love has He poured out upon us? The same Being. We're talking about that same God. The same one that we've already read, is also full of Godly wrath and will exact justice from someone.

Jeremiah 10 and verse 10, as I continue you on this roller-coaster ride:

But the Eternal is the true God. He is the Living God and an everlasting king. At his wrath, the earth shall tremble and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall you say unto them: The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even shall they perish from the earth and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power. He hath established the world by his wisdom. He hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he utters his voice there is a multitude of waters in the heavens and he causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings with rain and brings forth the wind out of his treasures.

Make no mistake about it, we are talking about a powerful Being who holds all the power of this universe in His hand—the capability of eliminating and destroying everything that lives and breaths. Everything that exists can be wiped out in a moment. It is sustained—that creation—because He wills to sustain it.

John 3 and verse 16, a scripture that we all know by heart: "For God so loved the world . . ." We're talking about a perfect love here, brethren. We're talking about a love that is unsurpassed in the thinking of any human being. There's not a single one of us that even can come close to understanding, appreciating, or fathoming what the depth of this kind of love is. "For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." He sacrificed His Son, His only Son. The Son, the God of the second part, the *YHVH* who was with God from the beginning as we know from John 1:1, the Word made flesh, who was with God and who was God. He was willing to divest Himself of His divinity and to become a human being, to take on all of those years of the temptations of the flesh and of the cruelty and the hatred of those He even came to save. And, furthermore, that Heavenly Father, God of the first part, was willing to sacrifice that Son that He loved so much, because He also loved the people which He created and with which He populated the face of this earth. That's how much we have received in being given an opportunity to know that God, both the Father and the Son—perfect love that is beyond our comprehension.

Revelation 19 and verse 11. Here's that same Being again:

And I saw heaven opened and, behold, a white horse. And he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True. And in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire and on his head were many crowns. And he had a name written that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood. And his name is called the Word of God. And the armies of heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it he may smite the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron. And he treads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

A scripture to remind us, lest we forget, brethren, the power and the authority of that Being who is coming to take possession of the Kingdom, lest we think that He's going to be a pushover, and lest we think that, even in spite of His great mercy and His longsuffering and His perfect love, that He is not simultaneously a world-conquering King who will have His way. He is both merciful and demanding at the very same time. He is benevolent and austere at the very same time. He is compassionate and uncompromising at the very same time. He is sympathetic and stern. He is severe and patient. He is tender and unyielding at the very same time.

Exodus 34 and verse 5. Here's an example in one scripture where you find both seemingly conflicting attributes demonstrated by Him at the very same time. Exodus 34 and verse 5, right after the time that this *YHVH*, this God of the Old Testament, revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai because Moses had requested and asked to be able to see the glory of that Living God. And He placed him—if you read the chapter before—He placed him in the cleft of the rock and put His hand over it and passed by, removed His hand, and allowed Moses to see His hind parts and to see even a glimpse of the glory of that God. And here now following—after God commanded him to carve out new stone tablets to replace the ones that were broken, where He was going to write again with His very finger the laws of God on those tablets—here we find in Exodus 34, verse 5 what God told him. And what did that Living God say? What did He say to Moses?:

And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Eternal. And the Eternal passed before him and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord God, merciful [here's His own description of Himself. Merciful,] and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth.

How many people in this world think about the God of the Old Testament with those attributes? Most only see the severe, the demanding, the unyielding God who instructed His

people to destroy the nations of the heathen in the land that God had given His people for a possession. They only see the rigidity, the elements of an unyielding nature of a God that they think they are blessed to be separated from. They think they're blessed to know Jesus Christ who is merciful and longsuffering and full of love and compassion. And yet it's the very same Being. For here He said, even on Mount Sinai, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious. Longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." But what followed in the very same sentence? "And that will by no means clear the guilty." Uh-oh. We just saw He's gracious and He's merciful and He's longsuffering. And before the breath of that very sentence was even over, He qualified it and He said, in essence, "But, do not think that because I have all of those magnanimous characteristics, that automatically clears the guilty."

". . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and the fourth generations." Whoever this Being is that we claim to serve, He is simultaneously—even out of His own mouth—merciful and longsuffering and gracious, and, yet, simultaneously austere and demanding and uncompromising. How do we reconcile those things, brethren? How, then, do we come to a concept—the correct concept—of God in our minds that we can carry with us moment by moment and day by day and year by year, so that when we think of God, we think of the real God, the God that embodies every one of those attributes, and know that they are perfect attributes, used correctly? Because we are also capable of every one of those attributes, and unfortunately, in many cases we use them incorrectly. We apply them wrongly in the wrong situation. It's very easy to do. What's the key, then, to the way God uses and exercises the different elements of His perfect character? Well, we find out that very clearly—and if you were paying attention to those scriptures, you probably saw the thread—the mercy and compassion of God is seen when we humble ourselves before Him. He is incredibly willing to grant us mercy and longsuffering, to forgive and to overlook our mistakes when we resist hardening ourselves against Him, when we truly humble ourselves before Him in the proper attitude and spirit.

Psalm chapter 85. It's a short one. Let's read it:

To the chief musician, a psalm for the sons of Korah. Eternal, thou hast been favorable unto thy land. Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob, thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people. Thou hast covered all their sins. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath. Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

And He could not have been wrong because He's a perfect God. It was not sin. There was righteousness in His fierceness and anger.

Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us forever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee? Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God, the Eternal, will speak. For he will speak peace unto his people and to his saints. But let them not turn again to folly.

See, brethren, it is conditional. He's ever willing to grant that mercy and that longsuffering and that love toward us. But, "let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh . . ." To who? "To them that fear him. That glory may dwell in our land."

Verse 10. Take special note of it: "Mercy and truth are met together." I never looked at it in quite the same way as when I was preparing these notes. And this hit me especially hard, when I recognized that within this very passage, right here, He tells us exactly, that in order to have that relationship with Him—in order to understand the perfect God—in order to reconcile all of those attributes that are not only a part of His nature, but the things which He expects us to take on and to make a part of ourselves as servants of God and of Jesus Christ, "mercy and truth are met together." There is a reconciliation, brethren, required of us, to join mercy with truth. What is that truth except the unchangeable law of a perfect God—the commands, the judgements, the statutes that he gave and said they do not change? Of them, He says, "hold fast, do not compromise my Word." That's the Truth we're talking about, and yet He said, "Mercy AND truth are met together. Righteousness . . ." What is righteousness? It is also embodied in those very laws and commands. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Think about that. Whatever is required of us, brethren, it's absolutely incumbent upon us to find a way to properly reconcile our obligations before God, both to uphold the Truth—those commands—and at the very same time exercise love and compassion and mercy and longsuffering and an orientation of peace. Why? Because that's exactly what God does. All of those things are a part of His perfect character and He commands us to find a way to reconcile those things, to put on that same perfect mind so that we—in the operation of our daily lives—make the right choices to know when a response of mercy is appropriate and when a strong, defensive response may be appropriate in order to hold on to the Truth, to avoid allowing compromise in any way of that perfect law.

Unfortunately, brethren, we often make mistakes in evaluating the proper response to a situation. And so, for those who take the test of how we view God, usually it is a telling sign about what our natural proclivities are. Because we're talking fundamentally about all people—I give credit for having the right things in mind. They want to be faithful servants of God and, yet, for those who have an orientation that focuses on the hard elements of God's nature only and not the soft, they are most in danger, then, of being guilty of not showing mercy and not be longsuffering in the appointed times when it is absolutely appropriate. And just as much, those that have a proclivity to see only the softer sides of the

