

**Abundant Life—Today and Tomorrow #7;  
Self-Sacrifice and Giving**

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Well, picking up, brethren, where we left off yesterday, we are getting nearer the completion of my series now on, "Abundant Life—Today and Tomorrow." And I've tried to go through and give you a number of topics which support the overall premise of how to have abundant life—how really to enjoy the richness and the fulness of all that God has given and wants us to have. He's not a hard, difficult, demanding God, who seeks to give us difficulties and problems for the sake of seeing whether or not we can endure it. It really isn't a case of His trying to do bad things to us just to see if we will still be faithful. At the beginning of this Feast we started by saying that His commandments are not grievous. But they seem grievous to human beings—they seem grievous to you and me, by nature, because you and I, by nature, do not agree with the principles of God. It's not because there is anything wrong with those principles. That Law is spiritual—that Law is life to us. The problem is, you see, we are wired in mind to absolutely reject and seek to go against those principles, even though following those principles leads to a good life. It's obedience to that Law which brings us the blessings and the absolute fulfillment and contentment that human beings need and desire. But, you see, by nature, we have blinders on our eyes—God intended it that way—so that we cannot see the plain truth. We cannot recognize the simplicity of His laws and His doctrines and we don't see them as a pearl of great price. We don't see them as something valuable that we should hold on to and cherish and pursue. We see them as something to avoid, if we can. And if we can't—even if we come to recognize and believe that the Truth of God and His Law is valuable, and that we need to acknowledge it in order to be in His Kingdom—we say, "Okay, we have to do it."

So we grudgingly submit to the "burden" of God's Law as if we are taking some great yoke upon our shoulders which is grinding us into the powder of the ground. And we just hope that time will not go on too much longer so that we can finally be released from these physical circumstances into God's Kingdom. When the reality is, brethren, spiritual growth is really coming to value and appreciate God's Truth and those laws more and more day by day. And when we get to the point where we can really say from the fullness of our hearts, "What a marvelous Law; how absolutely glorious are the commands of God," and we cherish them and we value them and we practice them, then, you see, we've made real progress and real growth. And then we begin to get a glimpse of what the real abundance that God offers is all about.

If you don't have that feeling about God's Law at this time, that's okay. I'm not saying it's okay to stay that way, but I'm saying it's okay to admit that that's true. Because that's really where you and I start. And I can tell you—as one growing up in the church—in my life, I have not always loved God's Law. I am still in the process of learning to love God's Law more and more. And I can tell you, as a teenager and as a young adult, I did not love God's Law. I understood and I had the knowledge—I did know enough to understand that it is true and right, and I really did believe that when you obey, you are better off than when you disobey. I understood that, and I believed it was true, and that helped me avoid a lot of mistakes—not all mistakes, not all penalties, by any means. But, you see, that is not the fulness of what God wants us to have. It's been a long process, from the time I made the personal decision to get baptized and begin to walk in this way, to the point that I have come gradually, over time, to really appreciate and value God's Law as something that is good. And it really is very priceless. And I am still working on that. And it is a process of putting out more of this carnal orientation which is against us and which rejects that Way of Life.

So I have been trying to give you a number of principles that support this foundational theme on abundant life and abundant living. God is a loving Parent who wants good for us and not bad. So, when He teaches us and when He corrects us, it's not for our harm, it is for our benefit. What, therefore, is the next principle that we want to cover this morning? It is an important aspect of achieving abundant life. And I have not been able to avoid alluding to it, and, in fact, through all of the other messages that you've heard so far, I've been touching upon it. So, to a certain extent, today's message is going to seem somewhat repetitive.

But today I want to focus very specifically on the principle of self-sacrifice and giving.

Mr. Armstrong characterized the way of God vs. the way of man as the difference between the way of give and the way of get. He was so eloquent in being able to put broad concepts into very simple language—things that human beings could more easily grasp. And, in fact, that one comparison says it all: God's way is the way of "give"—man's way is the way of "get." Man's way is one of selfishness. God's way is an outpouring of consideration and service toward others. That's the simple difference between the orientation of the mind of man and the mind of God—give and get. Man believes, by nature, that the way to have abundance is to try and get just as much as he can for himself, the best way he can get it.

And, so, we all, as human beings, grow up with this orientation of trying to "better ourselves"—isn't that right? We're taught to better ourselves—and that's not necessarily a wrong principle. But, you see, without a spiritual orientation, it is entirely selfish—absolutely selfish to the core. Man believes the way to have abundance is to get just as much as he can, but, ironically, who are those that truly have the greatest abundance? Do you know who they are? The ones who have the greatest abundance are those who are willing to sacrifice the most. It doesn't seem that way. The wisdom that we have naturally, as carnal human beings, tells us that in order to have the most, we must be really good at manipulating our circumstances and our environment so that we can attract as much as we can get. That's how we end up with the most, right? It makes perfect sense. The more I can be wise and prudent in learning how to get stuff, and hold on to stuff, the more I end up with in the end, right? Makes perfect sense. But the wisdom of God creates a miracle that turns that wisdom upside down. And we cannot explain it, technically. You cannot prove it scientifically. And, yet, it is a reality—an absolute truth in this world—because it is an invisible law, a spiritual law of God, that the ones who truly experience the greatest abundance in the final analysis, are the ones who have oriented their lives according to the principle of giving and service to others.

