

Stay the Course

Roger Kendall—December 24, 2016

Brethren, we're on an incredible journey, a journey to the Kingdom of God!

In this life we go through many experiences and we struggle with things. Then there are times of delight and joy. All these experiences that we have are playing a part in forming and shaping us so that we can be prepared when we arrive at our destination in the Kingdom of God. It's a wonderful thing that God has personally and individually called each and every one of us to be in His *spiritual* family:

- that we might take on the very nature of His Son Jesus Christ
- that we might be able to grow in Spiritual character
- to be able to live by the way of God
- to be able to be a light to this world
- to help others through their difficulties

We are in training for eternal life. That's an awfully long time. Indeed it is! Now, in this physical state that we're in, God is now working with us so that we might have the character and the very nature of Him so that we can rule with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom.

We heard this at the Feast that we kept this past fall. I think about this a great deal. We just need to recognize that we have a job description that has to be fulfilled. Indeed, we need to 'keep on keeping on.' You know something, we are the 'chosen few,' not the many.

Matthew 22:14: "For many are called, but few *are* chosen." Why is that?

- most do not want to repent
- they don't want to obey and love God
- they prefer to go their own way rather than to recognize God as their:
 - ✓ Creator God
 - ✓ the Law Giver
 - ✓ the very One Who gives them the breath of life that they have

This has been the way that is has been down through time. God has always engaged the few against the many.

We can look at the situation with Gideon, with his 300 against the large Assyrian army. We can remember Elijah, who by himself, single-handed, took on the 400 prophets of Baal. Again, *the few against the many!*

Not only are we few in number, but 'God has chosen the 'weak of the world to confound the

mighty.' Who would have thought it? No one in their right mind would look at us today and say that we're going to be leaders under Jesus Christ in the Kingdom. Let's realize and understand why this is so.

1-Corinthians 1:26: "For you see your calling, brethren, that *there are* not many who are wise according to the flesh, not many who are powerful, not many who are highborn *among you*."

We can look around and we can see that we're successful in our own way, but we're not of the high elite part of our society. No way!

Verse 27: "Rather, God has chosen the foolish things of the world, so that He might put to shame those who are wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world so that He might put to shame the strong things. And the lowborn of the world, and the despised has God chosen—*even* the things that are counted as nothing—in order that He might bring to nothing the things that are" (vs 27-28).

God's going to change everything as far as the way this world is being run. He's going to change everything! He's going to take it right down to the parking lot. Everything is going to be cleared back and there's going to be a new society based on love and based on God and His very wonderful plan for all humanity.

Verse 29: "So that no flesh might glory in His presence"—*glory in themselves*. Just to take on credit for things they never should have.

What are we to glory in? Jeremiah answers that question. Actually, God revealed it to him. This kind of follows on what we just read in 1-Cor.

Jeremiah 9:23: "Thus says the LORD, 'Do not let the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might; do not let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, **that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD**... [the Lord God] ...exercising loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these I delight,' says the LORD" (vs 23-24).

We see here that *we are to glory in knowing God*. That was mentioned in the opening prayer, that we would come to know God in a really deeper, more strong way, as we continue on our journey to the Kingdom.

As Paul says in 2-Tim. 3, that perilous and dangerous lie ahead here in the end-time. We can see it all around us. The potential for absolute

catastrophes and incredible perilous times are all around us. God, to me, is holding it back until He is ready for things to proceed as He has designed it to be. God will protect us and deliver us from all trials and difficulties that we might face, all the evils that is before us, *if* we have trust and confidence in Him.

Let's remember that we have spiritual enemies. *Indeed we know!* Satan and this present evil world is at work striving:

- to divert you
- to confuse us
- to lead us away from the road that leads to the Kingdom of God

He does it daily. Look at the world we live in. It's just absolutely broadcasting corruption and evil in every side. Again, our enemies:

- want to distract us
- want to discourage us
- want to divide us
- want to deceive us

These are the tools that they're using in a very subtle, but not so subtle way, as they attack us striving to bring about confusion and other elements within us.

We all need to recognize these very enemies that we have. Be ready to stand firm against them and to know exactly what they're doing; they want us to bypass and not make it to the Kingdom of God.