nature of God and to focus on the concept of love and mercy and longsuffering and compassion, can very easily slip into the dangerous situation of underestimating the value and the incumbency of the Law of God, to recognize the requirement to hold fast—without compromise for the sake of any individual, for any person—that perfect law and those commands. Either one, brethren, puts us in danger of making a mistake. Neither one of them is correct. I fully believe that in the day of the judgement of that King when He returns, there are going to be those who will be gnashing teeth, not only those who have seen themselves as a defender of the faith, who in the process of "defending" the truth and the commandments have trampled upon the people of God, not showing mercy and love. And simultaneously those who will be gnashing teeth because they have adopted a false sense of love, and have compromised the unchanging Truth of God. And I guarantee you that our adversary, Satan the Devil, is trying with all of his might to influence us in whatever our leanings may be in our evaluation of God, and play upon those things to make us make a mistake. And how many times I have seen circumstances where individuals within the church are pointing fingers at one another, both with what seem to be very good arguments—one coming from the hardness of the commands of God, and one coming from the softness of forgiveness and mercy—and both absolutely wrong because of the way that they're applying them. And I tell you who the winner is in those circumstances. Satan is the winner. The one that is very pleased that he has gotten both parties thinking that they are defending God and at the very same time they are both in danger because of their reactions. What we need to do, brethren, is evaluate ourselves to know first, what is our natural leaning in our evaluation of the attributes of God? Because when we understand what our natural leaning is, then that probably tells us where we need to focus more of our time, learning about the other attributes—either the harder or the softer attributes of the perfect nature of God—and focusing on those things, incorporating those things regularly in our orientation toward God. Righteousness—meaning the keeping of the law—must meet mercy if we're going to be there. We must have both to have God. And as I have given to you many times before, and we're going to go through it again, this is defined perfectly between both great commands that God gave: Love toward God and love toward man.

The first four commands of the ten show us how to love God and respect His authority—to keep His Sabbath, to put out idols, not to take His name in vain, to do those things which are required to keep the Law—to respect God. The last six telling us how to interact with one another, not to take advantage, not to abuse, not to harm.

Matthew 22 and verse 36: "Master, which is the great commandment of the law?" Here, an individual who wanted a distinction. "Okay, I know there's all of these laws and statutes but if I'm going to focus on one, which one should I focus on the most?"

What is the great commandment of the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto

it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

And what do you know, brethren, in order to fulfill both of those commands, we have to have an orientation of perfect reconciliation between lawkeeping and consideration for our brother. Isn't it interesting? It is the very perfect harmony and balance that we've already seen is a part of the nature and the characteristics of that Living God.

1 John 3 and verse 16:

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

And I'm very sure, brethren, that at one time or another we may all have been guilty of shutting up our bowels of mercy, maybe even because we thought we were using "tough love." Have we ever done that? "It's for their own good. I'll restrain myself from helping, from serving, because this individual needs to be taught a lesson."

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." It's not enough to be in love with the idea of love—as I told you at the Feast of Tabernacles in Newport this year—love is a verb much more so than a noun, it's something you do.

And hereby we know that we are of the Truth and shall assure our hearts before him: For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not then we have confidence toward God and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him [Why?] because we keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.

We can't have a correct concept of love without lawkeeping. "And this is his command: That we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ." What does that have to do with the ten commandments and the judgements and the statutes? Because the Son, Jesus Christ, is the personification of the Law. He was the Word made flesh. He is the totality of that perfect law. Say we don't need the commandments and you're saying we don't need Christ. Saying we can water down or compromise any of those commands for the sake of "helping" someone or doing something that we think is noble, is to trample on Jesus Christ Himself. "That we should believe on the name of the Son Jesus Christ"—because He is the embodiment of the commands. And what else? "And love one another as he gave us commandment also." What was that commandment but the second great commandment embodied in those six? All of them required simultaneously, brethren.

We can't pick and choose. Focus on one side and we end up in the ditch on the left, focus on the other side and we end up in the ditch on the right. Either way we end up in the ditch, left or right. We will fail to be there at the return of Jesus Christ. And I guarantee you, Satan doesn't care which ditch you fall into. Hardness, or mealy-mouth softness, it doesn't matter as long as he gets you in one of them.

