

## A Season of Heaviness

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Recently the Church of God, an International Community has been asked to consider Mr. Hulme's leadership. Voices within the Church – and notably among the ministry – have expressed fear that Mr. Hulme has adopted an autocratic style of governance in the Church. He has now responded by giving two sermons and penning two letters to the Church's membership, but still some claim that the issues raised are not being addressed.

One of the major concerns is that of governance. Here the accusation of "autocratic" implies that Mr. Hulme isolates himself in an ivory tower and from this retreat, arbitrarily renders decisions.

For some the accusation suggests that he is either unapproachable or that the ministry has no access to him. However, even a quick glance at some of the correspondence circulating reveals that the authors reference advice given and appeals made by several on numerous occasions.

Is Mr. Hulme isolated and unapproachable, or does he receive advice and appeals regularly?

My personal experience in communicating with Mr. Hulme would involve monthly pastor telephone conferences. I often have occasion to e-mail him with a question or concern prior to that conference, asking him if he thinks it is worth bringing up for discussion among the ministers who attend that monthly pastors teleconference.

Certainly, I have personal telephone contact as needed. I am able to pick up the telephone and reach Mr. Hulme when I need his time and attention, plus e-mail correspondence and ministerial conferences every couple of years.

Let me describe two components of our most recent ministerial conference. About a month prior to the conference, Mr. Hulme offered personal appointments to the field pastors in Pasadena. His e-mail says, "While at the conference I thought as a pastor you might want to chat with me about any concerns you have on a one-on-one basis. I will be very happy to set some time aside for this. Please let me know so that I can make out a schedule. Safe travels. David."

During the ministerial conference itself, we had breakout sessions. Mr. Hulme introduced certain topics and asked the ministers to gather in groups and discuss them and then appoint one individual in each group to give a report to the overall attendees.

One of the subjects had to do with going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; we sat and discussed it. A reporter from the group came forward and made some comments. There were six of us, as I recall, in six groups or so. Mr. Hulme, at the end of the session, got up to the front and said, "I have learned some things here today," and thanked us for our input.

One of the other topics that we discussed was serving difficult people. Is it them or me? That's the question. Sometimes ministers and members find it difficult to communicate with each other. The relationship can become strained and result in one or both being aloof and cool toward the other. Suspicions or disapproval arise between the parties involved. Frustration festers. The pastor, of course, possesses the ultimate weapon, excommunication. "I have had it with you. Out you go." The member can preempt that by simply leaving the Church. "I have had it with you. Out I go." The result is the same. How can ministers learn to minimize the likelihood of these impasses? What steps can be taken by members and ministers to resolve conflicts before they reach the point of no return? Can a minister consult with a colleague? Perhaps someone who serves as a sort of "ministers minister?" Can a member appeal a pastor's decision when he perceives it is unfair and/or harsh?

That was put before us as a concern. We sat together, and we talked. Each group had a reporter come to the fore and relate the findings of the individual ministerial group.

Between monthly pastor telephone conferences, personal telephone interaction, e-mail correspondence, ministerial conferences, opportunities for one-on-one communication and meeting with Mr. Hulme during the conference, and input sought by the ministry in breakout sessions at the conference, it is very difficult, brethren, for me to conclude that Mr. Hulme is not accessible to the ministry or unapproachable or unwilling to receive input.

Let's go to James 3:17

**17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.**

The trait that I'd like to focus on for a moment is "easy to be entreated." Some translations render this "willing to yield" or "open to reason." "Approachable" might be another way of viewing this.

I have found Mr. Hulme to be open to reason. This is, again, my personal experience. I find it difficult to view him as an authoritarian dictator or an unreasonable bully.

May I ask what your personal experience has been? Yes, you – you as an individual. Have you had access to him? Was he approachable? Have you had occasion to call him? Have you spoken to him at a Feast? Met him on a Church visit or a special weekend event that he may have attended in your region? Did he "blow you off" because he didn't have time for the little people, or did he listen to you?

Your personal experience is yours. I don't ask that you accept mine. I only provide it for you for consideration. Don't take my word for it, but don't take someone else's either.

"But Mr. Fitzpatrick there are a lot - *many* who say he doesn't listen to anyone." The expressions "a lot" and "many," I find unsatisfying and unconvincing.