Stay the course to the Kingdom of God. I hope the seven points that I'm going to go over—or attributes—will help us to better understand how we can *stay the course*:

- not to be diverted
- not to be distracted
- not to be pulled away

But to focus intently on our goal: the Kingdom of God!

Each one of these points could be a sermon in themselves. You can expand on these as you would like in your own personal study. The first one is very clear.

1. Your number one goal in life is to reach the Kingdom of God

That means we are not to be distracted, as I said, by the world. We need to keep our eyes focused on the goal. There's so much around us that can distract in terms of:

- activities
- the fun
- the sports

- the music
- all of the entertainment
- our work
- our family

So much we have to do!

On the other hand, daily in your prayers, talk to God and say to Him, 'I'm seeking Your Kingdom, Father, with all my might, with all that is within me.'

These are Scriptures you're very familiar with, but very important to read as we go through this first point. Particularly *making the Kingdom of God your primary goal!*

Matthew 6:31: "Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we be clothed?' For the nations seek after all these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things" (vs 31-32). What's going on in the world? People are:

- seeking wealth
- seeking power
- seeking control
- seeking those things that put them on top of everybody else

In other words, it's a frenzy out there in some cases.

Verse 33: "But *as for* you, **seek**... [and *keep on seeking*, as the Greek implies] ...**first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...**" There's two things in this verse that we need to focus on:

1. have the right goal
2. to be making that journey:
 - ✓ with righteousness
 - ✓ with the Truth of God
 - ✓ with keeping His way of life
 - ✓ with living by it
 - ✓ with practicing righteousness

Then He says *if* you do:

"...and all these things shall be added to you" (v 33). God will take care of all these physical things we need as we are loyal and faithful to Him.

Colossians 3:1: "Therefore, if you have been raised together with Christ... [through baptism] ...**seek the things that are above**, where Christ is sitting at *the* right hand of God. **Set your affection on the things that are above**, and not on the things that are on the earth" (vs 1-2).

This goes along with Matt. 6:33 that our focus needs to be on the goal. Our love and attention should be for God and not to the things of this world.

Verse 3: “For you have died, and your life has been hid together with Christ in God. When Christ, *Who is* our life, is manifested, then you also shall be manifested with Him in glory” (vs 3-4).

This is talking about the resurrection. When Christ comes, at His second coming, He’s going to raise all the saints to be spiritual beings. We can get rid of this physical body. We can get rid of this burden that we carry every day because we’re physical. That’s going to be changed. What an incredible day that’s going to be!

We have to remember, as we journey to the Kingdom of God, that we have our part to play. We’re responsible for certain things that we need to be *doing*. If we can remember

Philippians 2:12: “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” You must be loving God and keeping His commandments.

We know that we need to be ‘walking in righteousness,’ as we just read. We also need to be developing Holiness. That’s God’s character. This is part of our job description now that we need to be doing.

2-Corinthians 6:16: “And what agreement is *there between* a temple of God and idols? For you are a temple of *the* living God, exactly as God said...”

We are the temple because God dwells in us. We have His Holy Spirit. Christ dwells in us. So, we are a Holy temple.

“...‘I will dwell in them and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.... [as a result of this] ...Therefore... [God says, Christ tells us] ...come out from the midst of them and be separate,’ says *the* Lord, ‘and touch not *the* unclean, and I will receive you’” (vs 16-17).

Here are some of the things that we need to be focusing on. We must get rid of sin and not touch the unclean things of this world.

Verse 18: “‘And I shall be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says *the* Lord Almighty.”

2-Corinthians 7:1: “Now then, beloved, since we have these promises...” We just read some promises from God that He would be with us, He would be our Father, and He would be there. Because we have these promises:

“...we should purge ourselves from every defilement of *the* flesh and *the* spirit, perfecting Holiness in *the* fear of God” (v 1).

These are things we need to highlight in our Bibles, to read and to recognize. We have our part to play as we seek the Kingdom of God.

2. Stay spiritually strong

How do we do that? *By staying close to God!* We’re not going to be strong if we’re out in the ‘hinterlands’ and we’re doing our own thing. If we’re close to God:

- in prayer
- in Bible study
- doing the good works that God would have us be doing
- fighting against sin
- resisting sin
- growing in righteousness

These elements, *if* we’re working on these things and practicing these things, we’ll stay spiritually strong.