And it's not a totally foreign principle—because many people in the world understand that and pay lip service to it, do they not? Now, don't confuse the principle of give with the idea of these great, wealthy individuals in the world who

become philanthropists and give away millions and even billions of dollars, and they set up their foundations, you know, to help poor and underprivileged people in other parts of the world, and they engage in all of these wonderful programs. And how do we react? We say, "Oh, isn't that wonderful. Isn't he or she an incredibly magnanimous, giving and loving individual—caring about his fellow man?" When the truth is, brethren, most of that giving is just as selfish as taking. Because what you are dealing with is people who have so much wealth they cannot use it to help themselves anymore. How many millions and billions of dollars does it take to buy everything you could possibly want or use? How many homes can you buy? In how many places can you live? In how many airplanes can you fly? How many places can you visit? How much food can you eat? As a human being, physically, if you have a few million dollars—if you've got a billion dollars—you can buy everything you can possibly use, of the greatest, highest quality, and deny yourself nothing. So what about the individual who has not just one billion dollars, but fifty or a hundred billion dollars? What's he going to do with all of it? He can't spend it. So, do you know what they do? Do you know the one thing they desire that they don't have? They use that money to buy a reputation—to buy a legacy that will live on after them. That's why kings build great stone monuments—obelisks, edifices—that will carry their names. So that even after they are dead and gone, there is something that continues on that will make people say, "Oh, wasn't he or she so incredibly wonderful." Because after you have acquired all of the physical mammon you can possibly use in your lifetime, the only thing left is to try and buy a memory— a reputation, or a legacy—that might live on after you. And that is what they do. Now they are spending their money on buying a legacy, and, brethren, that is just as selfish—just as much a part of the carnal selfishness—as anything that a poor person might be doing in the street in order to get along day by day.

So, don't make the mistake of thinking that what you see in the world, that appears to be giving and outpouring concern, is sincere. Yes, there are acts of sincerity. And there are those who are very sincere. They recognize the principle. It is another one of those things that gentiles—meaning those separated from God—can understand, value and appreciate. And so you do have people—even members of other churches—of all persuasions and orientations who do find joy in giving. But outside of the Holy Spirit, there is no way those acts can approach the depth, or the fulfillment of God's Law, that He intends for His called.

Let's notice a few texts to show that, by nature, man is absolutely selfish. James 4 and verse 1. James 4 and beginning in verse 1: "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Isn't that what we see all over the world? Wars and fightings have been an intrinsic part of human existence for the last six thousand years. So, in spite of all the claims of loving peace and seeking unity and oneness with our fellow man, if wars persist—which they do today, and always have in any given time—here is why: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" God says the very source of the war and fighting among individuals and nations is an inherent lust that dwells in the mind of man—that's where it is conceived. "Ye lust, and have not"—meaning you have this strong, inordinate desire to have things, and yet, you cannot achieve your goal—man cannot get that which will make him satisfied. "Ye lust, and have not"—meaning he is empty. "Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme. I grab everything I possibly can, and yet I still have not." It's not that they don't have stuff. They have accumulated stuff. But they still have not—they have not in mind, meaning they are not satisfied. The stuff they get doesn't satiate that missing element down deep inside. "Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain." It's an elusive goal. It's like chasing a mirage in the desert. You see it on the horizon and it looks so real. And you run for it and the closer you get the farther away it stays—and you can never get there.

"Ye fight and war, yet ye have not," why? "Because ye ask not." They are not orienting their minds in the proper way, according to the very Law of God, in seeking the Creator who is the one who gives all wealth. But even if you do seek God in the right way—if you are asking—"ye ask, and receive not." So here is a whole different classification which applies much more to the very people of God who have been promised the wealth—God's gifts, His abundance. And, yet, how many of us are really receiving that abundance?

"Ye ask, and receive not." Why? Because, "ye ask amiss." We ask amiss, which means we ask of God, but we do not ask with the right orientation of mind. What are we doing wrong? "Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." So, we are called out of the world and we are given God's priceless Way of Life, His Truth, with the promises of a Father to a child. He wants to take care of us; He wants to give us every good thing. He is a loving Father and He wants to pour out His benevolent blessings upon us. And we say, "Oh great! I am so happy God called me. Now I have an opportunity—because I am the son of the King who owns heaven and earth—and He promises to take care of me, and

protect me, and to provide all of my needs. Wonderful! Daddy, can I have this, and can I have this and this and this? Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme." You see? We use our calling as a way to further our carnal, selfish, orientation. It is exactly what James is saying here. "You ask." Oh, we get on our knees and we fall before God and we say, "Oh, Father, I've got so many problems. Please solve this and please solve that, and please give me this, and please make this problem go away so that I can have a little bit of this and a little bit of that."

"You ask and receive not because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts." What is the problem? We are still selfish. We are still oriented toward making the self more comfortable and better. Now, God wants us to have abundant life. He wants you to receive good things and blessings. But the way to get them is totally opposite to what our minds, by nature, dictate to us. Because the way to actually receive the abundance, is by doing the thing that is exactly opposed to your wisdom and mine. God says the ones who will have and hold on to abundance are the ones who are willing to give everything away. And see, that doesn't make sense to you and me by nature, does it? "To have and hold on to things, I have to grab and I have to keep." That's what my mind tells me. But God says, "No, if you really want to have it, and you really want to hang on to what really matters, you have to be willing—all of the time—to give it away." And then, you see, He miraculously makes sure that you always have abundance. But that requires us to have a total makeover of mind and orientation, and it just doesn't seem to be the right formula.

