

**Coming to Know and Trust God #4;
The Character of God, Part II**

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Jon W. Brisby
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Well, this afternoon, brethren, let's pick right up on my series—the next message in this eight-sermon series, "Coming to Know and Trust God." What does it really mean to come to know this God we claim to revere—that we desire to serve? And even beyond a clinical understanding of that Creator God, what does it mean to trust Him? What is required in order for you and me to *prove* that we really trust Him, which is the essence of faith?

I often think that the word "faith" is overused. What I mean by that is that it's *abused*, and it's so abused by so many that we start to think about it in terms of a superficial concept. And because the people who use it are using it in a wrong way, we begin to think about it in a wrong way. "Oh, faith. Yeah, faith." Another way to think about "faith" is that it's really "trust," "belief," "a conviction." When you have faith in something, you're willing to put yourself at risk. You put your faith in somebody who's watching your back. And you don't put your faith in somebody that you're halfway concerned whether or not they're actually going to be there, or whether or not they're going to leave you hanging out to dry. It's trust; it's confidence. That's what we're talking about. And God requires it. Turn to our base text—Hebrews 11, verse 6—to get us started off this afternoon. Hebrews 11, verse 6:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God [number one:] must believe that he is, *and* [number two:] that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him [emphasis added throughout].

You've got to have both. And it doesn't do any good to believe that God exists—or even to believe that He is that all-powerful, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Being that we talked about—if we don't believe He's a good God. If we don't believe He's dependable—if we don't think He will follow through and do what He says—what good is it?

Another characteristic of this God happens to be that He's a jealous God. He is a jealous God, and He wants us to appreciate Him. And guess what? He has a right to be appreciated because He gets to make the rules. He wants to be loved. We want to be loved, too, don't we? You and I don't have the right to demand to be loved, but God has a right to demand to be loved. And He does demand that we love Him, or else, He says, we're simply not going to be in that Kingdom. It's not a selfish thing on God's part. Remember, He's pouring Himself out in order to offer to you and me, and to all of those who will be part of the firstfruits harvest, incredible offices of responsibility for all eternity—power and might. You, too, if you're successful, are going to be omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. That's a lot of responsibility, don't you think?

Now, God wouldn't be very smart if He just had a low standard of expectation for giving that kind of power, would He? And He's not going to do it. He requires you and me to *love* Him, because He will not give such power and immortality to anyone who might possibly turn into a Satan, a rebel, in the future. The only ones He will reward with those gifts, are the ones who prove they love it—that they love Him, and therefore, they love what He represents. And they're willing to make every sacrifice to prove that they love Him and that Way, because that's the only way to verify that they will be faithful and consistent, and remain unified with Him through eternity, and not stir up trouble and strife in the God Family. There will be no trouble or strife in the God Family. And if there's any inkling that you or I might be a weak reed—that maybe even not now, but at some time in the future we might be swayed—He's going to do us a favor and just simply let us go to sleep for all eternity. The worst possible thing a loving God could do is to give immortal life to a being that ends up having to be locked away in a bottomless pit for eternity. He would not be doing us a favor. So the standard is high, and He says, "I want you to love me," because loving God the way He demands is also the test for your good and for mine in the end.

A family member of mine reminded me recently of a principle I'd forgotten about—and I used it in a sermon years ago when I first started speaking, I think. It was a business principle that I was taught, and then I saw the spiritual application of it much later. It's called the "Northbound Train." From a company—a corporate or business—standpoint, that model was taught to me this way: Our company is like a northbound train. We have a course that we are traveling—a direction we are headed—with a mission to accomplish. We need people to help work the train, and to move that train toward its goal. This train is going north. Now, then, if you want to go north, you are welcome to ride our train; but if you want to go south, or west, or east, or some other direction, this isn't the train for you. Don't get on board this train and decide that you've got some experience as an engineer, that you'd like to go up and drive the train, and take the train in a different direction, because you think you're called to it, or you think you have a better way. This train is going north. If you want to go north—if you want to be a part of this team—by all means, join in. But if you want to go in a different direction, by all means, do yourself a favor and get off this train, and get on another train. That's the model of the "Northbound Train."

In essence, God is the one running the northbound train—He is the captain; He's the engineer. He created it. He set the mission. He set the direction and the schedule, and that's where the train is going. You and I are blessed to be called to be a passenger and a crew member on the northbound train, if we want it. He's saying, "Get on board." But if you decide you don't want it, that's okay, because you and I each have free moral choice. He's not going to compel you. But, eventually, even if you get on board the train, if your behavior demonstrates that you really don't like where the train is going—you'd rather be doing something else; you're dissatisfied for whatever reason—God's not going to let you stay on it. Our coming to love Him is the test of whether or not we're on board with Him. It's not about giving your mind over to a human being, a minister like me, or anybody else who says, "Follow me, and I'll get you into the Kingdom." That isn't going to happen. You are free moral agents. You and I have to make a choice, and our salvation is at stake for the choices that we make, one way or the other. I'm serious about it. I believe it's true, and God helping me, I'm going to tell you the truth.