Let’s recognize: Where does our strength come from? *It comes from God! It comes from the Lord!* We must, daily, draw on that strength, draw on the very power that God is pouring out upon us so that we can resist, fight and stay strong.

Many Psalms point out the glory of God and the things that we can look to Him for: help and encouragement.

Psalm 18:1: “I love You, O LORD my strength.... [strength comes from God] ...The LORD is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer; my God, my Rock in Whom I take refuge; He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower. I will call on the LORD, Who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies” (vs 1-3). This is a promise that God gives to us. We can appreciate that.

Verse 30: “As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD is tried....”—**proven!** It doesn’t mean like you test out cattle for whatever. ***It’s proven!*** You can see the work of God and that it’s been tested and proven.

“...He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him, for who is God besides the LORD? Or, who is a Rock except our God? The God who girds me with strength and makes my way perfect” (vs 30-32). Indeed, ***our strength and our power comes from God!***

What does the Apostle Paul tell us in Eph. 6, that we must do daily so that we can stand strong against the spiritual enemies we fight? This is a section of Scripture that you are very familiar with. Let’s read about the armor of God that we need to put on daily.

Ephesians 6:10: “Finally, my brethren, **be strong in the Lord**, and in the might of His strength.” Here again, *our strength comes from God!* Notice what Paul tells us to do:

Verse 11: “Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able ^[#1]**to stand** against the wiles of the devil.”

He does have a bag of tricks that he tries to play on us, tactics and schemes that he works against us. With the armor of God we can stand against that. We can stand strong and defeat the enemy.

Verse 12: “Because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against principalities *and* against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual *power* of wickedness in high *places*.”

This even implies, brethren, that many of the successful leaders in the world that you see today, actually have a demonic force behind them. That’s what this means around the world. How could they get to where they are if Satan, *the god of this world*, did not allow them to be in the power structure they’re in?

Verse 13: “Therefore, take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having worked out all things, ^[#2]**to stand.** ^[#3]**Stand,** therefore... [he goes through the elements of the armament] ...having your loins girded about with Truth...” (vs 13-14). The belt of Truth upon which all Truth hangs from—the belt of Truth from God, His Word.

“...and wearing the breastplate of righteousness” (v 14). Again, the idea of walking in righteousness and in Truth, which protects us.

Verse 15: “And having your feet shod with *the* preparation of the Gospel of peace. Besides all *these*, take up the shield of the faith, with which you will have the power to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and put on the helmet of salvation...” (vs 15-17)—which reminds us of the ‘mind of Christ,’ *the very power of Christ in us*, in our mind and in our heart.

“...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God... [these are the elements of the armor of God] ...praying at all times with all prayer and supplication in *the* Spirit, and in this very thing being watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (vs 17-18).

It’s clear that *we can stay strong if we stay close to God and we put on the armor of God* on a daily basis.

3. **Be growing in conversion**

To achieve the Kingdom of God, we need to be growing in conversion. What is being converted? *Our fleshly existence into a spiritual reality, if you will!*

Conversion is a process. It takes time. It’s done incrementally over time as we add on more of God’s nature to our own selves, as we continue to grow and change and overcome the sins that beset us. By using the very power of the Holy Spirit, we can be growing in conversion. What happens if you stop growing in conversion? *You begin to die!*

There is no middle ground. There is no point where you say, ‘I have achieved the level I need to be at. I can rest now. I don’t have to worry about the spiritual reality thing.’ **No!** We need to recognize that it’s a continual process that we need to continue to work at.

- Have you gotten rid of all of the elements within you that we need to get rid of?
- What about pride?
- What about arrogance?
- What about not esteeming your brothers as much as you should?
- Are you conducting yourself and living according to the laws of God in a perfect way?

I’d like to say that we all are growing in these things, but we need to keep at it. We need to ‘keep on keeping on.’

2-Peter 3:18—we need to: “...be growing in *the* grace and *the* knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....”

Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus.”

Paul and Peter are telling us that we need to be growing in conversion, which means we take on more of God’s very nature, His very character and the very mind of our Savior Jesus Christ. With the mind of Christ, that will basically lead us:

- to do the right thing
- to serve God in love
- to love one another
- to do those things that we need to do

We just set our hearts on God:

- to love Him
- to serve Him
- to love one another

To be faithfully doing that, it means we come out of this world—2-Cor. 6—and do the *good works of God*.

