

## I. The Devil's Two Plans of Attack

You have heard me say many, many times, and it is a true statement, that the devil has basically two plans of attack for mankind. Obviously, the first plan of attack is on unsaved people. The devil has a plan to keep unsaved men and women, young men and young ladies, from getting saved. So he bombards them with everything and gives them everything and brings them into contact with everything in this world that will very simply and very basically damn their souls to hell. That is his main goal for you if you are here this morning and you are unsaved. You need to understand that that is plan one. Plan one is that he wants all mankind to be in the lake of fire for all of eternity, and he will do everything in his power to get you there.

We also know that the Holy Spirit of God is working in opposition to the devil's spirit. We know that through the love of God and the Holy Spirit of God and the things of God, men and women come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. When that takes place in your life and my life, we now know that there will never be ever again a time where you can lose your salvation. You do not have to be worried about now ever going to hell again. That is taken care of, out of the way, put on the cross of Calvary under the blood of Christ.

So then the devil's second plan of attack is for Christians. You have heard me say this; this is nothing new. If he cannot get you in hell, then he is going to try to get you to be ineffective for God all of your life. He is going to try to get you to just be a nominal person, go to church. The devil does not care if you go to church; he encourages it. You can open up the Candace Star or get in a religious section, and the devil just has all kinds of things. Go to the church of your choice. He wants you to go to the church of your choice; he does not want you to go to the church that is God's choice. He wants you to go to church. He wants you to read your Bible; he just wants you to read his Bible. So it is a very, very, very great plan that he has put forth. The bottom line is if he cannot get your soul in hell, then he wants to get you to the point where you do not do anything for God, and you just simply let the world pass you by.

## II. The Importance of Spiritual Growth

I want to talk to you this morning about the concept of your spiritual growth because that is really the issue today. If you are saved here this morning, the thing that you have got to look at and understand is that there can never be a time in your life when you do not continue to grow spiritually. Some people, bless their hearts, never start the process. They will get saved. They will never really let anybody work with them, or maybe they will go to a church where nobody understands the concept. But even in this church, you are going to find people that get saved, or maybe they have been saved for a while, and they come out of, and they start to put it all together, but they do not let anybody help them.

You are never going to figure the Bible out just by sitting down and reading it. God never intended for you to do it that way. Yes, He gave you the Holy Spirit of God. Yes, the Holy Spirit

of God leads and guides you into all truth, but the Holy Spirit of God leads and guides you into all truth to show you the wisdom that you need to get into a church that is God's program where they will teach you the Bible and help you understand the fundamentals so you can begin to grow. Many of God's people never get to first base in life spiritually speaking because they never start growing.

The other side of Christianity is men and women that begin to grow; they begin to go through the process, and then they stop growing. This is where the devil's attack is going to be. When you talk about the devil's attack to saved people, it will always be in the area of spiritual growth. He knows he cannot get your soul in hell, so he wants to get you to quit growing. If he can get you to quit growing and to stop your spiritual growth, either to never get you to start or stop the process once you get going, then he knows that you will never accomplish what God wants you to accomplish in your life, and you will wind up ruining your life probably with a lot of bad decisions, and you will wind up in a bad situation even though you are going to go to heaven and spend eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ. You will fail in the plan that God has for you. Let us face it, our churches today are filled with just those kinds of people. They really are.

### III. The Axe Head Story: A Doctrinal and Inspirational Lesson

Now there is a story in the Bible that I want to give you to illustrate this. This is not our message today, but I think this story helps illustrate it, and it is a strange story. Turn over to 2 Kings 6. Here is one of these stories in the Bible when you read it, you just kind of scratch your head. I have been asked this question many, many, many times over the years. It is one of these stories in the Bible that literally it is hard to figure out what is going on here. The application of it, or as it seems anyhow, is pretty hard to grasp. But it is a great story, and it is the story that you remember about where simply that the iron began to swim. Let me read it to you.