So we're working to come to know God better. We have seen that He is perfect, He is full of love and compassion, and He is worthy to be worshiped. He

is worthy to be worshiped, to be praised, and to be thanked at all times. But what else is it that we can know about this God we worship—His character? This is the message—and I try and get one in every single year at the Feast, even though it's a different theme—in which you're going to get hammered on one particular principle. And you know what that is? The faith once delivered—the hallmark, if you want to say, that separates this little remnant group from all of the others that came out of our parent organization. Mr. Raymond Cole hammered it over, and over, and over again for twenty-five years during the time that he was pastor and director of this little remnant. In the years since 2001, I have continued to do the same thing, and I promise that I'm going to continue to do it, God helping me. These principles are so critical to our survival.

Now, how am I going to fit that under the theme of "Coming to Know and Trust God"? Guess what is one of the hallmark characteristics of this God that we serve? God is honest; He is consistent; and He is absolutely unchanging. He's honest, consistent, and absolutely unchanging. He is absolutely dependable. This is a God you can count on—He does not shift with the winds or the sands of time. He doesn't take us in one direction, and then, all of a sudden, send us in the opposite direction. Notice how God describes Himself. Malachi 3, verse 6. Malachi 3 and verse 6: "For I am the [Eternal], *I change not . . .*" Oh, that so many of our former brethren really believed that was true. "I am the [Eternal]," He says, "*I change not*; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." He's reminding Israel: "You know, you had better be thankful that I am honest and that I keep my word." He said, "I made Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a promise that Israel would be blessed and multiplied"—as we heard from Mr. Litz this morning—in spite of their gross inability to please Him or to obey. And He could have destroyed them, just wiped them off the map. But, you see, He's an honest God.

Some misinterpret the events that happened in the days of Moses when, through the provocations, God said to Moses, "Get out of the way, Moses, and let me just wipe them out, and I'll make a new nation out of you." Years ago, Mr. Raymond Cole gave us the answer to that, which I never heard back in Worldwide. But it's absolutely priceless. You know, it was always thought, "Well, see, God was just so furious"—like a human being—"that He was going to break His promise." Do you think God was going to break His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? No. He didn't say that He was going to do it through Moses. Moses was a Levite. He made the promise that the scepter would never cease out of

Judah. Well, had God wiped out everyone but Moses, Judah would've been gone. God would've broken His promise. Do you think He was going to do that? If not, then why did He say that? As Mr. Raymond Cole gave the answer, it was to test Moses. Would Moses selfishly take the opportunity of an apparent offer to have a dynasty made out of his own descendants? But Moses passed the test, and he said, "No, God, please, You made a promise. Don't make Israel a spectacle before the nations of the world." Moses proved that he cared more about God's plan than trying to do something selfishly for himself. And, of course, God knew what Moses was going to do. He knows the end from the beginning, as we're going to see.

So, God honors His promises. He is trustworthy all of the time, and He's saying, "You had better be glad that I keep my word, no matter what, or else you all would have been wiped out." Deuteronomy 32, verses 3 and 4 are a repeat—I read this to you earlier, but I want to read it in a different context today. Deuteronomy 32 and beginning in verse 3: "Because I will publish the name of the [Eternal]: ascribe ye greatness unto our God." Verse 4: "He is *the Rock . . .*" Now, what are the attributes of a rock? Why does He call Himself a Rock? Does it mean that He's a big, dumb boulder? No. A rock is stable; it's firm; and it's well-stabilized in the ground so that it does not move. It is reliable; it is unchanging, which is the way God describes Himself. That's why He calls Himself a Rock. He says, "I make a promise, and I keep it. I follow through. I'm not flighty; I'm not fickle. I do work with purpose, and I stick to it, and I follow through. Everything I tell you to do will continue to be good and right, and I will always keep my word. If you do what you're supposed to do, I will always have your back. I will be your wing-man. I will be looking out for you, and I will fight your battles. I will defend you, and I will bless you, and I will protect you in every way. Trust me because I am a Rock."

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Psalm 18, verse 30. Psalm 18 and beginning in verse 30:

As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the [Eternal] is *tried*: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the [Eternal]? or *who is a rock* save our God?

Who is a Rock, save our God? Are there any other beings that can claim to be a rock? He says no. Not only does He compare Himself to a rock, but He says, "I'm the *only* one that can make that claim." All others are counterfeits. And no matter what they say, no matter what they claim, they are unreliable and they will let you down. Not only is He a Rock, He's the only Rock—the only one you can trust. ". . . who is a rock save our God?" Do you believe that?

Hebrews 13, verse 8. You know this text very well. What is one attribute of Jesus Christ—what is part of His character resume? "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"—another way to say, a Rock. He stays in place. Where He is, is where He'll be. Where you find Him now is where you will find Him later. He won't shift around; He won't move on you; He won't double-cross you; He won't leave you hanging. ". . . the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

James 1, verses 17 and 18. James 1, verses 17 and 18: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom . . ." What about this God, the Father of lights? He is the one from whom we derive light; His Way is the Way of light. And what about this God?

. . . with whom is *no variableness*, neither *shadow of turning* [no variableness, neither a shadow of turning]. Of his own will begat he us with the *word of truth* . . .

How does the work of God begin? With the foundation, and that foundation is always Truth if it comes from the real God—the true God. And if you have that foundation, you can count on it, and you can trust it, and it's not going to shift under you later, because it is an attribute of the character of God. And anybody who thinks that Truth changes throughout different eras of time, is really saying that God isn't a Rock— He's not reliable.

But let me not get ahead of myself. "Of his own will begat he us with the *word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures [or creation]." So, He's working with the firstfruits harvest of individuals that He's trying to teach; and through the Holy Spirit, we are to emulate those characteristics which will result in our being born into the very God Family. He's dependable and He wants us to be dependable too.

