

Framing the Picture of Prophecy

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As we're all aware, over the past month or so we have all kept the fall Holy Days. As we know, these are focused on prophetic events that will be fulfilled in the future. If we look at the spring Holy Days, they are all based on historical events. If we study those historical events, they help us understand the spiritual meaning of those days. But the fall Holy Days are all based on prophetic events that we look forward to in the future. If you have been in the church of God for any length of time, you know that if you look over history, when it comes to making an accurate picture of prophecy, that is an area in which we have made a number of blunders. Over the years, even back decades, there were times we were setting dates for when Christ was going to return. We had booklets that tried to lay out exactly when that was going to happen and so made some pretty significant blunders in that regard.

The reason for that is, prophecy is one of the subjects which is inherently very vague. You are often dealing with interpretation of scriptures that have symbolic language in them. Trying to figure out what to interpret as symbolic and what is literal can be difficult. Or there are vague statements that can be interpreted in more than one way and figuring out how to interpret them is also difficult. Sometimes we're trying to fill in the details that are not specifically filled out, with speculation. As a result, it can be a very murky subject and a challenging thing to get an accurate picture of prophecy.

In addition to all of those typical errors that we sometimes make, that are inherent to the subject, one of the big mistakes we make in trying to get an accurate picture of prophecy is not first framing the subject with foundational doctrine. What I'm referring to are not the prophetic scriptures that are vague and can be interpreted in more than one way, where we are guessing on how to look at them. I'm referring to just basic, foundational doctrine. The subjects that a lot of scriptures address that are very clear, very straight forward, with which there are a stack of scriptures which agree. I think it's important that we first frame the subject with those and then put our picture together.

As you might have guessed, I'm playing off the analogy of how you build a jigsaw puzzle. If you have ever built a jigsaw puzzle before—if you get a 1000-piece jig saw puzzle and have this big stack of pieces—it can be challenging to figure out where all the pieces directly fit with each other. You might work on it for hours, days or even weeks, trying to figure out where the pieces go. What's the first thing you do when you start building a jigsaw puzzle? You start looking for the pieces that have a flat edge or corners on them and build the frame around it because that's fairly easy to identify. Then there's one thing for sure, before you go any further—all of the remaining pieces have to fit inside that frame. It's not even a possibility that those pieces could fit outside the frame—they have to fit inside the frame. You use that as a guide as to where to put them.

That's what we're going to look at today. The subject is the framing our picture of prophecy with clear, foundational doctrine. If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

Framing the Picture of Prophecy

Before we even start looking at prophetic scriptures, which can be vague and use symbolic language with murky stuff to go through, one of the big mistakes we make is not taking those foundational doctrine subjects and make them the border around the subject and then making the obvious assumption that the rest of the pieces have to fit inside that border. Let me give you a clear example of why I mention this subject.

If I look back over my time in the church of God—as most of you know that is my entire life from childhood—almost every church of God organization throughout teaches what I like to call two complete separate paths to salvation. If you look at the scriptures that the Bible talks about, it lays out what our journey to salvation looks like; what's required of us and what this picture will look like. You see a lot of consistency in the scriptures just laid out. It tells us it's *a narrow, difficult path* that is hard for us to endure through. It says, *"he who endures to the end will be saved"*. So, it's through *much tribulation* we enter the Kingdom of God. There is scripture after scripture that describes this difficult struggle that we have to endure through, to be rewarded with the Kingdom of God.

If we look at our path today, I think we look at that description of that path and think *"That sounds pretty consistent with what my life has been like."* We attribute that to the Firstfruits and say the rest of mankind gets this easy slide into the Kingdom of God. They don't have to face Satan, they have a very comfortable, easy slide into the Kingdom of God. What we have are two completely different paths to salvation. Before we look at particular prophecies and how we want to interpret them, we need to ask the question. Do the foundational scriptures of the Bible that define how the process of salvation works allow for that? Do they allow for the idea that there is any such thing as an easy, comfortable slide into the Kingdom of God or does that contradict the basic scriptures?

So, let's start off by looking at how the Bible lays out the foundational principles and then at the end we'll frame our picture with this and see some obvious conclusions. We will start off in a very common scripture, Matthew 7, a very familiar scripture which I'm sure you've read many times. People struggle with this one, not because it's hard to understand, it just doesn't feel good to our emotions.

Matthew 7:13 *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.
14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)*

Notice it talks about the path that leads to life. It doesn't say, one of the paths that leads to life—one of the several options—is a difficult, hard, narrow way to go. No, it says the

path that leads to life, the one and only way to get to eternal life, is this narrow, difficult path and there is a substantial attrition rate. In my time in the church, I've seen some mental gymnastics around this scripture. The reason I mention that is, this is a very clear, straightforward statement that is not really hard to understand, it's just a little emotionally uncomfortable. You look at this verse and think this doesn't feel good because that says there is a significant attrition rate. Yes, it does. What happens is, we look at this and say, God is love—He's very loving and kind and His character is *agape* and it sums up who He is, and that is right. But then we inject in our physical, human, carnal definition of love.