"He that keeps the commands dwells in him and he in him. And hereby we know that he abides in us: By the Spirit which he hath given us." It is that Holy Spirit, brethren, and only through that Holy Spirit, that we have an opportunity to reconcile the attributes of God, to come to understand and appreciate all of the characteristics of that perfect Heavenly Father and of His Son, and then understanding, to emulate those characteristics and put them all within our own very character through that Spirit.

1 John 5 and verse 1: "Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone that loveth him that begat [meaning, if we claim that we love God—the one that begat us all in the Spirit—it's got to be more than a claim. Everyone that loves him that begat], loves him also that is begotten." So when you find yourself in a difficulty concerning one of your brothers or sisters in the faith, think of it very carefully, because our love for God in Jesus Christ is being measured very directly based upon the way we deal with one another.

"By this we know that we love the children of God: When we love God and keep his commandments." Uh-oh. So showing perfect love for my brothers and sisters cannot then include compromising the Truth. That also is a difficulty, a challenge and a test some of you have already faced, when for the sake of appeasing someone who has a wrong orientation, you are faced with compromising an aspect of the Faith once delivered and that Truth that you received, and you can't do it. We have to have the wisdom to know where to draw the line. "For this is the love of God: That we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not grievous." They're not something to be ashamed of. They're not something to strain under. They're something to appreciate because they give life and blessings and health and fulfilment and peace of mind.

Galatians 5 and verse 22: "But the fruit of the Spirit . . ." This is the Spirit that emanates from that Godhead—from the Father and the Son on the throne of that third heaven. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love." That means the right form of love, brethren. That doesn't mean the "love" that compromises or waters down doctrine. God is love. He is also the totality of the commandments. So the commandments are love. How much do we think about that? The commandments are love because they are all part and parcel with Christ and with the Father.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness . . ." One thing that's still hard for me to reconcile when I get on my knees and

I pray before that Living God and I think about His power and His majesty, is how to attribute to Him that He is the perfect personification of meekness—because human minds tend to equate meekness with weakness don't we? So how can a Being who holds the entire universe in the palm of His hand and exercises all authority, yet, simultaneously exercise meekness? What does God have to be meek about? What human being that has been given any kind of authority and power to any great extent on this earth would we expect to exercise that attribute and be called meek? To us it's hard to fathom isn't it? I'm still working on that because *He* is absolutely the personification of all those attributes. And He expects us to be meek even while we are strong in defending the Faith. We should be portraying—if we are being led by the Spirit—an orientation of meekness. How many people, when they describe us to others would say, he or she is very meek? Think about it. How many people could describe us—describe you, describe me—simultaneously as being incredibly strong and devout in defense of the Truth, uncompromising, unyielding, austere, when it comes to that Truth, and also say, by the way, they are also merciful and longsuffering and meek all at the same time? If, by that description, brethren, you evaluate yourself as I evaluate myself and say, "I don't have it all together yet," then maybe we have something on which to focus. "Longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law."

Romans 2 and verse 1: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." How often and how easily, brethren, we are caught in a trap of passing judgement, even if it's not verbally—even mentally—upon others. Whether we're coming from a harder approach concerning defense of the law of God and failing to exercise mercy, or whether we have a false sense of love and are willing to compromise the immutable Truth, either way that applies, we fall into that trap of one who's judging the other—whether one judges another because he doesn't show enough love, or the other judges the first because he won't defend the Truth.