Philippians 2:19, Philippians chapter 2 and verse 19: "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state"—Paul speaking here. Verse 20: "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Paul is expressing the dilemma that faithful ministers have faced and continue to face. Who can you trust? Who will truly—with the right orientation of mind—fulfill a responsibility of service without selfishness? It is hard to find. And so Paul expressed the fact that Timothy was one of those unique ones whom he could trust with a charge—when so many others had proved that they were only using the office as a way to merchandize the people to get something for the self. "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Well, there is not a single human being who *naturally* is going to care for anyone except himself. It requires the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to change that selfish orientation so that

you will have servants who are really willing to pour themselves out for the benefit of others—not trying, surreptitiously, to garner everything that they can, behind the scenes, to support the natural nature. "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

Brethren, I can tell you that Mr. Raymond Cole dealt with that for so many years, when there were so many ministers coming of Worldwide in those tumultuous years beginning in the early '70s. And, so, there was a continual parade—I will call it—of ordained ministers who, once they were forced out or made the decision to leave Worldwide, were looking for another lily pad to jump to. They were looking for a salary to replace the one they were leaving or having taken away from them. So they were out shopping for which of the splinter groups would provide them a salary to sort of fill the gap. And you just don't know—until you see the fruits over a protracted period of time—who really has a love for the Truth and a desire to serve and to fulfill God's will in a spirit of healthy fear, as opposed to those who are willing to say and do whatever is necessary in order to guarantee them an income of the mammon of this world. And, so, Mr. Raymond Cole dealt with a number of those, and he was always willing to accept people at face value when they claimed to believe and say that the Truth was most important to them. He accepted them at face value and gave them an opportunity. Well, we had a history in this remnant body of all sorts of ministers—especially in the first ten years—who came and went and proved in short order (some took a little longer) that they really didn't care about the Truth, and they really didn't care about serving. There were selfish motives all along the way. You know, I don't want to say I feel badly—I feel incredibly blessed—but I feel badly that Raymond Cole had very few ministers he could trust who were a supporting cast to him over the better part of the twenty-five years he was leader and pastor/director of this remnant body—to whom he could delegate responsibility in confidence and not worry what they were going to do with it. I have been incredibly blessed to have a supporting cast of ordained men around the world who have shown that dedication. Now, there is no guarantee that any one of us will remain faithful. It doesn't matter what the *status quo* is today, because we are all going to face severe difficulties and challenges in the future. Who knows what we are each going to do and which ones of us—ministry or laity—may face certain challenges that actually expose weaknesses? But as I have already said, you do not have to worry. You will be able to spot it. Remember, Christ said,

"My sheep hear my voice." You can evaluate, if you are watching the right things—the faith once delivered, that knowledge, the revealed Way of Life. You know what it is. As long as that ministry is holding fast and preaching those things, then you know you can count on it. But if you see that change, you will know if and when it is time not to follow anymore. That gives you a lot of power for your own salvation.

So, there is no guarantee that just because men are faithful today, they are going to continue to be faithful in the future. But I can say, at this given time, brethren, I am incredibly blessed with a supporting cast of ordained men that God has given us in the United States, in Europe, in the Philippines, on the African continent, that have really manifested good fruits, which gives me a lot of confidence. I feel badly that I'm enjoying that, and for much of Raymond Cole's ministry, he did not. And I do not know why God is giving us a reprieve at this time, but I try very hard not to take it for granted. But, by nature, that doesn't occur. Human beings are incredibly selfish. So, it is a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit—a miracle—when you find not only one, but a collection of individuals who truly care about serving the people. Don't ever take it for granted, brethren, or assume it just happens. It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit in those lives.

Second Timothy 3 and verse 1. God prophesied that a selfish orientation was going to be manifested and it was going to be strong in the last days—lest we think that it is not a manifestation of God's church, or it is not really God's work. The idea is that if it is God's Church, then everything should just be wonderful, with no problems. Everything must be good at all times. Not so. God said exactly what it was going to be like—what He was going to allow to happen in the orientation of men—not only with laymembers, but with the leaders, the shepherds. They were going to manifest their selfishness and not the mind of Christ. Second Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves [that means selfish—self-seeking], covetous"—a violation of the tenth commandment. "Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme." Now, they are never going to portray themselves in that way. Men can wrap themselves in all kinds of words and outward actions that make it seem as if they care so much for others. But in the final analysis, the fruits are manifested. And you all are not stupid; you soon come to know when someone is shining you on. The more you get to know and spend time with certain individuals, in time you figure out what they really care about

and what is important to them. It happens when they are not paying attention—because they cannot be on guard at all times. Human beings can deceive and then they have to practice it. Remember what I told you about telling lies in order to cover other lies. So, if you are not really genuine about what you are doing, in time there are cracks that appear and you are able to see the fruits—for good or for bad—and you find out in the times when they drop their guard. You see certain manifestations that tell you the story. But, it often takes time for that to happen. But this is the orientation which God said would exist: "For, men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded." And here's the next one: ". . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." These are ones who make a profession of loving God and putting Him first, but in their actual behavior—in the choices they make over time—you see that they are really sacrificing the good of God and His commands for that which is personal and selfish. "Having a form of godliness." Oh, they never give up the religious trappings of service to Christ—whether laymember or minister. They always wrap themselves in their religious orientation—the things you see, the way they portray themselves. But God says, don't be fooled by the outward shell because, by and large, down deep inside, it is just as selfish as it can be. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." And the instruction is: "from such turn away." We are commanded to distinguish between the fruits and to make the right choices. Now, I'm not saying by that, brethren, to be suspicious and always to assume the worst, because that's the tendency on the other side of the road—the ditch on the other side. And there are so many of God's people who have been shot into over the years, and over the decades, because of the misbehavior of the ministry, that we look automatically with jaundiced eye at all of them. And they cannot say or do anything without someone saying, "Hmmm"—misinterpreting, reading things into their words and actions. It happens—it happens to all of us. Hopefully, though, if you are truly objective, you are not trying to draw conclusions and read things into situations, and you are willing to give people an even break so that they can manifest over time what their true fruits are. You will be able to see it. And when there are faithful servants—ones who are working hard, even though they are not perfect (none of us are)—they are working to serve you and to fulfill that role that Jesus Christ gave, and they are serious about it. Hopefully, you will recognize that orientation—that it is not a sham, we are not shining you on, that you really do

count us as being serious, that we do care about it and that we believe our salvation is at stake according to whether or not we are faithful. Because we want to be in God's Kingdom with you—we want to enjoy the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ and all of eternity that follows.