*2 Kings 6:1-6*

*And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.*

*Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.*

*And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.*

*So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood.*

*But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.*

*And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.*

*Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.*

Now this is a story that is kind of a bizarre story. A guy is out here cutting down some trees, and the head of the axe falls off the handle, goes into the water. Then Elisha comes over; they have a little conversation, and Elisha makes the miraculous miracle that the iron axe head swims over to the guy and attaches itself back on the handle. Now you look at that, and you think to myself, I have got to tell you, that is not something you probably want to use for devotion next Friday night. But maybe you will after you see how it lays itself out. I have found in the Bible that most things that you read in the Bible that do not make any sense, make perfect sense. The problem is I am looking at it from my standpoint, not God's standpoint. So I have got to get on the same page with God.

Let us talk about this just for a second here, because I want to use this as a springboard to where we are going today. Doctrinally, when you go over to Jeremiah 51:20, and I will help you figure this thing out, and be an example for you how you figure these things out. In Jeremiah 51:20, you are told that the nation of Israel is God's axe. In fact, I think it calls it God's battle axe. When you come through the Bible, you already know, you should know from Ezekiel 31, Ecclesiastes 11, and Mark 8 that people in the Bible are likened to trees. Here you have a story of a man who has an axe who is going in and cutting down trees.

When you look at this from a historical doctrinal standpoint, Israel is God's tool, God's cutting axe. God is using Israel and his story as an axe to destroy God's enemy, in this case would be Syria, or in particular the King of Syria. What has happened is this: Israel is the battle axe of God by which He is going to fell the nations. "Fell" is an old English word; it means to cut down. He is going to cut down the nation. The nations are likened to the trees. But what happened is that Israel has lost its cutting edge. An axe does not do you any good if you just have the handle. You have got to have the part that cuts, the part that is sharp, the point that will do the most damage. In this particular case, the nation of Israel has lost its edge with God. It is no longer God's tool. The fact that this axe head fell in the water is a picture of Israel being submerged in all the ungodliness that is around them that has affected them and basically taking them out from being the tool that God wanted to use to fell the nations with. That is the story. That is what you have had. The king of Israel now is in deep apostasy represented by the water, and it can no longer do the job that the man of God, in this case Elisha, has called it to do for God. When you come down into verse 6 and 7, you will find a picture of the second coming of Christ. They come to the man of God, and the man of God then restores Israel back to the cutting edge. Israel at this point has become a broken tool. God by design wanted to use Israel to be the standard for all the other nations and as the cutting edge for what God's plan was and what God's program was in the Old Testament, and Israel now has lost its edge.

Once you understand the doctrinal side of this, and I hope that you are learning from what I give you over the weeks here, you begin to see that inspirationally it begins to go together. That is something I want to, and this year you are going to find that I am going to, even in my preaching on Sunday, I am going to take a little side steps and I am going to point out things to you that maybe I did not do last year that you want to jot down that will help you. Because this year is going to be a defining year for our church. It is going to be a defining year for many of you. I am going to take the time, the extra time to work and to give you the little extra things that for those

of you that will pay attention and will get that will really help you. You are going to find that when you get into the Old Testament and you read a passage that you cannot understand, if you can figure out what that thing is doctrinally, and that is really the easiest application. If you can figure out what it is doctrinally, then it is just a short jump to what it is inspirationally because of the parallels between the Old Testament and the nation of Israel and the body of Christ.

Now, we already looked at it doctrinally. Let us look at it from an inspirational application. This is where very basically if you are pretty good at it, this is where you could use this for a great devotion. It certainly would make a great sermon. Inspirationally, we have a picture of you and me. You and me simply when we stop growing for God and we lose our cutting edge. You and me as a child of God needs to always be on the cutting edge. We are God's battle axe in this world just as Israel was in the Old Testament. You and I have the responsibility to be the point of the javelin, the sharpest part of the axe by which we fell the trees. Of course, when you go over to the book of Ecclesiastes 11, you see exactly how this thing ties in where he talks about casting your bread upon the water so you shall find it after many days, and he goes down through there and he says if a tree falls to the north or falls to the south, wherever it falls, it goes. Trees being a picture of the Bible is a picture of somebody felling a tree, and that tree falls to the north, it falls to the south. That is a picture of a man being felled and falling to the north, that is where heaven is, falling to the south, he dies and goes to hell. It all begins to make sense once you put it into perspective.