Hebrews 6, verse 17. Hebrews 6, verse 17: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise . . ." What did He show them—the heirs of promise, of which you and I are a part? It's what we're called to inherit. And what is it that He gave to us? ". . . more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise [what?] the *immutability of his counsel* . . ." The word "immutability" means "unchangeableness"—the consistency of His counsel. That means His Word can be trusted—He is honest; He is forthright; He doesn't double-talk; He doesn't say one thing, while He's working some alternative agenda behind the scenes; He's up-front; He's straightforward; what He says is what He means, and you can take it to the bank—all of the time.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel [the unchangeableness of His Word], confirmed it *by an oath*: [Verse 18:] That by two immutable things . . .

What two things? If you go back up to verses 13 and 14, you will see that the apostle began by speaking about the twofold promise that was originally made to Abraham. What were the two aspects of that promise? Number one: that He would bless Israel; and number two: that He would multiply Israel greatly. That's the twofold promise. And so, now, carrying forward, verse 18 picks that up. "That by two immutable things [those promises to Israel], in which it was *impossible* for God to lie . . ." Impossible? Meaning that He is prevented from, that there's some power that keeps Him from, ever making a mistake? No, it's His perfect will, His control, and His consistency of character, which means He never, ever will. It's impossible because He refuses to consider it. He has such perfect control and conviction so that He will never falter nor fail.

. . . by two immutable things, in which it was *impossible* for God to lie [He made those promises to Israel, and He wasn't going to back up for anything], we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

That's what He wants you and me to focus upon. He made the promise, and He says, "You can count on it. I'm really going to do what I say I'm going to do. I made the promise to Israel." The type—the first—was that Old Covenant to Israel. Ancient Israel was only promised physical livelihood, in a physical land with physical blessings, during their short life spans. They were never promised eternal life. It was to the Church—spiritual Israel, the antitype—that eternal life and

offices in the God Family were promised. *That's* the promise that counts. And He's saying, "You can take it to the bank. I'm serious about giving it to you. If you follow this Way of Life, if you do what I'm telling you—follow the program—I promise you I will give it to you. You will be successful." And He's waiting to see: "Do you trust me, and do you believe me? Or, will you doubt me, and in fact, diss me by acting in faithlessness by taking a different path to save yourself in times of trouble because you just simply don't believe that I'm going to do what I say?" That's speaking in the vernacular in order to show the challenge He sets before us. It's all about faith. Trusting Him is respecting Him, and failure to trust Him for all of our needs, by obeying His Law, is disrespect to God.

Is it any wonder why Jesus Christ said, "If you love me, keep my commandments"? Do you see how it all links up? It's hard for human beings to keep the commandments, even when we want to. The pressures are so intense, and especially when we're afraid. And fear is a powerful force. How many decisions do we make in life, because of fear, that put us in opposition to God? God says, "You keep my Sabbath holy." And we say, "Yeah, but if I don't work on Saturday, I might lose my job." God said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." We say, "Well, God, I know you're God—and I do love your Way, and I want to show respect for you—but I've got to work on Saturday, at least for now, until I get a better job. So, please, have me excused." And He's saying, "Nope. You are under a curse for disobedience, and it's a sign of disrespect." It's a sign of disrespect because God says, "You put me first, no matter what happens."

You may lose that job. Many of God's people *have* lost jobs over the last seventy years, through the twentieth century. But they did so in faith. They said, "God, I don't know how this is going to work out, because I don't know how I'm going to pay my rent, let alone put food on the table. But you said to obey and then you'll fight my battles." And He does provide for those who do it with the right orientation. He may let them suffer, but if they stick it out and say, "I'm going to do this, no matter what! I'm afraid because I don't know what's going to happen. I think it looks like it's going to be terrible, but I'm going to take Him at His word. I'm going to step out, and I'm going to do what He says." *There's* a respect for God. *There's* an individual who says, "You know what? I don't think God is a liar. I don't think He's wishy-washy. I don't think He's like a human being who's going to hang me out to dry after He tells me that He's going to back me up. I will obey your Law. I will take you at your word, Eternal God. I will

show you the respect that you deserve because I do believe that you are a good God." It's hard to do. Your test may not be working on the Sabbath. Your test may be one of the other many commands of God. We all have our weaknesses, whatever they may be. Those who follow God are expected to be as immovable as He is, you see, because we're supposed to be walking in the very footsteps of Jesus Christ. If He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, that's what you and I are supposed to be learning to do as well. That's what it means to walk in His footsteps.

Psalm 16, verse 5. Psalm 16 and beginning in verse 5: "The [Eternal] is the portion of mine inheritance . . ." This is the psalmist, now, speaking to God, confirming the understanding that God had made a promise, and the psalmist is taking Him up on His word. "The [Eternal] is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou *maintainest my lot*." He's saying, "God, you promised to have my back; therefore, I will trust you."

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." He says, "I believe that God has made a promise to give me a future, to take care of my needs. If I will obey Him—if I will keep His Law—He has promised to take care of the rest. There is a heritage. I want it; I believe in it."