If you said to me, “Mr. Fitzpatrick, one third of the angels agree with Lucifer. There must be something to it. One out of three think he’s got a point.” What should I do? Should I conclude, “Wow, you are making me think here. Maybe I need to reconsider that.”

“Don’t tell me one third of the angels are ALL wrong. Come on!”

“Where there is smoke there is fire.”

In Numbers 13, (I won’t take a lot of time here because Mr. Hulme referenced it in his message last week), we have the incident of the spies going into the land. These are leading men. We know that ten of the twelve return and agree that we would be crazy to go in there. Only two say, “Let’s go forward, let’s trust God, let’s rely on God to follow through on His promise and to take care of us.”

We find in Numbers 14:10 that the will of the people was informed by the ten, and the people got angry and wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb.

Let’s go to 1 Samuel 8:1:

**1 And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.**

And we find that these sons were not the best example in verse 3:

**3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.**

**4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,**

It says *all* the elders, *every one* of them. All of them came and they said, “Samuel, we’ve got a problem. We are not inclined to allow your sons to rule over us. You’re an old man. Your days are numbered. Your sons are not suitable replacements. Now, make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

If you use the words “a lot” or “many”, in this case, we can use the word “all.” Everyone felt that way and thought that way. The leaders of Israel gathered themselves together and they spoke with one accord, with one voice. “We don’t want your sons ruling over us. We want a king like the other nations.”

**6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Eternal.**

**7 And the Eternal said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**

**8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto you.**

In Genesis 3, we find that the adversary of God is successful in implying or suggesting to humanity that God was withholding good from them. There were only two at the time, so we could say as a result of the influence of Satan the devil, 100% of humanity agreed that God was withholding good from them. And they had an “inside source” to validate their position that God was only telling them part of the story.

I find it unsatisfying and unconvincing when I hear “a lot” or “many” feel this way. I don’t offer these thoughts to cast aspersions on anyone. I really don’t. I offer them as reasons to reflect. While fielding accusations about another being unreasonable and unwilling to listen, shouldn’t I also ask myself the same question? Am *I* easily entreated, willing to consider and open to reason? Could it be me? Could I be wrong?

I would have preferred to have talked today about joyous things, but there is the proverbial “elephant in the room.” My comments here today are intended to address what I think is on your mind: concerns as to what is happening and where are we going.

Hurt and anger resemble one another. Sometimes people get hurt because of a personal experience, or an offense. It could be a misunderstanding, or it could be more than that. But often when people are hurt they might appear to be angry. It is not always easy to distinguish between the two.

Are we currently dealing with a crisis that is the result of personal angst, hurt, or anger that is seeking validation?

If you were seated here at services today, and I opened the door to the congregation’s hall and yelled, “Fire!” can I use the panic that ensues as evidence of chaos that I predicted? When people scurry around nervously with a lot of energy being expended, emotionally supercharged, wondering what is happening, can I then turn to the person next to me and say, “See? Look at this state of affairs. Look at the mess we are in.”

People are confused, unhappy, some leaving, withholding support of various types, financial and other. Why? Some of my colleagues say that they are just trying to get government right.

I do not judge them, but I wonder about what is happening. I don’t doubt that there are those who are sincere, but I am concerned that there are others who are absorbing the angst. That it was not theirs, but they have now received it and are absorbing it and being told – or invited, if you will – to be upset and angry when it was not there initially.

There is the *fear* that Mr. Hulme has retreated into an autocratic style of government. I think the word “fear” is important. I believe the ministry has access to Mr. Hulme and can offer advice and appeal decisions as they like. He is approachable.

But acceptance of advice is not quite the same thing. Access, offering advice, making an appeal is part of being reasonable, but the acceptance of advice is another matter all together.

You might be surprised to know that I have said “no” to people in my role as a minister. I remember standing at a lectern on Long Island and a woman came up to me after services and said, “I would like you to baptize me.”

I said, “Well, hello! I’d like to...who are you?”

She proceeded to tell me that she had worked last night, Friday night, but was able to get to services today and wanted to be baptized.

I said, “Well, we need to talk. I would like to talk to you and explain a little bit of what baptism is all about.”

She was very upset with me because I wouldn’t baptize her. The fact that she had worked on the Sabbath was a cause of concern for me. I thought she was asking something of me that either she didn’t understand or that it wasn’t clear to her what God would expect of her if she entered into that covenant.