As I like to put it, we define love carnally with, "*Does it feel good?*"; things that feel good to our emotions that are positive. Through our physical perspective, it sounds positive and loving and the things that take away pain or difficulty from our lives and give us pleasure and enjoyment—make life positive—that's how we define *love*. That's not how the Bible defines it. To understand that, all you have to do is read the book of Job or the prophecies of the Day of the Lord. Because if your view is, God only does happy, positive, feel-good things that feel good to our emotions—Then that's His idea of love. You can't square the Day of the Lord with that idea, and you can't square the book of Job with that idea. You would have to define love with the question of, "*Does it do good?*" He does both of those things, which are very painful and unpleasant for our minds but He does it, and the end result is positive. It accomplishes good in the long run. That's how God defines love, and we have to look at it through those eyes. When He looks at this and says that the path to salvation is difficult and it's a struggle and that it results in a significant attrition rate, that's exactly what He means. But that's what is required to do the good that He wants. Unless we look at this through God's definition of love, we're going to be looking at the Bible through an emotional blindfold. We are just blinded to seeing what is right in front of our eyes and that is because we are trying to match it to our idea of love. What this results in, is not being molded into the image of God and thinking like Him, rather we are trying to mold Him into our image. We are trying to make Him fit our definition of love. We have to remember *there is a way that seems right to us, but it's not right. It ends in death*. We have to remember that as we look at a subject like this and use His definition of love. We are not to have an emotional blindfold over our eyes as we look at the subject.

He directly tells us that the way that leads to eternal life is narrow, difficult and a struggle. So much so that it leads to a significant attrition rate. Why would that be the case? It's because the Bible directly tells us that suffering is an inherent part of this path to eternal life. Look at Romans 8:16.

Romans 8:16 *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (NKJV)*

In other words, inherent to the whole concept of being a joint heir with Christ is suffering with Him. Suffering is required. This is why it's a narrow, difficult path and that's why it is

he who endures to the end who receives eternal life. That isn't positive, feel-good fun for our human perspective, but it's what the Bible says. It's how the Bible lays this out. Suffering with Christ is directly defined for us in the Bible. Look at 1 Peter 2 and we'll see that the Bible directly defines this for us. We don't have to guess what this means.

1 Peter 2:19 *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.* (NKJV)

We're talking about suffering wrongfully, not suffering because you made some bad decisions, you committed sins, you gave into your human weakness and did some stupid things and are now facing the consequences—we're not talking about that. We're talking about suffering, even when you've done righteously and the suffering you are receiving is not a natural result of bad decisions. Verse 20.

20) For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (NKJV)

So now we have defined what kind of suffering we are talking about.

21) For to this you were called ... (NKJV)

Notice this is fundamental to our calling; it's a given that this will be a part of our calling.

21 continued) ... because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (NKJV)

We need to follow the exact same thing that Christ went through. Christ didn't ever suffer because of His own sins or bad decisions because He didn't have any. He lived a perfect life and never messed up but suffered regardless of that.

*22) Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";
23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;
24) who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.
25) For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* (NKJV)

Notice it says we are called to face the suffering that He did. That suffering isn't because we made a mistake, that we sinned and messed up and are now experiencing the consequences for it. It's facing suffering even when you have done righteously. The Bible directly tells us this is a normal expectation for a Christian, it's not something unusual, it's not the exception to the rule. Notice when I said "the exception to the rule", I want you to see as we go through this the foundation doctrine that we need to frame

the picture with. If we assume that there are two completely different paths to salvation and the vast majority have an easy, comfortable path that doesn't require suffering, what we are saying is that this is the rule. This path that requires suffering, difficulty and enduring to the end, having to overcome Satan's temptations—that has to be the exception. Just by the sheer numbers. There are a small number of Firstfruits and the majority of mankind gets called later. What we would be saying is, this easy path to salvation would be the rule and the exception would be what the New Testament talks about.

In 1 Peter 4:12 we'll see that Peter directly tells us that suffering and going through this adversity is a normal expectation—it is part of the equation when pursuing eternal life.

1 Peter 4:12 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.* (NKJV)

In other words, rejoice because this is part of the path to salvation, this is part of what you are required to do to receive eternal life, it's inherent to the equation. What we're going to see as we go through this, is scripture after scripture that agrees with this. Not once are any of these scriptures going to say, that we are just talking about "the exception to the rule". What we're talking about doesn't apply to the vast majority of mankind, only a tiny number of people. It's never going to say that. It's going to keep consistently telling us that this is how it works. I'll also mention that I'm only going to briefly cover in this sermon—scratching the surface—on all of the scriptures that touch on this. There is going to be a paper posted on the website at the same time that this sermon goes up, with the exact same title. It's going to cover more extensively, more scriptures that address this. For time's sake I just have to scratch the surface. I want you to see the magnitude of scriptures that back up everything I'm mentioning.

In Acts 14 we see another statement. We are told this is just part of the process of pursuing salvation.

Acts 14:21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (NKJV)

Notice it doesn't say,

"There are a few of you where it's going to be a lot of tribulation and very difficult, but for everybody else it's a comfortable, easy slide because God loves you so much that He wouldn't require you to do anything difficult".

That's not what it says. It directly says it is a difficult thing, there is going to be a lot of tribulation and trial and you're going to have to buck up and endure through it. If you endure through it, you will receive eternal life, so it will be worth it. You're going to be very glad when you look back on the other side and you're not going to care what suffering you went through. But this is going to be hard; it's simply how it works. In Philippians 1 I want you to notice how it connects—belief in Christ and suffering—and pairing them together as a package deal.