The axe becomes useless when it falls into disarray or sin in our lives. When you begin to stop growing spiritually, when you take that or you never grow spiritually, when you begin that process in your life, you are going to lose your effectiveness for God, and your cutting edge as the axe of God to fell the trees is going to be nullified because you are going to lose that axe head and all the sin and disarray and the apostasy that comes into your life with all the other things.

I want you to look at verse 6 here. The man of God, now, inspirationally that would be me as a pastor. The man of God asked where he lost the axe head. I do not know if you have put together yet, but that is exactly the question I ask you every week in one form or the other. You see, you cannot get it back until you go back and identify where you lost it. In other words, you have got to go back and deal with whatever transpired in your life. Take care of that with God before you can get your edge back. This guy comes and a man of God, he says, "Man of God," he says, "Hey, I lost the axe head." The man of God says, "Where did you lose it?" They went back together where they lost it, and the man of God helped him get himself back to be the cutting edge for God and restored him. See how the thing works?

Now, that is the job of a pastor. That is the job of a minister. The job of a minister is to restore. It is to take lost axe heads, help you identify where you lost it, deal with whatever you have got to deal with, and then bring you back from there. He showed him the place, and he gets restored. This is a great picture of what happens when you quit growing spiritually. This is a great message for the beginning of our year at Old Path Baptist Church because I guarantee you the number one thing in your life after you get saved is for you to guard with all your heart, with all

your mind, and all your soul is to never to lose your edge with God and to keep spiritually growing.

I would say next to, I think the hardest thing in the world to do for a Christian is to love the Lord thy God with all your heart, with all your mind, and all your soul. I think that is absolutely, fundamentally the challenge for you and me every day of our lives. Without a doubt, the number two challenge, or maybe it is right in there with that one, is to make sure that every day of your life, every month of your life, every year of your life, you continue to grow spiritually and never find yourself in a place where you are stopped growing spiritually. Of course, this is the answer. It gets asked many times. I have had people ask me over the years, not just here, but over the years. They will look at somebody that has been around for 10, 15, 20 years, and they should be a lot farther than they are, and they are still struggling with the same old things, and they will ask the question. Young Christians get confused. You realize that some of you older Christians that are not the cutting edge, it is a stumbling block and a confusion to some of the younger Christians. They look at you and they ask me, "Why are they still struggling? Why are they still here?" Well, the answer is simple. Somewhere along the line, they quit growing spiritually. They became surfers. They became skateboard artists. They traded in their Bible for a set of roller skates, and that is where they are at today. God wants you and I to be on the cutting edge of the Bible and the ministry.

#### IV. The Book of Haggai and Its Context

All right, now turn over to the book of Haggai. Haggai is the, I think it is the third book from the end. I think you have Zephaniah, Haggai; it is right around here at the end somewhere. I think it is the third book from the end. That will get you on the target. Now Haggai is where we are going to go today. Now that you have got the example over there in 2 Kings and it shows you that thing, we are going to take that example and we are going to tie it into the book of Haggai because I want you to understand going in, and that is why I do not dare start the book of Romans before I lay this out to you because starting the book of Romans without you understanding fundamentally what I am going to give you this morning first is stupid. Stupid on my part, not your part.

Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We ask You today to be with us in all that we do. We love You. Thank You for all that You do for us. Pray, Father, You will continue to bless us, give us Lord all the things that we need, and we just ask You now in a very special way to be with us, help us with the message today, help us to put it out, help us to receive it, do with it, Lord, in the lives of Your people, what needs to be done, and we will thank You and praise in Jesus' name for a sake we ask it. Amen.