So I said, “Listen, I think we ought to talk. I would like to do that. I am thrilled that you are interested in baptism, but no I’m not going to baptize you today.”

She was very upset with me and very offended. Who did I think I was to deny her baptism?

I understand her reaction. I really do. It was a reaction that came from her understanding at that point in time. She thought I was a servant of God. She wanted something from a minister of Jesus Christ, and he said no.

I have asked people to stop attending services. I’ve said, “No, you cannot attend here.”

“But I know some of the people here, and I like them and they like me.”

“Well, that’s fine, but you have your own personal ministry, sir. You have your e-mail newsletter. You have your little group that gets together in your home. You are operating an independent ministry. You cannot do that here. It is not my responsibility to give you an audience, a congregation to influence and to work with in order to promote your efforts.”

“Yeah, but I know these people from years ago and I like coming to see them.”

“Well, don’t expect me to provide a congregation for you.”

I have said no when people have asked to be married. I have said no when people have asked to be anointed. Not that they asked me directly, but somebody asked me for somebody who was related to somebody, whose next-door neighbor wanted to be anointed. I said, “Well, does the person know what anointing is?”

“Well, no, but they want people to pray for them and churches to be thinking about them. They want their name announced.”

“To consider anointing that person, I would like to talk to that person so they understand what they are asking of me and that I can explain to them why this is meaningful.”

Some people just want the people in a church to pray for them. They do that over the lunch table, e-mails, etc. These things, like attending services or being baptized or getting married, asking God to bless a marriage and being anointed are very significant and meaningful to us.

If you would say of me, “How dare you say no to someone,” I would say to you, “I can’t do this job. I cannot be a minister of Jesus Christ and not have the capacity or ability to say no.”

Now, “no” is not necessarily the final answer, but we need to talk about what you are asking of me. We need to sit down. For years and years, it has been the practice of the ministry to sit on people’s couches and eat and drink and answer questions and express an interest in why it is that people are wanting to know more about the Church, what we teach and what we practice.

I had another lady who wanted to be baptized. I said, “I’ll come out. We will talk, and we’ll visit.”

She said, “Don’t worry about it; I baptized myself last night in the shower.” So, I canceled it right then and there.

“Do you want me to talk to you about baptism?”

“No, I took care of it. You seemed hesitant to do it, so I just took care of it myself.”

These things happen. Sometimes explanations are required. Sometimes people need further input in going forward.

Let’s take a look at Matthew 3:1

- 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,**
- 2 And saying, Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**
- 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.**
- 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.**
- 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,**
- 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.**
- 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**
- 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet [or suitable or demonstrating] for repentance:**

Where does John the Baptist get the nerve to tell these religious leaders that he won't baptize them? He explains. He says that he requires of them fruits that demonstrate repentance.

Reasonable? Unreasonable? Easily entreated? Willing to yield? One man telling the Pharisees and Sadducees (we don't know, but it says *many* of the Pharisees and Sadducees)—one man, saying, “No, not now. I would like to see some change. I'd like to see some fruits that demonstrate repentance.”

I won't take time to turn there, but Acts 8 is an interesting example where Peter tells Simon Magus, “No! You have no part in this.”

Simon says, “But I want part of it. I want to be in this. I want the power of the Holy Spirit.” He was a sorcerer. He was very effective with his magic arts, with the people. He saw the power of the Holy Spirit and said, “Boy, I add that to my arsenal, I'm in great shape for years to come.” And Peter said no.

Some of my colleagues in the ministry have wanted to have individuals disciplined, and urged Mr. Hulme to do something, to deal with the situation. His failure to act on their advice and timetable makes him an autocrat, unwilling to receive counsel. Recently, when it became necessary for him to act, to discipline, it proved he was an autocrat. So when he *didn't* discipline he was an autocrat, and when he *does* discipline he is an autocrat.

What would represent enough multitude of counsel to satisfy the standard of mutual submission? Who would decide? What level of compromise is necessary to be compliant with the concept of mutual submission?

In recent weeks, as this concept has been discussed by the ministry—a variety of individuals in the ministry—I certainly have come to see that mutual submission is a biblical concept. It is mutual consideration, mutual care, and respect of mutual needs. It is love in action. But trying to force it to be a new approach to government is going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is not a new form of government.