Philippians 1:29 *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake ... (NKJV)*

Notice they are a package deal.

30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. (NKJV)

Notice, these come together. When you're called to salvation and given the opportunity to accept Christ as your Savior, to believe in Him—what comes with that? Suffering as He suffered—it's a package deal. As carnal human beings we say, I would prefer to have the opportunity to accept Him as my Savior and live a Godly life, but take that suffering part away. Just give me the feel-good, positive stuff and take away that negative stuff and adversity—that doesn't sound good. That's what we would do as carnal human beings. That is what sounds good to our carnal minds. We make the mistake of wearing that emotional blindfold. We read through the Bible with our idea of what love is. We define love with that question, does it feel-good? We think because God says His very nature is love—which it is, He is very kind, loving and good to us—but we assume that means feel-good things are true and bad things couldn't be true because that wouldn't be love. If you have that viewpoint and are trying to read the Bible through that lens, you're literally reading the Bible with an emotional blindfold on. You're going to try and interpret it to match that. You're going to miss what it's saying on the page.

Why does God do this? Why does He send us through these hard trials? It's not because He's mean or likes to inflict pain, it's because He is looking at it from the perspective of, does it do good? In other words, what is the end result? He puts us through this because it's fundamental to building His character in us.

James 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials ... (NKJV)*

That's easy to say and very hard to do. How many of us when life is getting painful and beating us up say, "*I'm so thankful for this, this is great, I'm celebrating.*" No, we're normally praying, "*God could you take this away? This isn't fun and I'm not enjoying this.*" We ask our friends to pray to make it all go away, that's a normal response. I'm not criticizing that; I'm just saying that's how we think and the whole idea of rejoicing in

that is foreign to our thinking. But we need to be molded in God's image, not try to mold Him into our image. Let's see why that is something we should celebrate.

3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (NKJV)

Going through these hard trials builds the character of God in us.

4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)

The reason God puts us through this is because it does good. Because it's fundamental to building His character in us. This is a concept you will find all throughout the New Testament. In Romans 5:1, we see the same concept again.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

2) through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3) And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations ... (NKJV)

Again, something just foreign to our physical, carnal thinking. Nobody says, "I'm getting beat up by trials, let me celebrate this"; that's just not how we think.

3 continued) ... knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (NKJV)

So why should we celebrate this? Not because it feels good, it doesn't feel good. It's not something we enjoy and like to go through, it's because it produces the character of God in us. It's fundamental in how it works. We're going to see as we go through all of this and lay out the whole concept. If we frame out our picture of prophecy with this, we realize when we look at how everyone else is called, it's going to have to fit inside this frame. That's going to make some very obvious conclusions that we will look at. One more scripture to reinforce this concept in 1 Peter 1:6.

1 Peter 1:6 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials ... (NKJV)*

Notice this concept of rejoicing when you're getting beat up by trials. Is that not just completely foreign to how we think as carnal, physical human beings? I know it's foreign to my thinking; that's not my first initial reaction. I have to stop and remind myself; God is doing this for a purpose and I have to trust in Him. But I want the pain to go away. As I mentioned, we have to take that emotional blindfold off and read the Bible thinking in terms of how God defines things and be molded in His image, not try to mold Him in ours. Picking up in verse 7, notice why we go through these trials.

7) *that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*
8) *whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*
9) *receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.* (NKJV)

We receive our salvation when? After we have been tested by fire, after we go through the hard trials that test us and build God's character in us. This is fundamental to how it works. Also realize, it's not just a matter of God giving us these tests to build His character, He's also testing our hearts. He's also testing us to see if we will be faithful to Him when it's painful. It's very easy for us to go along and obey God as long as it's comfortable and we are being rewarded for it. I'm sure you've seen a lot of times, as long as it's easy and comfortable, it's really easy to go along. Then you find out what people really believe once it becomes painful.

Let me give you an easy example. You come into the church of God, when you first understand the truth—maybe you were a Protestant or Catholic and you were keeping Sunday before and going along with what everybody else was doing. Then you start reading the Bible and realize, the Bible doesn't teach Sunday, it teaches Saturday and it's kind of serious about this Saturday Sabbath thing. God says this is a commandment, this is something we have to do. You say, I should start keeping this and I shouldn't work on the Sabbath and should honor this, so you start doing that. Then later your boss comes up to you and tells you he needs you to start working on Saturday now. You tell him, "*I believe in the Sabbath and can't do that.*" So they are going to have to let you go if you don't. Now you find out how strongly you believe in that sabbath. Once your livelihood gets threatened, the carnal human nature reaction is, God wouldn't want me to get fired. He wouldn't not want me to feed my family so maybe I can be flexible on this Sabbath thing. That's our carnal human nature reaction—that's why we get put into these tests and God says, you say you believe in the Sabbath, let me make it painful to stand up for this. Now do you really believe it? Or is it just something you went along with when it's comfortable and as soon as it got painful you decided it was a lot more flexible. That's how God figures out what our heart is about. This is a concept all throughout the Bible, but we'll just look at a few scriptures on this beginning with Proverbs 17:3.