Verse 7: "I will bless the [Eternal], who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons." This means that even when it's dark, even when it's most scary, do what God says—even when everything in you is saying, "Run! Save yourself! God said to go this way, but that looks like a terrible way. That looks like disaster. This other path looks better. This is safer. My intellect tells me this is what I should do—go over here." But God says, "I don't care how it looks. You go where I tell you to go, and I'll make it work out." The psalmist says, "I'm going to take Him at His word."

"[M]y reins also . . ." What are the reins? The Law, the commandments that tell him right from wrong, the instructions of God—what to do, what not to do—including keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, like being here at the Feast of Tabernacles. It's part of our reins—the guidelines, the structure—by which we are intended to walk in order to please Him. Those are the reins, in essence, that control us, if we allow them. "[M]y reins also instruct me in the night seasons." No matter how dark, no matter how scary, no matter how fuzzy it seems to be—when you don't know what to do; like you're in a fog, and you're lost—He

says, "You focus on the rules—on the Law that I gave you—even if you can't see how you're going to get to the morning. Do what you know is right. You've been taught. Put one foot in front of the other. Obey what I told you to do, and I promise I will make it work out."

Verse 8: "I have set the [Eternal] always before me . . ." There's the confidence—there is the hope—that is going to help him deal with his fear. "[B]ecause he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Human beings, without God, faced with scary, or changing, or challenging circumstances, will shift with the wind—situation ethics. "Oh, I love you, God. Oh, yes, I respect your commandments, and I'll keep them as often as my circumstances will allow." But God says, "Uh-uh. Not good enough." Not good enough. He is looking for the individuals who love it so much—who believe Him and trust Him enough—that they will say, "Although what you are telling me to do is petrifying, I'm going to take that leap of faith. I'm going to trust you and I'm going to do it."

"I shall not be moved"—because I trust God. In my scary situation I won't flitter and fly, and tilt, all over the map with my personal choices. I will remain committed to that track of obedience. There will be no stop-start, left-right, because I am going to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And He is a Rock. And I need to learn to be like that Rock too—consistent, committed, determined.

"I shall not be moved." Verse 9: "Therefore my heart is glad . . ." What is the reward of the individual who can follow through? I'm not saying you have to be able to do it perfectly. We are all weak. We make mistakes and we have to go on our knees daily and ask God's forgiveness. But if you know what you are supposed to do, even if you mess up, you can go back and say, "O God, I messed up. I take responsibility for it. It was my fault. I showed you disrespect because I didn't trust you. I was afraid. Please forgive me and put it under the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and help me get back on the horse." The individual with that orientation, though weak and making mistakes, but single-mindedly keeping that path, says, "Therefore my heart is glad." That's the orientation of the faithful.

"[A]nd my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope." Do you want peace of mind? Do you want real peace of mind? Put God first, as scary as it is. You see, it is so counter-intuitive to us as human beings, because we all seek peace of mind, don't we? We want rewards; we want happiness; we want peace; we want

contentment. How valuable is peace of mind? Oh, it's priceless. So, we all want it, and we are all trying to get it. God's path for us requires us to forget our natural intuition and to do what He says, even in opposition to what seems right to us—that which is according to *our* experience and *our* intellect. He says, "Do you want peace of mind? Do the scariest thing you have ever had to do in your life." Whereas, we say, "Peace of mind: avoid the fear and run away from it; go in a different direction and hide in a little corner; get myself into a safe place of my choosing. Then I will have peace of mind." God says, "You ain't gonna have it. You try to get it your own way, in violation of my Law, and you will be miserable and you will be cursed. The only way for you to achieve true peace of mind is to step out and face those fears and put me first, and do what is right." It's counter-intuitive, absolutely. It's the test of how much we first, "believe that He is," and second, that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Do you believe? Really?

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in [the grave]." This individual is saying, "My hope is not in this present flesh life, because I believe in the promise that you gave me of a better future to come. Therefore, I am going to invest in that now."

"[N]either wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The body of Jesus Christ laid in that tomb for three days and three nights—seventy-two hours. He had to put Himself absolutely in the hands of the Father. He was dead as dead can be for those three days. And do you know what? The Father could have reneged on His promise to Christ, and just kept Him there. He wasn't a spirit floating around in the tomb just waiting to be released. He was *dead*. There was no life in Him. He had to put Himself out there and say, "I know the Father will not leave me in the tomb—in that grave, because the Plan is for me to be resurrected after seventy-two hours." He had to trust that His Father was going to follow through, or He wouldn't have done it. But He did do it, and now He is saying, "You are supposed to walk in my footsteps, pony up. Do the same thing; demonstrate that kind of conviction in my integrity as God—that I am not going to leave you hanging out to dry. Make your investment in a better tomorrow, beyond this flesh, as well."

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Do you believe that's true? He said so, but you are going to have to take His word for it. By your actions and mine,

we are going to demonstrate whether or not we trust Him—whether or not we believe He is a rewarder of those that seek Him. He said He is, but He is challenging you and me to prove it, and your choices, and my choices, tell Him what we think of Him—honest or dishonest, consistent or inconsistent? Is He really a Rock, or does He kinda have these bad days in which He might change the rules and pull the rug out from underneath us? He's saying, "You decide."

Deuteronomy 4:1–2. Again, this God is a Rock—He is consistent—and He needs us to learn to be the same. Deuteronomy 4 and beginning in verse 1:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live [He says, "I *want* you to live. Here's the way to do it."], and go in and possess the land [the Promised Land. That's what this Feast of Tabernacles pictures—inheriting the Promised Land.] which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. [Verse 2—what's the condition upon achieving that promise?] Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it.