It is promised that there will be faithful servants even though they will be few in these critical times. So, make sure you are giving them an even shot. But we have seen the fruits of the majority—I know that I have—that they are playing games. They are either after power, or money to sustain their own personal lifestyles at whatever level they think they deserve, or the accolades of people who fawn over them, or whatever it may be that trips their triggers. It is selfish as can be. And that is what God said would be prevalent in the last days. And we have seen it with our own eyes.

Micah 3 and verse 11. Here is what God said about those servants—the ministry. Micah chapter 3 and verse 11: "The heads thereof judge for reward . . ." That means the nation of Israel has a whole bunch of leaders—judges—that are on the take. Justice is for sale. They enrich themselves. That's their orientation. "The heads thereof judge for reward . . ." They use their offices to enrich themselves, not to edify the nation. "And the priests thereof teach for hire . . ." They are like hired guns, willing to teach whatever is required to ensure their salary.

Brethren, did we not see that in the 1970s? I guarantee you when those doctrinal changes were made in 1974—the major ones on Pentecost and Divorce and Remarriage—there were a number of those ministers who had strong problems with their consciences over those changes. There were a number of them who did not agree with those doctrinal changes. We have the evidence of it and we have the witnesses who heard them and their initial responses when the changes were announced, and who saw their agitated behavior and heard the claims that they would never go along with it. They knew. One of them I'm thinking of, brethren, is leading one of the major splinter groups today which came out of our parent organization. He knows better. It doesn't matter what he has been teaching now over the last twenty-something years, he knows better. And as long as this remnant continues to be viable, we are his conscience, because we are practicing the things that he used to practice himself—the things he used to teach himself, the things he was baptized into believing and accepting. But he doesn't

do it anymore because he was for sale. And he—like many of them at that time—were faced with a choice: "Do I follow my conscience and hold on to the things I accepted as having come from God by divine revelation, or am I ultimately going to compromise in order to preserve my salary and my office of prestige in the organization? Am I going to follow the new party line?" Every one of them at that evangelistic level—fifteen or sixteen of them under Mr. Armstrong at the time in 1974—eventually capitulated and sold out. Against their consciences they sold out. Mr. Raymond Cole was the only one who stood firm and said, "I don't care what the price may be in this life, physically." Even in separating from Mr. Armstrong, the man he loved—through whom he had received God's Truth—he said, "I will not compromise it." The rest of them made choices of selfishness—self-preservation in the mammon of this world.

The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us?

Oh, they don't give up their feeling—they lie to themselves—that God is still with them and that they haven't really compromised. "Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us." They think they are still God's ministers. They think God is still with them, inspiring them, in spite of the choices they have made. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field." God said, "The end result is that when I finally get their attention, they are going to come to find out that they have separated themselves from me. I am not blessing them. I am not supporting their corrupt thinking."

Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

Zion and Jerusalem are symbolic of the church. Isn't that exactly what we have seen happen over the last thirty-five years in God's church? What has happened to the Church of God because of their selfish orientation to preserve their own at the expense of the Truth of God? Have not you seen it become absolutely shattered, divided and confused? God did exactly what He said He was going to do in this prophecy of Micah because of the faulty leadership of those shepherds and judges who were supposed to be representatives of the Christ—who were supposed to represent His perfect, unchanging character. And all they did

was sell out. And the Church has paid the price for it—it is in a state of destruction and confusion right now—absolute darkness. So, we have seen it manifested in our day in the most traumatic ways. But, brethren, it all relates back to the inherent weakness that you and I share because we are human beings. Let us not just beat up on the ministry. I could go on forever about that, but they are just like the rest of humanity. Without the power of God's Spirit working in us to go a different way, that is exactly what all of us are going to do by nature. So we are no different and we all have to be working to put out that selfishness and learn to give and be outpouring servants to those around us. It is self-sacrifice which is the key to real abundance. By nature, though, we don't agree. It says, "No, grab, grab, grab. That's how I get more stuff." But the reality is that it takes a miracle that defies all logic and it says the more you give and pour yourself out to serve, the more you are going to receive.

Concerning tithing, I remember Raymond Cole used to say, "You can never out-give God." In answering technical questions over the years, people would ask him, "Well, what do I do about this? And what about that technical situation? What's subject to tithe and what is not?" And my family was one of those that asked him many of those questions over the years because we needed that guidance. We wanted to make sure we were not violating God's Law in any way. And there are many grey areas. What about large gifts? What about inheritances and all of these sorts of things? And there are not a lot of specific black and white answers in the Bible, though we have a lot of administrative history that came from Mr. Armstrong. But, still, there are a lot of gaps in there. And so, Mr. Cole's counsel was always, when in doubt, go above and beyond—not because he was trying to get more for himself and the Church. It was what he himself practiced. Here was a man who was a target when the Worldwide Church of God leadership did an audit of ministerial tithing as part of the witch hunt they conducted to try and find out who they could set up. At the time, they were trying to jockey for position, and because Mr. Raymond Cole held a significant position, there were those who wanted to knock him off the roost, so to speak. So they conducted a review of ministerial salaries behind the scenes to see who was tithing and how much. And they thought they might find a chink in the armor, but they were the ones who were not living it themselves. So they hoped they could find something on Raymond Cole. The problem was, when they did the audit, they found out that Raymond Cole was giving back more than fifty percent of his income to the Church. Because do you know what they were paying those evangelists at the

highest levels? It was a lot. Well, the Coles knew that they were getting more than they needed—much more than they needed. And they basically just turned back more than fifty percent of all they were receiving. So they certainly could not be criticized by their enemies in that way. But that was always Mr. Cole's philosophy: You could never out-give God.