Proverbs 17:3 *The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts.* (NKJV)

We just read in Peter earlier talking about our faith being tested in fire and it was like gold being refined in the fire. He's using that same analogy here, saying He tests our hearts, just like gold is refined in a fire. That's when it gets hot, when it gets painful and uncomfortable. This is how it works; how the process works. Not only how He tests and builds His character in us, but it's also how He tests our loyalty. Just think of how He handled Abraham. For years He worked with Abraham and then gave him the ultimate test. "You know that son you waited for all these years? Take him to the mountain and

kill him.' Imagine how emotionally grueling that had to be for Abraham. He has to take his son and doesn't know that God is going to stop him at the last minute and not have him go through with it. But what does God want to know? Is he going to be willing to do this, is he going to obey when it is an absolutely grueling trial he has to go through? After Abraham gets to the point where he has the knife up and is ready to do it, then he is stopped and told he doesn't have to go through with it. Then what is he told? Now I know; now I know your heart, because He tested him. That's how this process works, it's fundamental to it.

To look at a couple other examples, look at Deuteronomy 13:1.

Deuteronomy 13:1 *"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,
2) and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—and let us serve them,'
3) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (NKJV)*

Notice how he mentions that this is specifically a test to see what you're going to do. This is exactly what God places us through. As we're going to see, if you have a perfect utopia where these situations never happen, how do you test people to see what they are going to do. Put them in a hot seat and give them a choice. Where maybe the majority of the crowd is going the other way and it would be easy and comfortable to go along and do what everybody else is doing. Are you going to stand and do what you know is right, even when you're going to get ostracized, even when they are going to throw rocks at you and you're going to lose friends and maybe family members? God purposefully places us in those situations to test our character. It's not just a tool to help develop His character, it's a testing of our hearts to see how loyal we are. Notice in 1 Corinthians how the New Testament tells us that this must exist. Notice that statement; it's not just that this happened to happen and God took advantage of it and saw an opportunity to test people, He says this kind of thing must happen. It's directly stated in 1 Corinthians 11:19.

1 Corinthians 11:19 *For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. (NKJV)*

In other words, He can identify who is really serious and whose heart is really committed and is going to follow Him. He orchestrates situations where we have options. There are choices—you have the ability to choose right or choose wrong and He creates it where it's painful. Where if you do the right thing, it's going to hurt. That shows that we are for real, that shows that we are committed to this, even if we suffer loss, even if it's painful. That's how you know if someone really believes something, if they are really committed. If the moment it becomes painful, we say, it wasn't that important to begin with, then it was a belief of convenience. It wasn't something we

were truly committed to. God wants to know if we are truly committed. He's not going to give eternal life to anyone who is just going along with what the crowd was doing. Everybody was going in this direction, and this was where all the positive peer pressure was and I just followed along. He's not going to give eternal life under those circumstances. The Bible repeatedly tells us—lays out the entire process of how this works. Notice how consistent this is, of the whole picture we're seeing from scripture. I'm only going to scratch the surface for time's sake on all the scriptures that mention and back up all the points I'm making. That's why there is going to be a research paper put on the website with this exact same title, covering a lot more scriptures showing you how strong the case is and how many scriptures there are backing all this up. I'm just covering the highlights here for time's sake.

One of our challenges as carnal human beings looking at this subject, is our definition of love. We look at love through the eyes of carnal, physical human beings and you might say, when we say, "*I've been truly blessed in life*" our definition of a blessing is normally, from our viewpoint. The pain and discomfort have been taken out of my life. and things have been made easy and comfortable, in pleasure and enjoyment. I think the same way, I have the same carnal human nature as everyone else. But let's be honest, that's how we define what a blessing is because that is how we see what love is. The key to understanding this subject is getting our definition of love out of this book and not out of our emotions. Our physical, carnal human emotions, if we use them as a guide, are an emotional blindfold and you will not see what is right in front of your face.

The way we define blessings and the way the New Testament defines them are in direct opposition with each other. The definition that the New Testament gives for blessings is consistent with all the scriptures and the concepts I've laid out. Matthew 5:10.

Matthew 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness ' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)*

Notice those who are going to receive the Kingdom of God are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake. We're going to touch on that concept again later. Notice it doesn't say, just a few of them—it says this is the equation. Those who are going to receive the Kingdom of God are persecuted for righteousness's sake.

*11) Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NKJV)*

That's typically not how we define blessings. Our idea of a blessing is to take away the pain and discomfort from my life and give me pleasure and enjoyment, that's how I define a blessing. That's how carnal human beings define it. But notice the Bible says it a different way because this is what is required for salvation. This is how God tests our

character, this is how He puts us in situations that develop character in us and that's why it's a blessing. It's not because it feels good, it's because it does good.

Let's notice a couple other scriptures that back this up.

Luke 6:22 *Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake.*

23) Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. (NKJV)

Something completely foreign to our physical, carnal thinking because rarely do we think, "Oh good I'm getting beat up and my name is getting dragged through the mud and people are throwing rocks at me, isn't this fun?" That is not how we think. It's, "Can I get away from this, can you make this go away, can we skip this part, I'm not enjoying this". This is how we look at it. We have to get our definitions from God's Word and be molded into His image, not insisting on molding Him into our image. That's normally where the problem comes in understanding this whole subject.