We do know that *faith without works is dead!* If we have the faith and the love of God in us,

that should be reflected in the fact that we're doing *good works for God and for one another*. You can see how that comes together.

We need to serve God and do *His* will, not our will because our selfish will says, 'I want this. I want that,' but that might not be what God would have for us. You need to seek God's will.

Romans 12:1: "I exhort you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy and well pleasing to God**, which is your spiritual service."

There are many, many sermons in this Scripture. What I'm just saying is that we need to recognize that this is part of the conversion process—that we "...present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy *and* well pleasing to God..."

Verse 2: "Do not conform yourselves to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**... [take on the 'mind of Christ] ...in order that you may prove what *is* well pleasing and good, and the perfect will of God."

What did Christ say in terms of why He came to this earth? *To do the will of the Father!* That's what we need to fix in our minds, to do God's will. We need to be walking in the Light of God's Truth. Walking in the Light, because Christ is the Life.

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life...'"

Also, we need to be in this conversion process. Because we're walking in Light and following the plans of God, we need to be producing the very fruits of God's Holy Spirit. There lies the proof of our conversion, the fruits of God's Spirit.

Gal. 5—we see the fruits of the Holy Spirit listed out. It clearly indicates that this is what we need to be producing in our lives. Before that, Paul talked about the fruits of the flesh, but I'm going to jump over that to go to the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering... [forbearance] ...kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **But those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh**..." (vs 22-24). This is the key—as we approach Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread—that we need to recognize: We need to crucify the flesh, the desires and lust of the flesh and nail them to the cross and walk in righteousness

"...with its passions and lusts. If we live by *the* Spirit, we should also be walking by *the* Spirit" (vs 24-25).

We're not to be hypocritical. If we do confess that we are 'walking in the Light' and that we are truly God's people, then we need to be 'walking in the Spirit.' This is not always easy sometimes because we are beset with so many things in this world.

Peter shows us how we can make our 'calling and election sure.' It focuses, really, on what conversion is all about. These are key Scriptures to keep in mind as we work toward the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

2-Peter 1:4: "Through which He has given to us the greatest and *most* precious promises, that through these you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in *the* world through lust."

We've gone through some Scriptures already to show how we can do that and how we can escape from the corruption that is in the world and take on a Divine nature. We can grow in the Divine nature.

Verse 5: "And for this very reason also, having applied all diligence... [*focused attention*] ...besides, add to your faith... [as a foundation] ...virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance..." (vs 5-6)—patience.

You can see how this almost lines up a lot with what the 'fruits of the Spirit' are. You can see how it does compare quite well.

"...and to endurance, Godliness; and to Godliness, brotherly love; and to brotherly love, the love of *God*" (vs 6-7). You can see where we are building like a structure. At the top of this is love, the love of God. Love toward God and love toward one another.

Verse 8: "For *if* these things exist... [if they truly are in you] ...and abound in you... [growing in an unlimited way] ...they *will* cause *you to be* neither lacking effort... [meaning effort; you're putting in the effort] ...nor lacking fruit in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.... [the fruits of God's Spirit] ...But the one in whom these things are not present is *spiritually* blind—so short-sighted *that* he has forgotten that he was purified from his old sins" (vs 8-9).

That means that the old sins are surely still there, has not expunged the sins from his life.

Verse 10: "**For this reason, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure**; because *if* you are doing these things, you will never fall at any time. For in this way, you will be richly granted an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (vs

10-11). What a powerful Scripture to read and begin to appreciate.

We don't have to be in doubt, brethren. We can prove and we can establish, 'Are we going to reach the Kingdom of God?' If we continue to do this, Peter says that 'your entrance into the Kingdom is assured.'

I love that God has put that in there. To me, it gives me a lot of encouragement. I hope it does for you as well.

4. Always trust and have confidence in God

These aspects of trust and confidence, is really an extension of our faith and belief in God. So, from an extension of our faith, should come trust and confidence.