That's the guideline—that's the standard: "Don't add to what I say, and don't take away from it. Don't try to modify it. You can't improve upon what I have given—the way that I have outlined the rules and the path to salvation. So, when I give you the Truth from the beginning, *there* is your foundation. Now, you hold on to that and you don't let anybody take it away from you, and you show that *you* will be a rock—consistent and purposeful for the rest of your lives. *There* is your path to salvation. But if instead you do as ancient Israel did—time and time again—you will not inherit that promise." They could not be faithful—they had to try to improve upon what God had given to them through Moses. That wasn't sufficient for them, and so they included their own ideas. Oh, there were a lot of smart people in Israel—a lot of scholars and those with a lot of experience in life—and, boy, they thought they had a lot to offer. "Well, I know that you told us God said this, but, you see, here's a pretty good idea I have, as well. So, really, we should include that in the mix of how we worship Him, and how we think about what we are doing." But God says, "Don't do it."

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the [Eternal] your God which *I* command you.

He says, "I gave you my Way. I made sure to reveal it to you through chosen servants." And that is another angle that too many of God's people today don't get. Whenever God has done a work, He has done it through a chosen servant. You show me any place in the Bible that says otherwise. It's *never* a johnny-come-lately who decides to appoint himself to be a minister, or a prophet, or whatever else. *God chooses*. He picks the individual and sends him with a commission, and it comes with the authority of Jesus Christ. And then He requires us to recognize it and to take it as the Word of God, not as the word of a man. What Moses delivered was not the word of Moses. The Ten Commandments were written with the very finger of God upon two tables of stone. The statutes and the judgments that amplified the understanding of those Commandments came from God, not from Moses. Israel was commanded to accept them as the Word of God and to hold on to them, but they could never do it, which is why they fell under a curse, time and time again. And all of that was written as an example for the last-day church, of which you and I are a part, and God is saying, "Please learn from these mistakes of old."

But guess what the majority of God's people today have done? *Exactly* what our ancient ancestors did. They could not believe that God revealed the Truth from the beginning of the Work, and they thought they had to "grow in grace and knowledge" by appealing to Hebrew and Greek scholars to help them interpret what the Bible *really* says. What a joke.

Let's read the command in 1 Corinthians 15:58 to all true Christians. 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable . . ." Why did God tell His people to be steadfast and unmoveable, if "growing in grace and knowledge" means that every few years we throw out what we used to do, doctrinally, and *replace it with something new*? Does that make any sense and all? That is *exactly* what the majority of former members of the Worldwide Church of God are doing, right now. They have their Feast sites—some of them who are still keeping the Feast, or think they are keeping the Feast—and they have appointed their own rules and doctrines, and they have shifted like the wind, according to their individual situations, over the last thirty-five years, and they still think they are worshiping God, and that He should honor them. And God is *not* accepting their sacrifices because they are offering *strange fire* upon His altar—paganism, doctrines that come out of the minds of men, and that did not come from God. And He says, "I won't accept it. I made the rules and I revealed them through a chosen servant in the last days." That was Mr. Armstrong—that's what we believe.

And, so, you can go back and verify what the original teachings were—any of us can. They are all documented. We have forty years worth of articles, and the correspondence course that tells us what the original teachings were. We have no excuse for not knowing what the faith once delivered is.

But you can't tell that to the majority—thousands of these former members who are out there in their own congregations, some larger, some smaller. They are keeping a Sunday Pentecost, or maybe a Sivan 6 for Pentecost, or maybe they have rejected the Hebrew calendar as being revealed by God. "Oh, that Hebrew calendar," they say, "is Babylonian. Israel picked that up while they were in captivity. God didn't reveal that. We have to go outside and look up at the moon every month and find out when the new moon begins, or we have to go and look at the barley in Jerusalem and measure how tall it is." Was that what we were taught? Is that what Herbert Armstrong—God's servant in the last days—taught us to do? No, Mr. Armstrong confirmed, in the name of God, that He had compelled the Jews to bring us the correct calendar, as much as He compelled them to bring us the Holy Word of God. Oh, you can't look to the Jews to tell you how to keep the Law, because they have perverted it and always have done. But God required them to bring us the Bible that you can trust as the Word of God. There are variations in translations, but He provided us the means to reconstitute the original meaning so that we have the Truth in the Bible *in spite of* the perversions of the Jews. And guess what? We also have the correct calendar *in spite of* the perversion of the Jews. That's what Mr. Armstrong taught us. But a lot of scholars say, "Oh, that Hebrew calendar. We can't have that." So they make up their own—"the calendar that God gave Moses." *Poppycock!* They don't know. They are making it up. It seems right to them.

They say, "Well, I'll just read my Bible and I'll figure out the Truth." No, you won't, and neither did I. *God revealed it*—divine revelation through a chosen servant. You show me any example in the Bible where Truth comes any other way. Truth didn't come to you directly, and Truth didn't come to me directly. I'm not standing up here quoting to you that which came to *me* by my Bible study. I'm defending a Way that came through a chosen servant, and it wasn't me, it was Herbert Armstrong, and that which was preserved through the faithful ministry of Mr. Raymond Cole when that church began to go apostate in 1973. Raymond Cole wasn't interested in his own ideas. I'm not interested in my own ideas because, you know what? My ideas aren't going to get me or you into the

Kingdom. I have nothing to offer. I have nothing to offer you out of the mind of Jon Brisby that is going to help you in your salvation process. If you follow me as a man, you are hopelessly lost. The only way you have any hope is if you hold on to that Way that God revealed. *Where* is that Jesus Christ who is foundational? You have to find Him. And then when you find that Truth you had better hold on to it and don't let anybody take it away from you.