So, if in doubt, make sure you go above and beyond. My wife and I took that advice. And so whenever we had an issue, "Well, I wonder if this is subject to tithe?" Maybe not technically, but when in doubt, we wanted to make sure we left no possibility of robbing God—because you can never out-give God. What Mr. Cole said is, "Every time I give God more, He ends up rewarding me so much that I really can't get rid of it fast enough because it keeps coming in the back door." You can never out-give God. He is going to win by pouring out abundance. And, again, the natural orientation is, "Okay, I should tithe as an investment so that I can get it back. I give it to God with this hand and He gives it back with the other hand." If you are doing that, it is not going to work. Do it because you want to serve Him—you want to show respect to Him. You don't expect anything back. It's just that the reality is you can never out-give God if you do it with a truly right orientation. You are serving—not selfishly, not with a hidden agenda: "Oh, if I provide this service, people are going to see, and they will think that I am so loving and magnanimous." All you are doing in that case is buying a reputation that is just as selfish as anything else. But God knows the heart and the mind. So it is self-sacrifice which is the key to real abundance. And it is a miracle and you cannot explain how it happens. I cannot explain to you, brethren, how those who begin to tithe actually find out that they are more blessed in time and substance if they are doing it with the right orientation. But that's what God said. We honor Him and obey the Law and He says, "See if I don't pour you out a blessing so great you can't receive it." And He does. He does. It's not always that you get more money coming in the door. Many times it is because He protects you from extra expenses. Your net benefit may be that He gives you special savings. How many times do we have unexpected things that come up? "This is not in the budget and, whew, we have to pay this out and we have to pay that out." So it is not that you necessarily have more money coming in the door, but you may be blessed with needing less to pay for the things you really need. And when we shortcut and instead decide we are going to rob from God, we find out that there are all sorts of obstacles that spring up in our path. It never works out. But it takes an act of faith to simply trust God and do it. Then you have to wait for the miracle to happen for the right reason and in the right way.

John 15 and verse 12. John chapter 15 and verse 12: Christ said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. That is an expression of total, outgoing, giving—sacrifice for someone else—at the expense of the self. That's why it is a principle. Instead of getting, we are willing to make a total sacrifice to help someone else. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Which is exactly what Jesus Christ did Himself, is it not? He gave Himself as a living sacrifice. It didn't benefit Him at all. Did you ever stop to think about that? Jesus Christ—the God of the second part—had glory, power and eternal life in the God Family already. He already had everything. Why was He willing to divest Himself of all of that glory and put Himself at risk of eternal death? Because, you know, that is exactly what He did. He could have failed. He absolutely could have failed because He had a carnal mind that came from the DNA of His mother. He was absolutely subject to the same temptations that you and I are, and under the absolute assault of Satan, the Devil who was out to take advantage of the time of Christ's thirty-something years in the human flesh. That was Satan's best opportunity to destroy a member of the God Family. He could have done it. Christ could have weakened. He was daily faced with every temptation that you and I are. Why would He put Himself at risk for that when He already had eternal life and all of the wealth of the universe? It wasn't for Him; it was for you and me. It was worth it to Him to fulfill His Father's desire for an expansive Family with which to share all that God owns in heaven and earth. And so He put Himself at risk and poured Himself out for the benefit of you and me—nothing selfish in that at all. But that was the same principle—I'm not going to take time to read it, you read it in Matthew 5, verses 38 through 48—where Jesus fleshed out what it means to give. He talks about turning the other cheek—total self-sacrifice for others when you have nothing to gain, but you are going to do those things which benefit someone else; you are going to take it on the chin, even when you are abused and taken advantage of. And He said to love your enemies. Love your enemies—take care of, be concerned for, help the ones who would just as soon see you destroyed. We learn not to just take care of our friends. But what do we do by nature? "I take care of you, you take care of me." I invest in a relationship that has something to offer me. That's all human beings do—that is their concept of love and friendship: Take care of your friends and despise and hate your enemies. God says, "Love your enemies. Pour yourself out to serve and help them, even though they may

turn around and use it against you." It's the hardest thing a human being will ever learn to do. And you will not do it on your own and neither will I. Without the power of the mind of Jesus Christ in you, through the Holy Spirit, there is no way we are going to do it.

First Peter 2 and verse 19. First Peter 2:19: "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." Oh boy, is this a tough one. We are creatures who want justice and we want justice NOW when somebody wrongs us—when we are an innocent victim of someone else's hate; or an assault, bodily or mentally; when someone has robbed from us; when they have taken advantage of us. And we ourselves know we are guilty of many things, but in those cases when we are not guilty—we did not bring it upon ourselves, we are innocent, and we suffer at the hands of someone who takes advantage of us—then *we want vindication*, we want justice, do we not? Why else do we love stories, books, movies, television programs, or whatever it may be, that set up the innocent party who is wronged and is finally vindicated in the end and all is made right? And at the end, we say, "Oh, wonderful. Wasn't that great? Because justice was served in the end. The good guy won and the bad guys were punished." We identify with the heroes. We love justice, especially when we are the party that benefits. The problem is, in order to serve God and walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we have to be able to suppress that natural urge. Not that justice isn't going to be done in the end. Oh, yes, it will. God is a Creator who is set on justice. He is a righteous judge. Jesus Christ is going to judge. All things are going to be resolved equitably, in the final analysis. And, yet, in the meantime, He requires His people to wait, and to be patient, and not to demand satisfaction for every wrong.