Let's see what the Psalmist says in Psa. 9, regarding trusting God; Psalm 9:9: "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And **those who know Your name...**" (vs 9-10). Again, we're coming back to knowing God:

- knowing God
- knowing His name
- knowing His awesome power
- knowing Who He is

The world doesn't know God. It says here, *because you who know God*:

Verse 10: "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You." Where can we read that?

Hebrews 13:5—God will: "...In no way will I ever leave you; no—I will never forsake you in any way."

God is always there for us, even in our deepest trials and difficulties, even when we face death, the first trials that are so overbearing, God is there to watch over and to help us.

Psa. 91 is a tremendous Psalm I talk to many brethren. They read this quite frequently because it gives them a great deal of help and encouragement as they face this world and all the evil that's out there, the dangers and the troubles.

I'm not going to read the whole Psalm You can read this totally in your leisure. Looking at trusting God and believing in Him, that He's there for you:

Psalm 91:1: "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

This is going back to staying close to God and staying strong. If you're in the shadow of the Almighty, you're standing right next to God. That's what this is implying—standing next to God in the spirit.

Verse 2: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Whom I will trust.'"

Verse 9: "Because you have made the LORD, Who is my refuge, even the Most High, your habitation, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling" (vs 9-10). God will protect us from the evils in the world. We know that from experience.

Here we are. We're walking through a credibly, dangerous, evil world, and God is protecting us. I think we know it. Our prayers are answered and we can know that to be true.

Verse 14: "Because he... [the individual] ...has set his love upon Me... [God/the Lord] ...therefore, I will deliver him; I will set him on high because he has known My name." Again, we're talking about *knowing God*. What a tremendous thing it is *to know God!*

Verse 15: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (vs 15-16). What an incredible Psalm this is, brethren:

- God will provide
- He will protect
- He will bring us through the troubled days that lie ahead

So many things we could add to this particular section.

Rom. 8 is speaking about trusting and having confidence in God. Paul writes, Romans 8:31: "What then shall we say to these things?... [read the beginning of Rom. 8] ...**If God is for us, who can be against us?**"

That's an emphatic statement that we can truly appreciate. God is for us and He's for us because why? *Because we are for Him!* Because we are for Him, God is for us. Who can be against us?

Verse 32: "He Who did not spare even His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not also grant us all things together with Him?"

Verse 37: "But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us." He loved us before we even loved Him. He loved us from the beginning.

Verse 38: “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vs 38-39).

I find these Scriptures very inspiring and very, very helpful. When times are difficult we can look to God and trust in Him for all things.

5. **Be courageous, have courage**

This is an attribute that we need to have because without courage, a person can become anxious and fearful, and that’s not what God wants. He wants us to stand strong—Eph. 6—against the enemy, not to be afraid. God will help us against the enemy. We know that. We know that to be true. We can read a Scripture that will help us to appreciate that we’re not alone:

1-John 4:4: “You are of God, little children...” He has called us, He has given us His Spirit, and we are His children.

“...and have overcome them... [the enemy] ...because greater is He Who *is* in you than the one who *is* in the world” (v 4).

It could be referring to Satan, but it also could be referring to the elements in the world. In other words, because God is in us, we do not have to have fear or anxiety, or be stressed out that somehow, some way, we can stand.

Proverbs 28:1: “The wicked flee when no man pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The lion is the ‘king of jungle.’ He is the top predator in some cases. So again, there is no fear in a lion because they’re the top of the predator line.

We’re living in perilous times, as we have read. We know that we need courage. We need to stand strong in the forces that are coming.

I like the example back in Joshua. Can you imagine what Joshua felt at the death of Moses? He was given the responsibility to lead the children of Israel—over three million men, women and children—into the ‘promised land.’ When he was given that responsibility, don’t you think he had:

- a little bit of anxiety?
- a little bit of concern about doing this?

About having the courage! What did God do? *God spoke to him directly and told him to have courage!*

Joshua 1:4—talking about the time: “From the wilderness and this Lebanon even to the great river, the River Euphrates...”

Verse 5: “No man shall be able to stand before you [Joshua] all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, *so* I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you. **Be strong and of good courage**, for you shall divide for an inheritance to this people the land, which I swore to their fathers to give it to them” (vs 5-6).