Did God place David Hulme in his role in the Church, or did you? The answer to that question is very important, because once you decide that, it will lead you in a direction. Now before you decide that, I would like to ask you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12:18:

**18 But now has God set the members every one of them in the body, as it pleases him.**

Verse 28 elaborates on that:

**28 And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, teachers, [etc.].**

So in response to my question, “Did God place David Hulme in his role in the Church, or did you?” I ask you to take the verses I pointed out in 1 Corinthians 12 into consideration as you consider how you would answer. Because if you (or we, collectively) put him in that job, in that role in the Church, then I suspect you and I can lobby to remove him. But if God put him in that role and that responsibility, then shouldn’t we be very careful about claims to discredit him? If he is accountable to you, then fire him. But if he is the servant of God, please stop and think.

What do you and I know about the threshold for challenging one whom God has placed in a position? Let’s go to 1 Samuel 24:1:

- 1 And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David *is* in the wilderness of Engedi.**
- 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.**
- 3 And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where *was* a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.**
- 4 And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto you, Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.**
- 5 And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.**

Now David’s men are saying, “This is the opportunity. This is the answer to prayer. This man is out to kill you. He is determined to get you. This is an answer to our prayers. He is yours for the picking.”

- 1 Samuel 24:5 And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.**
- 6 And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he *is* the anointed of the LORD.**

The question that we brought to this section of Scripture was, “What do we know about the threshold for challenging one whom God has positioned?” David’s example here is that a man whom God had anointed, even though the man was working as an adversary against him, and the other men around him even perceived it that way—David said, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.”

- 7 So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on *his* way.**
- 8 David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.**
- 9 And David said to Saul, Wherefore hear your men's words, saying, Behold, David seeks my hurt?**



**1 Samuel 24:10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered you to day into mine hand in the cave: and *some* bade *me* to kill you; but *mine eye* spared you; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he *is* the LORD'S anointed.**

From day one, my recollection (and others can speak to this as well) is that Mr. Hulme has resisted the titles of Apostle and Pastor General, even though there were those who wanted him to assume those titles.

He has held back from using the expression, “This is the one true Church.” I know people who don’t attend this Church because of Mr. Hulme’s refusal to refer to the Church of God, an International Community, as the one and only true Church. We have always understood and allowed for the fact that God could be working with people elsewhere. That is for God to declare, not for us.

Our track record is not one of constant criticism of others. We would rather be about our Father’s business. We have not spent time and effort and energy and resources in undermining or criticizing others. We have not.

Let’s turn to Exodus 17:8 (King James Version).

**Exodus 17:8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.**

**9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out and fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.**

**10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.**

**11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.**

**12 But Moses' hands *were* heavy; and they [meaning Aaron and Hur] took a stone, and put *it* under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.**

**13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.**

The victory that God gave was interesting in a lot of different aspects. Let’s look at some of the components that had to come together for this victory to be the case.

In verse 9, Moses comes to Joshua, and he says we have to go out and meet the challenge of Amalekites; that this is God’s doing. “I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.” This directive that comes from Moses (who carries the rod of God in his hand), begins to be implemented in verse 10. “Joshua did as Moses had said to him.” I guess he could have said, “Who came up with this crazy scheme?”

But he did as Moses said to him, and he fought with Amalek. And Moses and Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

“Sure, *we* have to go out to fight and where are you guys going?” “Well, we are going to be on the top of the hill.”

“And it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed.” It would appear that Joshua had to do his part. The men chosen in verse 9 had to go out and do their part. Moses had to do his part. And when they did, God blessed it.

But when his arms got heavy and he started to let them down, it was very clear that the Amalekites began to prevail. So Aaron and Hur provide a seat for Moses, and they take the responsibility of stepping up and lifting up his arms, one on one side and one on the other.

Now, not only does Joshua have to do his part, and the men that were chosen have to theirs, Moses has to do his, but now Aaron and Hur have to play an active role in it as well. Everyone has to do something here to help, to be supportive.

Again, glance if you would, at the latter part of verse 11: “. . . and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” Wasn’t that sufficient evidence to conclude that this is a failed experiment, this is not working? “Nice try, Moses. It was a good idea but it’s not working. It’s obvious it’s not working. Look, you are only a man you can only do so much,” as his arms began to sink.

It would have been understandable if Joshua had called a retreat. It would have even made sense if Aaron and Hur said, “This was kind of a dopey idea in the first place, wasn’t it? What made you think we should do this? We fear that God is not in this. That God is not blessing this.”