Oh, we've had those who have come and gone in our fellowship, over the thirty-five years of this remnant body, who had all kinds of personalized ideas and various agendas that came to them by whatever means. Ultimately, that all comes out. These are people who want to come in, and they nod their heads and say, "Oh, yes, I agree with you, and I think you are the true Church of God." And then, before you know it, they are spouting their own *strange fire*. I've seen it a hundred times during the time that I've been a part of this remnant body.

You know, there is a reason that we are consistently keeping the same doctrine in 2010 that we did in 1975. Do you know how that happened? Because we are not afraid of who we are going to offend by holding faithful. I would love—as Raymond Cole would have loved—to help and to serve anyone, but the basis of our help is a belief and conviction in that unchanging Truth. And if you don't believe in unchanging Truth—if you have your own agenda—you will not find happiness with this little group. You just won't, and it's not because we want to be mean or heartless.

I do love the brethren in these other groups, but I am not going to tell them that their sacrifices are acceptable to God when I know they are not. I take the example of Aaron and the golden calf very seriously, and I refuse, even under pressure from the mob, to give in and to build a golden calf for the people. Because, if I do that, I lose my salvation. I don't intend to do it, God helping me. But you had better be on your guard, because there is nothing to say that I won't get sidetracked somewhere down the line. I'm vulnerable too, just as much as any of you. Satan might get to me at some point. As Mr. Litz mentioned, God can still preach the Truth, even through apostate ministers who are not themselves right with God. Be very, very careful.

But many of you proved you weren't following Raymond Cole, because after Raymond Cole died, you continued to hold on to the same Way of Life. If it had been a personality cult, this group would have folded up and disappeared

within months or years of his death. That did not happen. So why are we still here? It's not because I'm some great guru—come on. I'm a slight shadow of a servant compared to Raymond Cole. Why are you still here? Because you love Truth—the revealed Truth that came from God, not from man. Because it was the Truth that came from Jesus Christ, not Herbert Armstrong, not from Raymond Cole, and certainly not from Jon Brisby. You can verify what that Truth is. It was taught from the beginning. But don't bring your strange fire among us, we are not interested.

They've come and they've gone. There are some—ones who have been with us for a few years even—who, all of a sudden, get sidetracked, and they start pitching things to me: "Have you ever considered this? We should be keeping new moons as Sabbaths." No, that's not what Herbert Armstrong taught us. We are not going to keep the new moons as Sabbaths because they are not. "Oh, but we need to be doing this, or we need to be doing that," or "God revealed to me through my Bible study this, that or the other." I don't mean to be respectful, but I'm not interested. And many of you in this fellowship have already proven that you are not interested either. Why? We believe in an unchanging, unmovable God who is a *Rock*. That's what this little remnant is all about, and that's what He requires us to be. And we are going to continue to hold on to that original faith.

Do you know how much of a miracle it is that we are still doing that thirty-five years down the road? How many other groups do you know of from the true church that are doing that? Too many pressures—too many pressures, fears and circumstances that "justify" a change, just a slight modification here and there, or wherever, to make it easier for us. That's what all of these other groups have done. They have done it, and they continue to do it.

Why are we still resolutely holding fast to the same set of doctrines? It's not because of me, or any other man. It's because God revealed it, and the Holy Spirit residing in this body says, "We love that way, and we refuse to depart from it." It is because you are manifesting the fruits of a Rock—following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because you trust that He doesn't change. And so we are not going to change either. And I don't care if all of these other groups say, "Oh, that Church of God, The Eternal, their fruits are dead. They are not willing to grow because they won't entertain any new ideas." Call us dead if you want, but we *have* grown. We have an incredible depth of understanding that we didn't have fifteen, twenty, thirty-five, fifty, or seventy years ago in the church. But that has never undermined or destroyed the foundational principles; it has built upon them.

That's the difference between real growth and false growth. God's work was founded upon that Rock of reliability. 1 Corinthians 3 and verse 9. 1 Corinthians 3 and beginning in verse 9. Paul says:

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation . . .

God laid the foundation, and He did it through the work of apostles—which simply means those chosen messengers who were sent with the inspiration. And they are not any Tom, Dick, or Harry that decides to make himself a minister. That's never the way God works. I've always used that example: It's like if you are a small business owner. You start your business and you run your business—you have control of your business. You have the right to it. But then some guy walks in one day and says, "Hi, my name is George. I saw your sign. I like your company and I've decided I'm going to be an employee of yours. Welcome me to the family. And, by the way, I have a few ideas. Let me share them with you. In fact, why don't you just move over and let me sit behind your desk, too. Let's go out and build this company." If it were my company, I might say, "Excuse me? Who are you? Oh, you have a degree. Oh, I get it. You have a business degree. Oh, an MBA! Oh, well! Oh, well, by all means, just take over my company. I mean, you have an MBA!" Pretty absurd, isn't it? But why do people think that God's work is any different? Do you think God gets to choose His servants? Maybe? Maybe He gets to pick who represents Him and speaks with His authority? Maybe? Maybe not any Tom, Dick or Harry gets to appoint himself to be a minister, or some wise guru, so that he can wax eloquent on what the Truth is and what it isn't. Yes, the God I serve is in control of His work. He picks His servants—He always has. He picked Moses and no one else. Moses didn't choose God, God chose Moses. God chose every prophet of old and sent them with a message. They did not volunteer.