To notice another scripture, in 1 Peter 3; as I mentioned, I am only scratching the surface on the scriptures that address this. The paper online will give you a lot more.

1 Peter 3:13 *And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?*

14) But even if you should suffer for righteousness 'sake, you are blessed. (NKJV)

Once again, this idea of being blessed while you suffer, is completely foreign to our physical thinking.

14 continued) ... "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

16) having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

17) For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (NKJV)

This is not only fundamental to our calling; the Bible repeatedly calls it a blessing. It isn't because it feels good, it's because it does good. It's because it gives an opportunity to develop the character God as we have to endure through this and gives God the opportunity to test our hearts and see what we really think and believe. Are we just following beliefs of convenience and we do it when it feels good and as soon as it doesn't feel good then we say it's more negotiable and we can compromise? Are we treating foundational doctrine as a light switch? What I mean by that is, I'm sure

everyone is familiar with the concept of, you turn the light switch on, the light comes on and when you switch it off, the light goes off. Sometimes we can treat foundational doctrine like that. As long as it feels good, that has to be true. But if we read something and think, that can't be love, that's not needed and, in our minds, not knowingly or maliciously—we can switch it off. Like it's a light switch that we can make go away when it doesn't feel good. That proves it's beliefs of convenience and not something we are truly convicted on.

I mentioned that what we're seeing here is a complete process being laid out. Not only telling us that the path to salvation requires difficulty, requires suffering, but we are seeing why. The reason why is it develops the character of God in us, it tests our hearts and enables God to know where we stand and to develop us into what He wants us to be. The Bible directly tells us that we don't receive the crown of life until after this process is played out. Look at James 1, we read the first couple verses earlier, let's go to verse 12 now

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* (NKJV)

Notice when he receives the crown of life is when he has been proved. Let me share with you the definition of the Greek word that is translated as *prove* in this scripture. It's transliterated into English as *dokimos*, [Strong's #1384](#) and the definition I'm going to give you is from [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as, "to accept, receive, proved receivable, tried as metals by fire and thus purified, hence to be approved as acceptable men in the furnace of adversity".

In other words, when do we receive the crown of life? After we have been proved in the furnace of adversity. We have to go through this adversity to qualify for eternal life. That's why it's described in the Bible as *he who endures to the end*. It's an endurance process. You don't endure through something that is comfortable and is all warm and fuzzy and positive. That's not something you think of as enduring through. You might sarcastically joke that you have to endure through this, when you are joking about something you completely enjoy. But we endure through something that is painful. Something we would prefer not to have to go through. If it was up to us, we would opt out because this isn't an enjoyable experience and we think of enduring through something as bucking up and making ourselves go through something that is not pleasant or fun to go through. That's the path to salvation; that's how this works. We receive eternal life after we've done that, because that's how the process of building God's character and testing us, is done.

Also see in this, that Satan plays an important role in this process. Think about it; how is it that we are suffering and persecuted and suffer when we've done good. When it's not a result of the natural consequences of bad decisions or sin, but we are suffering and going through painful situations even when we've done righteously. The way that

happens is having to overcome Satan and his demons and what they do to us. This is a fundamental concept in the Bible. Ephesians 6 is a very common scripture I'm sure we're all familiar with.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

12) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (NKJV)

Why is this life such a struggle? Why is it we have to endure through it and it's so hard? Because we aren't fighting physical forces, we are fighting Satan and his demons who are out to get us. What we'll see in the Bible is, yes, Satan is an evil guy who is out to get us, but as the book of Job clearly illustrates how God is using him. Who initiates the whole exchange? It's God.

"Have you noticed my servant Job, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil?"

He baits Satan in the process and Satan says,

"Let me take him on, I'll show you I can break him."

God says,

"Ok you can go after him but here's the boundary lines. You can go this far and no further."

So, God is in control over the whole thing, but what does He tell us in chapter 41?

"I have put a hook in Leviathan's nose, I have taken him as a servant."

In other words, he is like a dog on a leash. This is all by design and God has done this purposefully, not because he likes Satan or agrees with what he does, but he knows he can utilize that to test our character. He can utilize him as a tool in that regard. We receive eternal life after we've overcome his attacks. 1 Peter 5:8.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

9) *Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

10) But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (NKJV)

After you have suffered—it's a requirement that you suffer a while with this—then God will exalt us after we have gone through this, after we have endured through this process of dealing with Satan. As I mentioned previously, most prophetic scenarios in the church of God, at least that have been taught in my lifetime, have two separate paths to salvation. We look at all the scriptures I've gone through in the entire process I just laid out—this is not anything new, this is foundational doctrine that is covered in church of God sermons. Nothing revolutionary about this—what is different is we look at this and think it just applies to the Firstfruits. But the good news is, the rest of mankind gets an easy slide because Satan is out of the picture, and they don't have to deal with him. They get a warm, fuzzy, feel-good slide into the Kingdom of God and everybody makes it. Did any of the scriptures that we read say that we were talking about the exception and not the rule? No, they all describe this as the rule and explain the whole process of how this works. What we would have to explain, if we are going to be honest with scripture is, if the vast majority of mankind has a completely different path to salvation, where they don't face any of this, where does the Bible address that rule? That would have to be the rule and this would have to be the exception. Where are those scriptures? I've been looking for twelve years and haven't found them.