So, which one of these individuals would you cast yourself in as your role in this particular scene? Are you Joshua? Are you one of the chosen men out there meeting the challenge of the Amalekites? Moses, Aaron or Hur? Which one would be correct in saying, “This ain’t working. I’m out of here.”?

Because when “Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the one on the other, his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.” God blessed their efforts.

You and I, brethren, have been called into the work of the living God. When do we throw up our hands and say, “Enough is enough – this ain’t working.”

Our leaders need to be easily entreated. They need to be open to questions and concerns because questions and concerns are going to be a part of our walk with God. There is just no way around it.

Ministers will disagree. Some of those disagreements will be sincere and genuine efforts to try to understand how we could do things better. I think we should be prepared for that. I think we have experienced that and will continue to experience that. Questions and concerns are normal and right.

But it is a mistake to walk away. It is a mistake to declare that something is a failed experiment and that God is not a part of it. I think it would have been easy to do in this circumstance here—very easy to do—but it would have been sadly mistaken.

Let's go over to 1 Peter. We are walking through a season of heaviness and recently in Bible Study we have been talking about that, because the epistles of Peter offer guidance to people who are walking through times of trial and difficulty. Here in 1 Peter 1:2, Peter notes that he is writing to the:

**2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.**

**3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**

**4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, an inheritance reserved in heaven for you,**

**5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

I mentioned early on that the word “fear” comes up in these discussions at this point in time. We are afraid that Mr. Hulme is retreating into this style. Or we are afraid that we are going in the wrong direction. We are afraid that this is not working. The antidote for fear is faith, brethren. It always has been, and it always will be. Concerns and questions are understandable. Fear has to be met by faith.

From the early days when we came together 15 years ago, there was reason to be fearful. If you look around at our membership, we are an aging population. We are small, we are scattered, and we are aging. That is a recipe for dying out, isn't it?

Where will the new people come from, and where will the new resources, the financial resources, come from? When we first came together, you had every reason to be afraid. You should have been afraid—humanly speaking—because you couldn't do the math and make sense of it.

We should not work. We really shouldn't. We have very limited manpower. We have limited finances. We have small and scattered congregations. On paper, we shouldn't work. The Church of God, an International Community, should then be a failed experiment. It should not operate. But we have gone forward for 15 years and need to continue to go forward on faith. Because if you look at the material side of things—the human resources, the money, the people to write, the people to do the various jobs that are needed—where are they going to come from?

Well, the answer to that has been and always will be that God must provide. God must provide. You and I should be holding up the arms of those whom God has positioned, so that the Church of God, an International Community, prevails; that it goes forward in its work and accomplishes.

To withdraw support, does that make sense? “Well, I'm afraid. I'm afraid that we are not going to have enough money. I'm afraid that *Vision* is not preaching the gospel. I'm afraid that we made a wrong turn. I'm afraid our leadership isn't concerned about the people.”

Brethren, we are here because of God, and the antidote for fear is faith.

**1 Peter 1:5 You are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

**6 Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness in manifold temptations:**

I would say that you and I are going through—for a season—a time of heaviness. This is not pleasant. This is not easy. We hurt, and we hurt for those who seem upset, concerned, anxious, distraught. This is a season for us to walk through.

Why does God allow seasons of this type?

**7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:**

Seasons of heaviness are intended by God to produce a faith-filled character, tried by fire that is “found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Let’s turn to 1 Peter 2:19:

**19 For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endures grief, suffering wrongfully.**

**20 For what glory *is it*, if, when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, you take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God.**

I can’t imagine that anyone in this room, or hearing my voice, would claim that they have not suffered as a result of their own faults. Some of the tension that currently exists in the Church is the result of mistakes that have been made. I have talked to some of the parties involved. Some wish they had done things differently under the circumstances.

We know what it is like to make mistakes. We know what it is like to receive the consequences of those mistakes.

Do we know about patience and forbearance and longsuffering and endurance? Because that is a part of what is revealed to us here as acceptable with God. Have we forgotten how to disagree but be willing to forgive?

As I said, sometimes hurt expresses itself as anger and sometimes anger is just plain old anger. It is not always easy to make the distinction.

**1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps:**

**22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:**

When you are walking through season of heaviness, it is not a time for irresponsible chatter and hostile, angry remarks. Ideally, parties who disagree can recognize the importance of a willingness to forgive.