And there are those who want to read Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20 as a calling card that gives them the right to go out and do that. "Go ye, therefore, and preach to all nations." And they say, "Oh, you see, God said to do it, so I have to do it." But to whom was He speaking? The twelve—at that point it was the eleven—who were left after the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. He wasn't speaking to everyone, He was speaking to His chosen, hand-picked servants, and He said, "*You go,*" because He was sending them with His authority. And what were they

going to preach? Their own words? No, only that which God revealed—the Word of God.

So, how is it that so many in the last-day church decided that they were unhappy with the doctrine and that they had to fix it? "Because, after all, Herbert Armstrong wasn't a scholar. You see, he didn't have enough education; he didn't go to a seminary; he didn't study Greek or Hebrew. So, he did the best he could, but by the time we got to the 1970s, we figured out that, ohh, look at all of these doctrines we got wrong. Pentecost on Monday? Oh, no, no, no. It's on Sunday. Marriage for life? Oh, no, no, no. Divorce and remarriage is okay." But for the first forty years of the church it wasn't so. So they got "smarter" than God, and then they decided that it had always been, not the Church of God—founded upon Jesus Christ—but the church of Herbert Armstrong, and since it was the church of Herbert Armstrong, they said, then, "Well, he was a fallible human being, which means there must have been some mistakes. So we, as good—more scholarly, more wise and experienced—individuals, will now get rid of the mistakes of Herbert Armstrong so that we can grow in grace and knowledge in order to have more truth in the future." You find me any example in all of the Bible where that ever happened in the true work of God. The work of God begins with the Truth, which is a Rock. It is substantial, it is reliable, it is unmoving, and the test for the people of God is always to hold firm and never let go, not to "grow" by changing the doctrine. Find that in the Bible. You will not. And the ministers of the other splinter groups don't like me to say that. It makes them squirm.

A little remnant, like this one, holding on to the original doctrines, is the conscience of the church at large—whether they like it or not. Do you realize that? We are the conscience of the church at large because we are still holding to that which they once held. We are not holding on to something that is foreign to them. The ones who were there in the early years know that. It reminds them of what they used to do, and what they used to keep, when they were originally baptized, or for the ministers, what they used to teach when they were originally ordained. They were ordained to keep and to teach a Monday Pentecost. Why did they change? That's not what a Rock does. Why are they changing? Why do they now justify divorce and remarriage at whim? Because, like Aaron, they were afraid of the mob. For the sake of their livelihoods—or for whatever personalized reason—it was easier to change and to give the restless people what they wanted. That they might preserve their jobs—their livelihoods—their ideas, or maybe *they*

were married and didn't like *their* wives. Maybe they wanted an excuse to get rid of her and get a new one, as well. "Well, let's just change the doctrine."

God said, what He has joined together, let not man put asunder. But they will tell you, "Well, oh, yes, divorce is a sin, and God hates it, but it's like any other sin: you can just put it under the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and then you are free to go out and remarry." No, marriage is not a sin to be forgiven, marriage is a promise to be kept. God holds us to our vows, and those who break their vows will not be in the Kingdom. But they are teaching the church otherwise now. Divorce and remarriage is rampant in these other groups.

1 Corinthians 3, verse 10: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation [Christ did it—not Herbert Armstrong], and another buildeth thereon." I would tell you that we believe Raymond Cole built upon that foundation that was laid through the work of Herbert Armstrong, but it was still the work of Jesus Christ.

"But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." God gives a warning and says, "You had better be very, very careful how you build on the foundation I laid, because if you offer strange fire on my altar, I will reject you." Verse 11: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There is only one Christ, and there is only one set of doctrines that represent that Christ. He is the Word. He was the Word made flesh, and He was manifested to man through the gift of the Law to Israel. And we know what that foundation was.

Most of God's people will not remain steadfast—they won't be a Rock. They won't follow Jesus Christ and they don't believe that He is a Rock. It is unquestionable that He is consistent and reliable. It is one of His character traits. What is God like? He is unchanging. But what do they believe? They think He flits and flies all over the map. What they believe won't work—it won't fly.

Deuteronomy 32 and verse 15. Deuteronomy 32 and beginning in verse 15:

But Jeshurun waxed fat [God's people], and kicked [Yep, that's what they are still doing today. They will not be steady—they will not hold firm. They are going to kick and resist.]: thou art waxen fat,

thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

What was Israel's downfall every single time? They "lightly esteemed the Rock." They wouldn't hold firm. "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods." A Sunday Pentecost is a manifestation of a strange god. Allowance of divorce and remarriage is a manifestation of a strange god. Rejection of the Hebrew calendar is a manifestation of a strange god. All of these other things that you either add to or subtract from that original revelation are strange gods. We are not interested in strange gods.

Ephesians 4:13. Ephesians 4 and verse 13: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man." That's the process we are in now—trying to walk in Christ's footsteps toward becoming perfect, as He gave us the perfect example.

. . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine . . .

That's what God's people naturally do—God's assessment, not mine. ". . . tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Look at the fruits of all of these groups over the last thirty-five years and tell me if that's not exactly what they've done. What else do you call it? We've got members from other groups, and I've learned a lot from you and your experiences in other fellowships. And a number of you have told me that, in effect, "If they had just stayed the same, we would have stayed in that group." If they had just stayed the same. But they keep changing, and you never know when their minister is going to stand up and say, "Ah, God's given me a new revelation. Now He's convinced me that I'm a special prophet," or "We should go here, or we should go there." And everybody cringes and says, "Oh, please, can't we just hold firm to what we have?" But they won't allow it. They can't—the Spirit is not guiding them, because they have rejected the revelator, Jesus Christ. So their fruits are unstable.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men." Oh, boy, are they ever shifty. They are crafty, and they're very convincing, especially when they are

convinced themselves. And there are a lot of them that really, I think, believe in what they are doing, and they don't realize they are deceived.

". . . by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; *But speaking the truth in love . . .*" And what is love? The fulfilling of the Law. "If you love me, keep my commandments"—the way God revealed them, not your version of the commandments, not your concept of the commandments, but the commandments as God delivered them through a chosen servant, in what ever age you live.

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him [Christ] in all things, which is the head, even Christ." That's what it's all about. And you won't do that if you don't believe He is a Rock. You will not do that if you do not believe a part of His character is immutability—He is unchanging, without wavering, consistent. If you don't believe that He is, you are destined to be tossed to and fro, just like the majority of God's people in the last days.

My dear friends, the day is coming when the whole world is going to come to know this unchanging God. They are going to have that Christ revealed to them. They are going to have a chance to learn His Truth, which is dependable, and reliable and will not change. You and I have the opportunity now, as part of the firstfruits. It's also an incredible responsibility, because you and I are at risk right now according to what we do with it. The world is not at risk. They are deceived and they are not called, which means that God is not holding them accountable. Oh, they are suffering incredible curses because they are violating God's Law—even though they don't know any better. But, spiritually, they are not at risk. They are not held accountable for that which they have not received by revelation. You and I are different. With knowledge comes responsibility. You and I are on the cusp, and what we do with that calling has everything to do with whether or not we are going to be in that Kingdom. We are talking about a life and death struggle.

I interface with many individuals, and whether it is in my travels every year around the world, or at home, or at the office—with phone calls, emails, letters, or whatever—I want to be kind, and I want to be supportive, in any way I possibly can, and hopefully I am, God helping me. But I refuse to tell somebody a lie in order to make them feel good about themselves. Do you know why? My own

salvation is at stake if I start doing that. I will not build a golden calf for you, even if you demand it of me in order to be your friend. If you put the condition on your fellowship, or your friendship, that I have to accept your golden calf and bow before it, I still love you, but I will put Jesus Christ first. I will put Jesus Christ first, even if I have to lose your friendship and your respect. And there are many who have walked that path—they've come and gone. They did not find a home with us because they didn't like the idea of unchanging Truth. They wanted something that allowed them to participate, and to be included, and that allowed them to give their input and their ideas. Not here.

The day is coming when the whole world is going to have a chance to have what you have now. Many of them will respect it and love it, and they will show respect to God by honoring those commandments. What about us now? What about us now—the ones who are on the cusp? Revelation 15 and verse 2, in closing. Revelation 15 and beginning in verse 2:

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire [John's vision of the throne of God]: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast [meaning those who ultimately did the right thing and were born into that God Family], and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty [that means omnipotent—all-powerful]; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?

Who is it, they are saying, who will refuse to recognize the glory, and the majesty, and the perfection, and the goodness of this God, and this Way of Life that has been offered to us? Who is going to reject it, when they really understand what they have been offered and what they are dealing with?

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee . . ." Oh, yes, that is the time to come. All nations, then, are going to be called and given a shot at what you have now. Do you love it enough to prove you want to be there to help teach them, or are you and I going to miss out, and they are going to replace some of us,

because they are going to love it more than we do? God doesn't need you. God doesn't need me. He doesn't need any one of us. His Truth will prevail, just the way He revealed it. You can't improve upon it, and I can't improve upon it. Accept it His way, or miss out. Many in the world, when they are called, are going to love it, and they are going to embrace it, and they are going to run with it. What about us, right now?

". . . for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." That's the day when they are going to be manifested to the world. Right now, they are being manifested to you. Your eyes have been opened. You have been schooled, you have been educated, and you have been warned. You also have been given a glorious opportunity if you will *hold firm*. *Hold firm* to the revelation of the doctrines that God gave through those chosen servants. Don't allow anyone to get you to trade it away. The standard that God gave was that if any man comes to you and preaches something that is not consistent with that which you received from the beginning, then let him be accursed. You *can* judge by the fruits. What are they saying? Are they confirming the faith once delivered, or are they coming up with their own concepts? Don't fall for the deceit, even if you have to lose a friend, or a family member. Do you love God most, or is He second or third down the line? That is the test.

God is, indeed, unchanging. What He has made right, *is* right, and what He has made to be wrong, *is* wrong. *He* is trustworthy. You and I must, likewise, learn to be as stalwart as He is.

Now, we can agree that God is good and righteous, but what about when things don't go our way? Do we really agree with the judgments of God then? I'm not talking about theoretically, but down in the trenches where we live. What do you really think about those principles? Next time, we are going to analyze God's judgments as a means of getting to know Him even better. That will be tomorrow morning.