"For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully"—you are taken advantage of, someone harms you. They take from you—physically, mentally, whatever it may be. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?" And that is much of the reason we suffer. If we are really honest about it, when we have problems and trials and difficulties in our lives, we cannot point and say it was someone else's fault. We have to look at the self and say, "You know what? I got myself into that." So that is a whole different situation. That's where we need to be very, very self-reflective and say, "My fault. I can't blame anybody else for that. I put myself in a bad situation and bad things happened. I compromised God's Law and

I received the penalty—the curse—that goes with it, that God said would happen. My bad." But there are times when we suffer and we haven't done anything wrong, and that is what we are addressing here. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?" Well, we should take it patiently.

"But if, when ye do well . . ." You are following the laws—the commands of God. You are doing exactly what He requires. "If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." That is what He is looking for in you and me, brethren—and the world cannot manifest that: To suppress the carnal desire for vindication and justice and to wait patiently—not justifying the self, not going into big defensive measures to get what you deserve. But you just say, "I'm okay. It's not important to me. I'm not going to allow it to rob me of my peace of mind. I can take it and I can still live abundantly." The abundance is not the stuff we think we have to have. If somebody takes your stuff from you, your abundance is still with you because you know it is the power of Jesus Christ and your work in preparing for that which is coming—His Kingdom. If that is your real goal, what can anyone take away from you today that is of real value? And that applies especially to your self-esteem—your sense of self-worth; your sense of the right to have respect; for people to treat you correctly. That is important to us, is it not? By nature, we all want that. And the greatest thing that robs us of our peace of mind—that robs us of abundance in life—is our feeling of being slighted. We don't like it because we have been mistreated, we have been disrespected, and we "deserve" to be respected. And when we don't get it, we are angry. All of that is selfish, brethren. SELF-esteem. What is the first word in that term? Self. The right of the self to be treated properly by others. "Me, Me, Me, Me. Take care of *Me*. Give *Me* what I deserve." Selfish. That's the self, brethren, that we are supposed to be crucifying. That's the old man that we are supposed to be burying. When somebody does something wrong to us—when we are harmed in some way, physically or mentally—who is it that suffers? Is it Christ in you that is suffering? Or, is it the self that feels harmed? It's not Christ who is upset about it. It's not Christ in you that is crying out for retribution and vindication. It's the good ole self that is hurt and wants revenge. But isn't that the self that we are not supposed to be following? The self is not supposed to be leading us around by the nose anymore. So what if somebody takes advantage of you? Christ in you says, "Do what I did. Take it patiently." You don't worry about it and you say, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. They are weak

and they need time for repentance if they are in the Body. And if they are outside, how can they do what is right?"

If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example.

He suffered, did He not? Jesus Christ suffered more than any human being that has ever lived on this earth, and yet, He had perfect peace of mind and contentment the whole time. His peace was not dependent—as I told you when we talked about "State of Mind"—upon other people doing what is right. Christ didn't live by the philosophy, "I will have a good day if other people will let me." He carried His sunshine with Him—His contentment, His fulfillment—because He was doing what the Father required of Him. He received His satisfaction from knowing that He was building treasure in heaven. So He could be the victim of abuse at the hands of human beings around Him, and it did not rob Him of His peace of mind, and He did not cry out for vengeance. Yes, there is going to be vindication. And if you suffer when you don't deserve it, brethren, there is going to be a Judgement that will bring all of those things into account. The question is, can we be patient and wait for it? Christ was patient to wait for it. Christ in you and me should be patient to wait for justice. But if we find ourselves demanding immediate vindication, that is not Christ in you, that is the self. That is the old man rising up and saying, "I want justice." Keep it in mind.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled . . ." Remember, this was a perfect man; He didn't do anything to deserve this. He told the truth, He was compassionate and loving at all times, and yet, somebody—many people—reviled Him; they said bad things about Him; they accused Him of all manner of evil.

"When he was reviled, reviled not again." But the human orientation is, "If you hit me, then I am going to hit you back. I didn't start the fight, but I will finish it." Isn't that what we think? "He threw the first punch, therefore, hey, all bets are off." That is the human, selfish orientation. But the God-response—which doesn't come to you and me naturally—is: "When he was reviled, reviled not again." He did not respond in kind to bad behavior. He took it on the chin. "When he

suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." He *knew* that there would be a day of justice coming when all things are going to be set right. He *believed* it—which gave Him confidence in not trying to take matters into His own hands at that time and get His justice. That is how He was able to have peace of mind in the midst of being attacked and reviled and persecuted and hated. That is what you and I must learn to do as well, brethren. The justice will come. But, remember, God says He is the one who will repay. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." But we say, "We are not willing to wait for that. That's too far off. We want it *now*." Christ was willing to wait—He carried His sunshine with Him, He maintained His peace of mind at all times, in spite of what He was being subjected to by those who hated Him.

But committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Again, what was His orientation? It was totally selfless, it was absolute, outgoing concern for all of those who He knew were potential heirs—brothers for eternity in the God Family. Even though they were enemies at that time, He said, "I know what your potential is. I know that the Father is going to give you that calling—that opportunity. So I am not going to allow your bad behavior now to upset me and rob me of my peace of mind. I'm not going to require justice. I'm going to be okay with this and wait for the judgement that I know is going to take place."