But quite frankly, even if they can no longer walk together at this time, can the words be kind? Can sobriety and sadness and disappointment be demonstrated in a loving and considerate way so that there are no remembrances of hostile exchanges that hinder any form of reconciliation or resolution in the future? Does my angst need validation, or can I show a kind and forgiving spirit?

It says of Christ that He:

**1 Peter 2:22 . . . did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:**

**23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judges righteously:**

**24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed.**

**1 Peter 3:8 Finally, *be you* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be* pitiful and courteous:**

**9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing:**

Sadly, in a season of heaviness sometimes irresponsible chatter is disseminated, and its hurt is widespread. It's completely unnecessary, if we practice these principles.

**9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.**

**10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:**

**11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.**

Are seasons of heaviness strange and times that should shock us?

**1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:**

**13 But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.**

**14 If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are you*; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.**

Peter seems to be emphasizing that people who are going to navigate seasons of heaviness need to take the high road. They need to eschew evil. They need to seek peace. They need to be prepared that they should go forward in the name of Christ, and if they are reproached for it, recognize what is happening.

**15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or a meddler in other men's matters.**

**16 Yet if *any man* suffer as a Christian, . . .**

You can apply that to whatever personality or story that you have heard. Again, my role here is not to cast aspersions, not to criticize, not to belittle, not to put any particular parties in a bad light. But I do think there are biblical principles here that you and I need to lock on to. If we are going to be

given information and be told, “What about this or what about that, what’s going on over here?” can we receive those things and review them in light of the word of God – the principles that pertain to eternal life?

**16 Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.**

**17 For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: . . .**

Now, sadly, the challenges that you and I face are becoming increasingly complicated, complex. People are offering alternatives. “Come here. Look into this. Listen to me. I have got some ideas. Talk to these people.”

I see some problems with that. I really do. It is causing dissention and division.

Brethren, what is your understanding about the biblical teaching of disfellowshipping? Do you believe it? Do you recognize it as a teaching of the Bible? What is its purpose? My understanding of the purpose of someone being disfellowshipped is that that person then has this experience of being isolated. They need personal time, one-on-one with God. They need to know what it is like to be separated from the body, so that they can think about this.

If you and I rally around them, if you and I come to their aid, will they ever have that experience of being able to think in the setting of “I need to be alone with God—I need to reflect on why I am in this state or condition.”?

Could you and I preempt it? If the Church says that this or that individual is disfellowshipped and you and I say, “But I still love you, and we feel bad for you” and we kind of rally around, are we undermining what the purpose of the disfellowshippment was intended to accomplish?

The Church is saying, take some time to consider what you are thinking, what you are saying and what you are doing.

My behavior in that instance would be contradicting the biblical teaching on disfellowship. Wouldn’t it?

**1 Peter 4:17 For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?**

**18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?**

**19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.**

**2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, . . .**

I was reading one commentary that said that Simon Peter recognized that he was a servant. He didn’t put “apostle” first, he was a servant. He is a servant and slave of Jesus Christ, and one sent forth by Jesus Christ. He says:

**to them that have obtained like precious faith with us . . .**

There aren't any levels of a calling and a faith that God enables you and me to experience with God saying, "Well, listen. I gave the original apostles my high-octane faith. I gave them the upper grade of faith. But the rest of you average folks, you get nothing like that. You get just sort-of-like faith."

Peter is saying, no, I am writing to those who "have obtained like precious faith . . ." And that word, precious, in the Greek means "of equal value." Like faith unto us. We are in this together.

**. . . through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ:  
2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,  
3 According as his divine power has given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, . . .**

Peter is, again, talking to people who are navigating a season of heaviness. He wants them to know how they are going to get through this. How are *you* going to be successful in getting from here to there in the swirl of accusation, or persecution, or trial and difficulty that tested their faith in their day and time?

Couldn't Peter say the same thing to you and me? How are you going to do this? He said you need to know that you have been given the same faith that we have. We share in this. We are in the same boat. It was made possible "through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

**2 Peter 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, . . .**

God's divine power has equipped you and me for life and godliness. It is very hard to be godly in a season of heaviness such as the one we are experiencing. But Peter points us to the divine power that has "given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

God's Spirit equips us for life and godliness:

**. . . through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue:  
4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

In the other night's study, we noted how verse 3 notes the divine power God has *given* unto us. In verse 4, "Whereby are *given* unto us exceeding great and precious promises."