Verse 8: This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night, so that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it, for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, neither be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you in all places where you go**” (vs 8-9).

This must have been tremendously encouraging to Joshua to know that *he could stand strong because the Lord was with him!*

6. **Be zealous for God and His Kingdom**

Zeal is an interesting word. It means *to be passionate*. That’s what that word zeal means, *passionate*. That might be a better word that people would use today:

- to be eager in your pursuit for the Kingdom
- to be excited
- to be filled with enthusiasm
- not to hold back and say ‘ho hum’
- but to have zeal

Paul admonished Timothy to ‘stir up the Holy Spirit. If you have a fire that’s going out and there’s still some coals in there, if you can get a stick and stir up the coals and let the oxygen get in there, what happens? *The coals come brightly red!* They just flare out, they become intense and the heat just comes from it. That’s the idea of it. We stir up the Holy Spirit so that we can be intense, that we can be ‘red hot.’

2-Timothy 1:6: “For this reason, I admonish you to stir up the gift of God that is in you by the laying on of my hands.” Be zealous, Paul was telling Timothy. Be full of zeal.

Verse 7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear... [we don’t need to be fearful] ...but of power, and of love, and of sound-mindedness.” Which again, deals with self-control.

These are powerful things, but you have to be ‘stirred up.’ A lot of times we get tired and physically beat down. Sometimes we get up and say, ‘Ah! I just want to stay in bed all day.’ You feel that way. We need to take into account our attitude on a day-to-day basis. We need to not let this world, or our present difficult situation, bring us to

complacency; in other words, bring us into a 'lukewarmness,' which the Laodiceans are well known to be lukewarm.

This is something that we want to avoid. Even though this is the seventh year of God's Church, which is a characteristic in any of the churches down through time, but also it could be reflective of a major problem for the Churches of God today. Why? *We have everything, all the physical blessings that we could ask for, at least the large proportion of us do!* We're not going hungry. We basically have anything that we want, that we can buy.

What about the Laodiceans? *They were lukewarm!* They started taking God for granted. They were not zealous. Clearly, not zealous.

Revelation 3:15: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would *that* you be *either* cold or hot.... [lukewarm] ...So then, because you are lukewarm, and *are* neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'... [that wasn't true] ...and you do not understand that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (vs 15-17).

That's quite a list of discrepancies. They lacked righteousness. They lacked zeal. They weren't going to God for the things that they needed to do. They were 'laid back.' Jesus said:

Verse 18: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold purified by fire... [through trial, character can be built] ...so that you may be rich..." Maybe not rich in physical goods, ***but rich in the Spiritual character of God!***

"...and white garments... [which represents the righteousness of the saints] ...so that you may be clothed, and the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and to anoint your eyes with eye salve, so that you may see" (v 18). They were blinded. They couldn't see their own sins, their own situation. They needed to go to God and repent.

Verse 19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. ***Therefore, be zealous and repent.***" That goes down to us, brethren. We need to be zealous and seek God in a very fervent way on a regular basis, be steadfast and motivated. Always do your best and utmost to serve God and one another.

7. **Always endure and be faithful to the end**

This is a Scripture that we all know very well, Matthew 24:13: "But the one who **endures to the end**, that one shall be saved."

What do we mean by endurance? I think we understand what endure means: *Never quit! Never give up! Never say 'I'm done!'*

Always remain faithful in your quest for the Kingdom of God. It may be that we have to bear difficulties, trials and all of the difficult things that we go through, but we need to remain firm and steadfast in our search for the Kingdom of God on our journey to the Kingdom.

We must be willing to suffer for our beliefs and for our faith. Persecution will come for those:

- who believe in Jesus Christ
- who believe in His Word
- who believe in salvation through Him

What does Peter tell us about enduring persecution?

1-Peter 2:19: "Because this *is* acceptable: if, for *the* sake of conscience toward God, anyone endures sorrows, suffering unjustly.... [it's acceptable] ...For what commendation *is there* if, disobeying and being beaten, you endure it? ***But if while doing good you endure suffering, this is acceptable with God; for to this you were called...***" (vs 19-21).