I've mentioned this to a number of long-term ministers over the years, bringing up this particular subject and no one has ever presented proof to me. Let me show you the scriptures that address this rule and how it's going to work. The counter argument is always a motion. It's a motion in human reasoning. God loves so much, love feels good, people need to feel good, they don't need to feel bad. We create this warm, fuzzy picture to reverse engineer and justify it, but we don't deal with the fundamental facts. In Timothy 3 we read what the Bible directly states. All we have to do is read it right off the page and believe it. I've summarized a lot of the basic points but if you read the paper it goes into much more detail. As we can see, Satan is our persecutor. As we've read, he is the roaring lion that seeks after us. If you read the book of Job, God utilizes him as a servant, even though Satan's objective is to destroy us, God is utilizing him to test us and perfect our character because of the situations that Satan can put us in. If Satan is our persecutor, let's read 2 Timothy 3:12.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

Is there any other name by which we can be saved? No, the only way you can receive salvation is accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior and following Him as one of His disciples. Everyone who is going to do that, is going to suffer persecution. It doesn't say just the first group of people will suffer persecution, everybody else who follows Jesus Christ will have an easy slide into the Kingdom of God. It doesn't say that; it's an all-encompassing, dogmatic statement. If we take foundational doctrine for just what it says—take off the emotional blindfold for how our emotions want it to say things. It's a

very appealing idea to sell people on. I've heard lots of warm, fuzzy stories in sermons all of my life, particularly at the Feast and 8th day. They lay out the picture, won't it be wonderful, you live in a perfect utopia, everything is wonderful and then you get to slide into the Kingdom of God and receive salvation. Who wouldn't want that deal? It sounds fantastic. The problem is, it violates fundamental doctrine. It violates what the Bible says. If we frame the picture with the clear, easy to prove, foundational doctrine, what we come down to is, the Bible only describes one path to salvation. It's the difficult path that is narrow. It's difficult. We suffer through tribulation, we have to be tested, we have to endure through it, it's all throughout the Bible, there is a massive stack of scriptures. There's a counter argument, no one ever turns over and says, let me show you all the scriptures that tell you the other side of the story. No, they always say, God just loves us so much and it feel so good that it has to be true. They put on this blindfold and disregard scripture and tell me from emotional human reasoning why this would make sense.

How do we square this up with prophecy? As I mentioned, we are framing the picture with this. We know for an absolute fact that during the millennial period, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, Satan is out of the picture for 1000 years. I gave a sermon at the Feast this year called Prophetic Vision, it's on our YouTube channel and the website if you haven't heard it. One of the things in that sermon that I went through was the millennium and I mentioned there are three major factors. You have:

No war—swords into plowshares—spears into pruning hooks—they don't want to learn war anymore.

We know that is true for 1000 years. We know there are abundant resources. We have *the plowman overtaking the reaper* and abundant crops and this utopian earth with fertile ground and deserts that bloom. So we have abundant resources and no one is going without basic necessities. Also, everybody is healthy. *The lame leap like deer, the blind can see, the deaf can hear, the mute can talk*—a wonderful utopian environment and I'm not questioning that for a moment. There is a big stack of scripture that all mention that. What does the Bible tell us happens after the millennium? Look at the lay out of the Holy Days and you can easily see where all this fits. When you get to sundown at the end of the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, where are you? You're in the 8th day. So, what happens after the 1000 years are finished? You get to the 8th day.

Turn to Revelation 20 and let's see what fits here. This answers the whole question. In my experience in the church of God, which again has been my entire life, typically the release of Satan is one of those subjects that is quite frankly, flat out ignored most of the time. We are so sold on this idea that they will have this warm, comfortable slide into the Kingdom of God and it feels so good and so positive, who would want to talk about Satan being released, let's just ignore that. Even if it is talked about, it's very much minimized and positioned as, it's just this short little period and just a few people and the rest of mankind has to deal with it but everyone else has a warm, comfortable slide into the Kingdom of God. We're not framing the picture with all the foundational

principles we just talked about. We start off jumping into prophecy in the subject that is inherently very vague. We have to interpret symbolic language or what is literal and what is symbolic and how do we interpret different scriptures because sometimes they are vague and can be interpreted in more than one way. We don't just look at these fundamental principles. If you frame the picture with how the process of salvation works, you have to get the rest of the pieces to fit inside the frame. You can't build a picture outside the frame and say it feels good so it must be true. It doesn't work that way. Start off in Revelation 20 with the scriptures that address the meaning of Atonement because I want you to notice the wording here.

Revelation 20:1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.
2) He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;
3) and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. (NKJV)*

So, there is no question whatsoever, during the 1000-year millennium, is Satan present? No, he is not; he and his demons are completely out of the picture and that is the fundamental reason we have this utopian environment. But notice the last sentence, let's not ignore this.

3 continued) ... But after these things he must be released for a little while. (NKJV)

Why is it a *must*? Why is it a requirement? Because of everything we have covered prior to this. He is fundamental to the process of salvation. Not because he is a nice guy or has good intentions, but because of how God utilizes him as a servant in testing us and building his character in us and putting us through adversity so we're tried through the furnace of adversity—that's the purpose. Jump down to verse 7.