These are not things that you and I have somehow gone out and obtained on our own talents and abilities, or intelligence, or some academic prowess, or whatever else that we might have a tendency to rely on or to trust in. These are God-given things: like precious faith, "all things that pertain to life and godliness."

**4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, . . .**

It is nothing less than that that God wants for us. Therefore, we must acknowledge that in everything that we think, say and do. God has called us out of the world:

**. . . escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

He has called us to become partakers of the divine nature. These are “great and precious promises.”

When Peter told them in verse 1 that they had been given, they are the recipients of “like precious faith with us,” he goes on to explain in verse 5:

**2 Peter 1:5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;**

**6 And to knowledge control; and to control patience; and to patience godliness;**

**7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love.**

In one sense, you might say this is the concept of mutual submission, the practice of our faith, giving diligence to our faith, letting it be demonstrated by virtue, growing in grace and knowledge and control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

In the next few verses, Peter makes some profound statements that you and I want to make sure that we spend a moment on.

**8 For if these things be in you, [these things that he has just outlined and reiterated for us] and abound, . . .**

We can't cut ourselves any slack. We can't put these things on the back burner while we engage one another in battle. We can't say, “Okay, yeah, that's fine. I'll come back to this virtue thing and back to patience and godliness, but right now . . .”

**8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that you shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**9 But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, . . .**

Brethren, you and I need to have the vision. If people ask where are we going—here is where we are going. We must recognize these traits and characteristics that are part of the character of God that identify that we understand that we have received “like precious faith” as the apostles did, Christ's first students.

**8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that you shall* neither be barren [or idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**9 But he that lacks these things is blind [there is a blind spot; there is something they are unable to see] and cannot see afar off, . . .**

Then a very tragic statement here:

**. . . and have forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.**



The antidote for losing our focus or the inability to see that we were in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, that we are not here because we are the smartest men in the room and God said, "I need that guy. I need him bad. He's brilliant. He's capable. He's talented." We are here because we are the recipients of God's mercy. We have been forgiven our sins, and we can't allow that to slip from the forefront of our minds.

**2 Peter 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: . . .**

So what is it you and I should be doing? Peter says, "Listen, people go through times of heaviness. People have their faith tested and tried. They need to be mindful of the fact that God is at work in their lives. He has given to them the capacity to have faith. He has given them a body of beliefs, and he has given them the open mind to receive those beliefs and to act on them and let them become their way of life."

**10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: . . .**

That's where your time, attention and energy should be focused.

**. . . for if you do these things** [What things? Adding to your faith virtue, knowledge, control, godliness, brotherly kindness, love], **you shall never fall:**

Now why are these things so important, and why have I taken time to bring them to your attention? It is because of what he says next in verse 11.

**11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Peter is saying this should be the focus of our attention because these are the things that make your calling and election sure. These are the things that open the door or the entryway to the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is where our energy needs to be applied. He uses the expression, "give diligence" in verse 10. He also used it again in verse 5. He stresses this matter of giving diligence or applying ourselves in that way.

**12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know *them*, . . .**

You might be sitting there today saying, "Come on. I know these things. I've heard this before. This is not the first time somebody has ever asked me to turn to 2 Peter 1."

Well, of course you have. You know them. But as Peter says, "I will not be found negligent in not bringing these things to your attention." These are the weightier matters. This is where we need to apply ourselves. This is that from which we cannot be distracted.

**12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know *them* and be established in the present truth.**

The Church of God is currently walking through a season of heaviness. There are those who are unhappy, disenchanted, some more aggressive than others.

Some are reaching out and attempting to ask of you that you would follow them. The thoughts that I present you today—the biblical principles placed before you—are for your reflection and consideration.

I know that I have absolutely no control over the choice-making process that you exercise as an individual. It would be ludicrous for me to think that I did.

Every one of us has to make our own individual choice and decision. God has structured it so. We have freewill, and the choices reflect and will establish the character that we will form. God asks that that character be built on the precious faith that He has given unto us. He has equipped us unto life and all godliness.

Even in seasons of heaviness, brethren, you and I can act responsibly. We can act in a manner that is befitting our calling, and we can act as servants of the living God.

Let's conduct ourselves with love, with integrity. Let's represent the God that we love and serve.