We were called to endure suffering, as Christ endured suffering. In some cases we think that, like the Laodiceans, that things go very, very well and you don't have any suffering. It doesn't work for our good. What does suffering do? *Suffering helps us:*

- to appreciate
- to love others
- to reach out to them
- to recognize that through suffering we can develop character

Verse 21: "For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.**"

As God's people, we can build character from the suffering that we endure. That's why suffering is an important component of enduring. From trials and hardship we are able to build the character of God. From the character of God, we're able to build hope.

Romans 5:3: "And not only *this*, but we also boast in tribulations..." Boast can also be translated to rejoice or to have joy in. It's difficult to do, brethren, but that's what Paul's saying, 'We are to rejoice in our tribulations.' Why?

"...realizing that tribulation brings forth endurance" (v 3). Which is patience or being able to 'hang in there' when things are tough.

Verse 4: “And endurance *brings forth* character... [you can see this building process] ...and character *brings forth* hope. And the hope of *God* never makes us ashamed because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us” (vs 4-5).

We can see how endurance is an important quality that we must have. Sometimes we must suffer because of our beliefs and our faith in Christ.

Paul praised the Thessalonians for their endurance during persecution and trials; 2-Thessalonians 1:3: “We are duty-bound to thank God always for you, brethren, even as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing abundantly, and the love of each one of you is abounding toward one another.” That’s a very important Scripture. We need to be embracing that Scripture.

Verse 4: “So that we ourselves are boasting about you in the Churches of God because of your endurance and faith in all your persecutions, and in the tribulations that you are bearing. ***Your faith and endurance are a visible testimony of the righteous judgment of God, so that you may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you are suffering***” (vs 4-5).

Brethren, we can conclude by saying that reaching the Kingdom of God is something I know that is deep in the hearts of all of us. I know that I’m not bringing you this message to imply that you’re not. The thing is that with all that’s going on in the world, we need to just grab hold of reaching the Kingdom of God with all of our heart, mind and soul.

In conclusion, as we pursue the Kingdom of God, ***we need to make achieving the Kingdom our primary goal in life***, obviously. We need to stay spiritually strong and stay close to God in prayer and study. By that, God pours out His Spirit upon us and gives us the strength that we need to be growing in conversion. That’s a process that’s on-going. God is with us and He will continue to shape His very Son in us.

Always trust and have confidence in God!

No matter what, He is always there. He loves you. He loves *all* of you. He loves me. He basically is there for us. We can have confidence that He will bring us through any trial.

Have courage! Do not stand in fear before the enemy or circumstances. Stand strong! Be encouraged! Be courageous!

Have zeal for God! That is, be really ‘hot and on fire’ for God. Be passionate! Be zealous!

Finally, number seven: ***Endure to the end! It doesn’t matter how you start, it’s how you end! It’s how you end!***

By doing and practicing these things they will help you to ‘keep on keeping on,’ ***so you can truly pursue, make it, and stay the course to the Kingdom of God!***

Let us rejoice in God’s Word and the salvation that He brings to us through Jesus Christ, as we look forward to spending eternity with Jesus Christ and God the Father!

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 22:14
- 2) 1-Corinthians 1:26-29
- 3) Jeremiah 9:23-24
- 4) Matthew 6:31-33
- 5) Colossians 3:1-4
- 6) Philippians 2:12
- 7) 2-Corinthians 6:16-18
- 8) 2-Corinthians 7:1
- 9) Psalm 18:1-3, 30-32
- 10) Ephesians 6:10-18
- 11) 2-Peter 3:18
- 12) Philippians 2:5
- 13) Romans 12:1-2
- 14) John 14:6
- 15) Galatians 5:22-25
- 16) 2-Peter 1:4-11
- 17) Psalm 9:9-10
- 18) Hebrews 13:5
- 19) Psalm 91:1-2, 9-10, 14-16
- 20) Romans 8:31-32, 37-39
- 21) 1-John 4:4
- 22) Proverbs 28:1
- 23) Joshua 1:4-6, 8-9
- 24) 2-Timothy 1:6-7
- 25) Revelation 3:15-19
- 26) Matthew 24:13
- 27) 1-Peter 2:19-21
- 28) Romans 5:3-5
- 29) 2-Thessalonians 1:3-5

Scriptures referenced, not quoted: 2-Timothy 3

RK: nfs
Transcribed: 03-27-18
Proofed: bo—3/30/18