7) Now when the thousand years have expired ... (NKJV)

When you get to sundown at the end of the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles, where are you? You're immediately in the 8th day. You're not in a nebulous time period that's in between the two, you're in the 8th day because that's how the Holy Days are laid out. So, what happens after the millennium expires. When the millennium is over, we are in the 8th day.

*7 continued) ... Satan will be released from his prison
8) and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth ... (NKJV)*

He is affecting the planet as a whole. *The four corners of the earth* and what is he doing? Going out to deceive the nations. What was his job before? We read in the first

three verses of Revelation 20, he was locked up so he wouldn't deceive the nations anymore. He is given his old job back and the reason is very simple. It's the exact same reason he is allowed to affect mankind today.

8 continued) ... Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

9) They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

10) The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (NKJV)

We notice what happens after the 1000 years expire, Satan is released and allowed to affect all of mankind. We typically minimize this and try to ignore it, but this is the key that reconciles the whole picture. Everything that we read about the path of salvation—if you read the study paper you will see there are a lot more scriptures which I could have quoted other than the ones I have included. There is a huge stack of scriptures that all back up this difficult path to salvation and tells us, that is not only how it works, but tells us why it works, what it accomplishes and explains Satan's role in the process. The whole thing is laid out and we have to use that as the frame and get the rest of the pieces of the puzzle to fit inside the frame. We can't just build a nice, feel-good picture and completely ignore that. This is the whole key to reconciling both of them together. Satan is released again. Why? For the exact same reason that he is allowed to affect mankind today. God has put a hook in his nose—He has put a hook in Leviathan's nose—and taken him as a servant. He is allowing him to come after us while putting parameters around him to control the situation so that God is always in control of what is going to happen.

As I mentioned before, I'm not in any way questioning the perfect environment of the millennium. I won't go through the scriptures about the millennium. If you want to see those—they are in the sermon on the website entitled "Prophetic Vision". There are three major categories of how you can see the utopian environment of the millennium. There's *no war, swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, they don't learn war anymore*. There are abundant resources, no one is going without basic necessities of food, clothing and things they need to get by. There will be no famine or people suffering as a result of that and everyone is healthy. It directly tells us how wonderful it is and everyone is happy and going to work.

Well, let's notice what happens when Satan is released. We have had it briefly mentioned here. We know the "no war" situation immediately changes. Perhaps I wouldn't say immediately, I think it's going to take years for Satan to bring things to that crescendo, but obviously we have a war. I won't take the time to go through Ezekiel 38 and 39, but if you read through those chapters, you see this war is not some insignificant, tiny event that only affects a few people; it is a significant situation. It takes over seven months with people employed full time to go out and find all the bodies killed

when God intervenes and wipes out those who attack Jerusalem. For seven years they are able to use all the weapons that were brought for this battle, to burn as firewood. An entire nation can do this for seven years straight. This will not be a small event.

Notice I also mentioned three criteria. We've already seen the "no war" change but now let's notice that the plentiful resources and everybody being healthy has to change as well. Turn to Matthew 25, this is a common set of scriptures that I'm sure everyone is familiar with. Read through this and don't just breeze over it as a general lesson, let's read it for what it actually says and think through the ramifications of what this is actually saying.

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.
32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. (NKJV)*

Think about what is happening here. He's obviously not judging the Firstfruits; this is all the nations, after Christ returns. It's all of the population of the earth and He is judging their salvation. We'll see that clearly as we read the end of these verses because we're going to see one group receiving eternal life and one group in the lake of fire. There's no question what is happening, He is judging their eternal life. Pay attention to the criteria He uses to judge them because for these criteria to make any sense, these circumstances have to have existed during the time these people's salvation are being judged. Otherwise, these statements would be irrelevant and make no sense whatsoever.

*33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.
34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;
36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'
37) 'Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?
38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?
39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'
40) And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'
41) Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:
42) for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*

43) *I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.*'

44) *Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*

45) *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*

46) *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (NKJV)

He's very clearly judging the salvation of the rest of mankind. All of those called after Christ returns. Notice the criteria, don't brush it away. *When I was sick, you took care of Me?* How would that make any sense to say that to the population as a whole, that you're judging them on how they dealt with sick people, if nobody is sick? If everyone is healthy and no one is facing significant health problems, how does that make sense?

He's saying to them, *when I was hungry, you fed Me, when I was naked, you clothed Me*—if everyone has abundant resources and no one is doing without, how does that make any sense? How is this in anyway relevant?

The obvious answer is, when Satan is released and I think Rick worded it very well in his Last Great Day sermon this year when he said, "The 8th day looks like our world today". The reason being because Satan is released. Rick appropriately titled that sermon and if you haven't heard it, I would highly suggest you listen to it because it covers a view of the 8th day which covers details I am not going into. I'm covering more the foundational principles that show you this has to be the case of what Rick laid out. He mentions that the 8th day looks a lot more like our world today. The reason that he did, is because Satan is released and as he rightly called it, it is a day of judgment. It isn't when we are judged, it is for the rest of mankind to receive their judgment for salvation. They have to go down this same path; they have to overcome Satan's temptations. They have to suffer and go through this same process that is laid out all throughout the New Testament.