What Christ did, He commanded us, likewise, to do. Matthew 5 and verse 10. Matthew chapter 5 and beginning in verse 10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake"—even as He was. And He said you must do it as well. "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Who is going to receive those offices in the Family of God? The ones who learn to practice this against their carnal natures. Remember, He was reviled. And what did *He* do? "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you [just like they did Christ], and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." That means the reason you are being persecuted is not that you are violating God's Law and paying the natural price—suffering the curses for your disobedience—but you are suffering for righteousness' sake, for Christ's sake, because you are truly fulfilling the obligation to put God first in your life. And that is bringing persecution upon

you from people in the world. When we suffer because of *that*, and we can do it with a good orientation of mind, *then*, you see, we are starting to figure it out. We are starting to learn how to behave and to think like Jesus Christ. Because it is not selfish—it is all outgoing, it is all toward service. He says, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

We *must* learn, brethren, how to take criticism and persecution and injustice, and not let it destroy us. It is key—absolutely key—to salvation. And the only way you and I can do that is to stop defending the self. We must stop wearing our hearts on our sleeves and getting so upset when somebody disrespects us. So what? So what? It's the carnal self we are supposed to be killing, so what if somebody helps us along the way to kill it? The point is to get it dead, right? Have we learned to rejoice in persecution and self-sacrifice? I'm not there yet. I have a long way to go.

Here's an example: Acts 5 and verse 27. The gospels show that the disciples—who became apostles—were very carnal in the time that God was working with them in the flesh. Boy, were they ever making the common mistakes you and I do by nature. They displayed an incredible amount of selfishness. Remember, they argued over who was going to be greatest in the Kingdom? How selfish can you get? "I want the greatest position. No, I want it." They acted like a bunch of little children. Well, little children simply reflect the same nature as do adults. But after they matured—after they received the Holy Spirit—these same combative, selfish men actually became incredibly strong, powerful servants in the hands of God. Acts chapter 5 and beginning in verse 27: "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council." Here they are in trouble for preaching the Truth and they are hauled up before the council of the Sanhedrin.

. . . they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Well, the truth hurts. It was not politically correct and they were in serious trouble. Verse 29: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." *There* finally is a manifestation of the power

of God's Holy Spirit in a human being who is not looking to save the self—unlike what our leaders did in the church, years ago. But these men were willing to lay it all on the line, whatever happened to them—whether they were to be thrown in prison, whether they were to be killed, just like they killed Christ. All of those things absolutely had to be in their minds. If it could happen to Jesus Christ, why not them, here just a few weeks or months later?

We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

"Oh, let's just bury ourselves a little deeper—let's just really poke that tiger and make him really angry at us." Fearlessly, they told the truth. Verse 31:

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy [Spirit], whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Fearlessly, they stood before this body which had the power to afflict them, and they told the truth. "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." Exactly what they did to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ told the truth and they wanted to kill Him. And God allowed it to happen. In this case, God was not going to allow it to happen right away because they had a work to perform. But ultimately He did allow most of them to die as martyrs. But it was not God's purpose at this time, so He intervened. "They were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." Then verses 34 through 39 describe the counsel of this wise man, Gamaliel, who convinces the counsel to let them go. Then verse 40: "And to him [to Gamaliel] they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them." So here they were subjected to physical torture. ". . . they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." So they were trying to intimidate—physical intimidation, cruelty. They were harming them, and they were not guilty of anything. All they had done was tell the truth. They were doing what was right and they were suffering for righteousness' sake, were they not? And so after this beating—after this mental torment, after being in jail, after having been ridiculed and made fun of and intimidated—their bodies are bruised and beaten and hurting, and they come out and say, "WOE IS ME. I need *justice*."

That wasn't fair; I didn't deserve it. I want my vindication." Is that what they did? No. What did they do? Verse 41: "And they departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing*." Isn't that amazing? REJOICING "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Isn't that an absolutely amazing response? Amazing. They were beaten, they were taken advantage of, they were intimidated, and their response was to rejoice and to be happy. That is the manifestation of someone who believes in what he is doing—someone who is not trying to protect and vindicate the self, but is committed to an outgoing service in accomplishing God's will first and foremost. Therefore, even when we suffer for righteousness' sake, we count it a joy. We count it absolutely a joy and a privilege to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and we know all things are going to work out. We don't have to worry that we are never going to be vindicated. We are willing to wait patiently for the perfect plan and purpose of God to be fulfilled.

James 1 and verse 2. James 1 and beginning in verse 2: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." That just doesn't make sense to the human, carnal mind. Count it all a joy when you fall into divers temptations? How many of us are joyful when we face trials and difficulties and problems? "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Waiting for God, not trying to satiate the carnal mind.

John 16, verse 1. John 16 and beginning in verse 1: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." Why is He saying that? Because the natural reaction of human beings is to become offended. That's what we do. We are good at it. We do it automatically. Bad things happen to us and we are offended. We want vindication—retribution. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." There are going to be many sincere people—who are sincerely deceived—and you are going to be the victims of their zealous efforts. Can you take it? Are you really prepared in your minds to be victims even to martyrdom—to suffer all manner of persecutions when you are not guilty of any wrong? We have to be, brethren. If we live long enough to see the return of Jesus Christ, that is exactly what we are all going to face to one degree or another. We have to be ready. And, do you know, if we are harboring this orientation of trying to hold on to the self and make the self look good, and preserving our rights, and all of these things, we are not going to be prepared in that day. How can we be

prepared to endure persecution and suffering when we are still trying to make the self look good? "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." Are we going to be able to say, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do"? That's the test.