For thou that judgest [either way] doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

Do we think, brethren, that if we attach ourselves to only half of the attributes of the nature of God that we will not be judged for not living up to all of the others? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" That's what happens, brethren, if we recognize who and what we are and how far down we are from the perfect example of Christ, and how much farther we still have to go to put on that nature. It's only if we recognize our self that we will repent. "Not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance? But after thy hardness. . ." Oh, we think we have it figured out. That doesn't

apply, brethren, to just one or the other, it applies to all. If we're hard in thinking we're the defender of the Faith and we trample upon others, not willing to show mercy and longsuffering, we're guilty. Likewise, if we've adopted a false concept of love and put our finger under the noses of those that are defending the absolute Truth, we are just as guilty. "After thy hardness . . ."—hardness either in a false sense of defending the Truth, or hardness in watering down the commands of God.

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

Wrath, whether you were called or whether you're in the world, but especially to those who were called and given that opportunity to have that relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. For any of us who cast the Truth aside or create God in our own image, in our own mental orientation, we are in danger of just such wrath.

"But glory, honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." God's true people will also be manifesting the very same characteristics of God. Christ was our example. Those with a tendency toward hardness are wrong. Those who proclaim a false sense of love are also wrong. Lest there be any doubt about who the sermon is for, I'm taking a shotgun and I'm blowing it at us all and I'm not going to leave anyone out. Because, again as I've said before, there is a ditch on either side of the right road.

For those with a tendency to value tolerance above doctrine, beware. Luke 14 and verse 26: "If any man come to me and hate not his father and his mother." It means to love less by comparison, to be willing to obey God first above any commitment or requirement or obligation—implied or otherwise—of a human being, no matter what the relationship, whether it's your best friend, or if it's someone you've trusted all your life. Whether it's family, whether it's friends, regardless, Christ says:

If any man come to me [and love not less by comparison] his father and mother and his wife and children and brethren and sister, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

What about the other side? Well, for those with a tendency to emphasize the law at the expense of mercy and longsuffering and meekness, beware. Matthew 25 and verse 41:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Who, brethren, are those most likely in these unfortunate circumstances to be hungry, to be thirsty, to be naked, to be sick and to be in prison, except those who are probably guilty of breaking the laws of God? Because obeying the perfect laws of God brings happiness and contentment and fulness doesn't it? Unless there's a specific purpose that God is working out, in most cases those experiencing such circumstances have at least something of themselves to blame. So do not think that our obligation is to help and to sacrifice for and to serve only those who are in a circumstance through absolutely no fault of their own. That's exactly, probably, what caught these that are being condemned. They probably helped some people—maybe just the ones they thought were worthy, maybe just the ones they thought were living up enough to their expectation, according to their own evaluation of God's Law. But somehow there was someone else that they evaluated and said, "He's in prison by his own doing. The best thing for him is to sit there and rot till God gets his attention. I would be condoning it if I went to visit." Let's be very, very careful, brethren, lest we end up in this very category. "Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" Oh, I thought I served everyone that was worthy. The only ones I didn't were the ones that I didn't think were worthy of that sacrifice. "Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal." Let's be very, very careful, brethren, how we evaluate those that are worthy of our mercy and our exercise of longsuffering. It could be that we will face this very circumstance in the judgement when God says, "According to how you dealt with this person in this very situation at this particular time, is exactly how I will deal with you."

What is God like? He is both strong as iron and at the same time merciful and meek. Let us reconcile it in our minds, brethren, how that Being—our God—is simultaneously so strong, and yet so mild and merciful and meek at the same time.

In closing, Luke chapter 1 and verse 46. Here was a prayer that Mary offered up to God while she was pregnant with Jesus Christ. As she glorified Him notice what she said:

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior [who she was actually carrying within her womb]. For he hath

regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty [that is how she described Him] hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.

The perfect balance of strength, of resolution, of uncompromising will, and at the same time merciful and longsuffering. Those led by the Holy Spirit will also be demonstrating every single one of those characteristics, brethren, sacrificing not a one. Can we continue to work on putting on the fulness of the mind of Jesus Christ? Can we find a way to emulate with perfect harmony every attribute of that Living God? A perfect marriage in heart and mind of mercy and righteousness. That is our challenge.