This is something I came to see about twelve years ago and began questioning the popular scenario I have been taught from childhood. I did a couple of sermons that are on the Pacific Church of God website, called "A Fresh Look at the Book of Job Part 1 and 2". In doing the research for those sermons, particularly part 2, I started seeing how the whole subject of suffering is so intricately woven into the whole process of salvation. and that the whole New Testament treats it as standard to the process and a basic requirement we have to go through to receive salvation. I started scratching my head and thought that something was wrong. I've been taught a prophetic scenario from the time I was a child that the majority of mankind have an easy slide into the Kingdom of God and don't have to face any of this. Where does the Bible address the rule? According to this logic, this "easy slide" into the Kingdom of God would have to be the rule and what we're facing? What we see throughout the New Testament would have to be the exception. Something is wrong. I realized that the problem was, we didn't frame

the picture with foundational doctrine. We went into looking at prophetic scripture where we have to make guesses and try to interpret and use our human carnal definition of love and thought. The idea that you receive salvation and a wonderful utopia and just slide into the Kingdom of God just sounds wonderful. Who wouldn't want that? It sounds great. The problem is it violates the foundational principles of the Bible.

If we look at what I've laid out and just frame the picture with this but also look at the fact that the Bible directly tells us that Satan is released again and the obvious implications of that, then we see a coherent picture. We see the rest of mankind facing the exact same process of salvation that we do. The primary counter argument is never a scriptural argument. I've had this discussion with a lot of long-term church of God members and a number of ministers over the years but it's never a scriptural argument. To be blunt about it, the way I like to put it is, scripture is irrelevant to this conversation. What happens is, no one ever goes:

"Let me show you the stack of scriptures that would define the rule. Let me show you the scriptures that would define how the rest of mankind would be tested, how God's character would be developed."

No one has even tried to do that. The reason being is, there are no scriptures to work with to do that. The counter argument is,

"God just loves people, He just wants everything to be warm, fuzzy and comfortable and it's love, love, love."

That's the counter argument. Let's keep something in mind, as I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, we have to take off the emotional blindfold. Proverbs 14 is a common scripture I'm sure most all of us have read many times.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (NKJV)*

In other words, what seems right to us oftentimes isn't right. So, we can't use our physical, carnal definition of love, we have to use the Bible's definition of love. It is not based upon, "Does it feel good?" If you think it's all about feel-good, happy feelings, read the book of Job and go through the Day of the Lord. You can't get that to work. The only way you could make sense of those is, to recognize it's about how it ultimately ends and the good that it does. The key to understanding God's love—I'll put it the way that Gail Allwine mentioned in his sermon this year at the Feast as I thought he worded it very well—he said "God practices tough love." Let's read the verses that I think he read, just to back this up beginning in Hebrews 12:3.

Hebrews 12:3 *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.
4) You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*

- 5) *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*
- 6) *For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."*
- 7) *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*
- 8) *But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*
- 9) *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*
- 10) *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*
- 11) *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (NKJV)*

God's love is not based upon, "*Does it feel good?*" It's about "*Does it do good?*" God practices tough love. That's why He sends us all through this very difficult process, but if we successfully endure through it, we can receive salvation. This is exactly how it works for the rest of mankind as well. If we frame the picture of prophecy with foundational doctrine, if we build that frame and then put all the other pieces inside the frame, then we get a very much clearer picture. We can easily start off interpreting our view of prophecy and do what has happened most of my life on this subject. We create this wonderful sounding, positive picture of the rest of mankind just sliding into the Kingdom with no difficulty and when you point out the contradictions with that, we reverse engineer some rationalizing to back up it up. Instead of starting off with, "What do the foundational principals of the Bible that are easy to prove with a big stack of scriptures say?" Let's use those to frame the picture and then put the rest of the pieces inside the frame. If we do that, we come out with a coherent picture. We have one path to salvation. It's the one defined by the New Testament. It's the narrow, difficult path that requires suffering, that requires endurance, that requires us to be tested on our loyalty to God, through difficult trials, through the furnace of adversity, never a scriptural argument. That's how it works for everyone. That's fundamental to the meaning of the 8th day.

I've just touched on the fundamental concepts that back this up. If you want more details how the 8th day plays out, I highly suggest you listen to Rick's sermon that he gave on the 8th day. Since he was mentioning all this, I wanted to give the foundation of it. I know this is new for a lot of people to think about. It clarifies things if you just build that frame on foundational doctrine and then put the pieces inside the frame, then it becomes very clear. We can't come out with a prophetic scenario where we have to rewrite the New Testament to get it to work. That's a big red flag that tells us something is wrong.

As we look forward to not only a picture of prophecy, but also of the understanding the fall Holy Days, let's make sure that when we look at the picture of prophecy, which is an inherently vague subject where we can do a lot of guessing and putting of the pieces together and sometimes speculate, that the first thing we do is take, "easy to prove" foundational doctrine and frame the picture of prophecy with that foundational, easy to prove doctrine that is based on a lot of clear scriptures. If we do that and put all the other pieces inside the frame, then we can have a clear picture and an accurate picture of prophecy.