So, in what ways should we be willing to sacrifice for others? I can talk about being self-sacrificing and giving, but what are some specific examples of how to do it as members of the Church of God? Number one, brethren: Don't get upset at the mistakes of others. Satan is always looking for ways to divide us. Many of us are scattered and, in many cases, don't have very many brethren to meet with on a regular basis. So when we have an opportunity, like this Feast of Tabernacles, and we come from all over, we have this natural zeal and appreciation for each other. And in some ways we are more tolerant and understanding. But, do you know what? If we stayed together for many more days, how long would it take before we started getting on one another's nerves [laughs]? And we might start thinking things like, "What did he mean by that? That wasn't very nice. I don't think that should have been done. I don't think that should have been said. I don't think that was very thoughtful. I think I deserve better than that." How long does it take for the carnal nature to come out? And Satan loves to use it. Oh, he will work on you and me and get in there before we even know it. We go into that mode of thinking before we even know it—it's automatic. We are on autopilot—before we know it, we are turning over and over in our minds some offense, something that happened. And we start grouching about it inwardly—even if we don't express it. And maybe we do express it—which is even worse. And before we know it, we are caught up in that orientation. Do you know what it is? "Me. Me. Me. Me. Me. Me. Me. I got hurt. I was mistreated. I . . . Me . . ." But Christ says to cover it.

Romans 15 and verse 1. Romans 15 and beginning in verse 1: "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." There is that word, "self." Don't please self, bear the infirmities of the weak—a principle which is the antithesis of selfishness. When others make mistakes—and they will, because we are all human—those of us in the Church of God must be very desirous of putting on Christ. But we are a long way off from it—we are all a work in progress. So we are going to make mistakes—we are going to say, and we are going to do the wrong things. The more time we spend with one another, the more we find out that those weaknesses do surface in all of

us. When they happen to you—when you are a victim, you didn't bring it upon yourself—what should you do? The natural mind becomes offended. "What did you mean by that? I demand an apology. Give me justice." But Christ in you says, "Cover it. Bear the infirmities of the weak." And any time any of us makes a mistake, it is a manifestation of weakness. We are all weak brothers and sisters when we do not perfectly manifest Christ. So to one degree or another, we all fall into this category. "Bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." If you demand retribution, you are not crucifying the self—not at all. "Bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

First Corinthians 10 and verse 23. 1 Corinthians 10 and beginning in verse 23: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." Here is a concept that says, do you know what? You, as a mature member of the church, may understand certain things are allowed and not a violation of God's Law, but for someone who is still learning and maybe has a sensitive conscience about certain things, you must be considerate of where they are, spiritually. Don't try and force things down their throats. Just because it is "legal," as Paul says, that doesn't mean it edifies. Be concerned—outgoing—to those. So, what if one of our members is a former alcoholic? What if someone has a problem with alcohol—or even if they have mastered it—should that be a person who, when you invite them over, you set a big spread of alcohol out there for them? Maybe not—maybe that wouldn't be good. Is it wrong to drink in moderation? Absolutely not. But would it be considerate to put such a temptation in front of a weak brother or sister? That's probably not thinking about them, is it? That's what Paul is talking about.

All things are lawful for me [meaning all of those things which are according to the Law of God], but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

That doesn't mean, seek to have your brother's wealth—to take your brother's wealth. No, but be concerned about his or her welfare—about that person being enriched. You are not thinking about trying to get, get, get. You are thinking about how whatever you may do affects that other person in mind or body, and what you can do to help *them* feel rewarded and enriched and fulfilled.

Don't, brethren, become offended when someone insults you—slaps you in the face, literally or figuratively. Galatians 6 and verse 2. Galatians chapter 6 and beginning in verse 2: "Bear ye one another's burdens." Now, if we are all perfect—if we never sin—there are no burdens to bear, are there? If we all fulfill the Law of God perfectly, then we are never burdened by our brothers and sisters, because we all do things just right. It's a beautiful, marvelous world when everybody obeys. And, yet, the commands of God say, cover the sins of a brother or sister—bear the burdens. Which tells you that there are wrong things happening. In the weakness of the carnality that we are still fighting, we sin and we make mistakes. That's where the burdens come from. And he says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." It is not condoning sin to forgive. Some are concerned that if they don't tell a person that they have sinned—if they forgive too easily or too quickly—the other person won't learn the lesson properly. Brethren, it is not your job or mine to correct, or to provide the penalty. It is between that other person and God. Our responsibility is to show the mercy that Jesus Christ did.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

What does this mean? We are talking about bearing the burdens of a brother or sister and then, all of a sudden, we go to this topic about thinking we are something when we are nothing. Did God change the subject? No. The principles are related. Who is it that is not willing to bear the burden of a brother or sister? The one who is so engrossed in self that he can't be bothered. That's another mathematical equation: Focus on the self prevents you and me from being able to show compassion and mercy toward others. When we are focused on fulfilling Christ in us—in our behavior toward others—it requires the subjugation of the self. You cannot have both at the same time. If you are going to fulfill this law—to bear the burdens of the weak—you are going to have to do that at the expense of the self. Something has to give. God says, make self give—crucify it, kill it—and that will provide you the capacity to be outgoing and loving and benevolent toward those around you. It is not Christ in you who will ever be offended.

Make time also, brethren, to comfort the lonely and the downtrodden. Often, all it takes is your time. You don't have to be eloquent—you don't have to be able to have pearls of wisdom that just roll off your tongue. Just simply take the time and make the sacrifice for those who are in need, and it will be a benefit. Participate in fellowship opportunities and service to others. So, the socials that we have throughout the year, and Sabbath services, are not just for you—because you get a lot out of them. Just as much, brethren, your presence there is an opportunity to serve those around you. You attend not just for yourself. God always makes sure the good things benefit us, but you are coming as a servant, whoever you are, and your smiling face and uplifting personality, and simply being there, is a service—an opportunity to serve others.

Brethren, those who practice true giving toward others, are those who will receive the greatest abundance. It is a spiritual principle—it's a cardinal principle—that God has given us for abundant living today and tomorrow.