All right, Haggai 1, here we go.

Haggai 1:1-7

Now here is another great story. My job this morning is to try to tie the two stories together to show you the absolute necessity as you face this next year in your own spiritual life to grasp the concept of spiritual growth. Any church is filled with people who are on all levels of spiritual

growth. There is no question about that. This message will apply to anybody on whatever level you are at. Some of you have just gotten saved, and you are in the process of learning the beginnings of discipleship. Some of you, you have been saved for a long time, and you are just now getting plugged into the Bible. For you, even though you have been saved a while, the Bible is a whole new book for you. So you are trying to learn a lot of good things, and that is great. Some of you have been around for a long time, two or three, four years, and you are in a process where you are growing. Some of you are in the position that you quit growing. It does not matter where you are at. The thing is you never can stop growing spiritually. That is the point I want to talk to you about today.

Now, Haggai, and I need to say this to you. You guys who someday are going to pastor, you guys that someday, and your wives too, you guys that someday are going to be ministers and you are going to work with people, you are going to work in churches, maybe this church, maybe you will have your own church, maybe someday you will have this church. You people that are aspiring to be what God wants you to be. Let me tell you something. If you ever want to get a good taste of the ministry of what it is like on the negative side, study the minor prophets. The minor prophets represent what you and I are going to face as a pastor to a hostile church because those men were called by God to go to the nation of Israel, and the nation of Israel did not want to hear from God. They hated these prophets. That is why they are such outlandish characters. That is why God gets them from wherever that they have to have a certain kind of character to be able to withstand all the abuse. They took Jeremiah one time, and he did not like what he preached. They put ropes under his arms and loaded him down into a dung pit. They killed some of them. They sawed some in half, the Bible says. They stoned some. These men were men that went to a nation of people that did not want to hear the voice of God, but proclaimed that they all love God and were following God. The message that they were preaching was not the message that God was preaching. Boy, like cold air and hot air, brother, the two met in the middle, and the prophets paid the price for it.

My point is this: you are going to preach the word of God and stand for God. You are going to face 99% of your time, a hostile crowd of God's people. God's people, they do not want to hear the truth. They want to hear what they want to hear. They are just like the parallels of the Old Testament. Everybody has a form of godliness. Churches are filled with people who carry their Bibles. They just do not want to hear what God has to say because it interferes with their lifestyle. Haggai is about to interfere with their lifestyle, and he is not going to be popular. But you know what? You need to develop another attitude, and that is an attitude that you do not care. You preach the word of God that He has given it to you, and the chips fall where they may. That is hard sometimes because you know, in the ministry, it can get, it can get pretty hectic sometimes, and people can get pretty hateful.

Now here is what you have got. The time period here is after the 70 years captivity. Remember they went into captivity, into captivity in Ezekiel and the end of 2 Chronicles. They go into Babylon for 70 years. Then in Ezra and Nehemiah, they get a decree to go back and rebuild the temple. We studied Ezra and Nehemiah not too long ago. So now here they are back in the land. That is why Haggai is a book that goes along with Ezra and Nehemiah. One of the things that I

want to do this year, one of my goals with you people who are working with me on a weekly basis or every other week basis, one of the goals I want to accomplish with you this year, and we can do it also in Thursday night Bible study, however needs to be done, is I want to get you on track with how all the books of the Bible intertwine themselves. Who would think that the book of Haggai would tie into Ezra and Nehemiah when they are so far apart in your Bible? We are used to having all of our books one, two, three, see. I mean, we have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. That is a nice four or five part thing there. They are all falling into the place. But here you have Ezra and Nehemiah, and way over at the end of the prophets, almost the end of your Bible, you have Haggai stuck. You know what? They go together. You have to learn that in your Bible at some point. You can know all of the great truths of the Bible. But if you do not learn the structure of how the Bible goes together, you will not know what to do with it. You will not know how to use it. So you have got down through here, and you are going to find that Haggai along with Malachi and along with Zechariah. Those three books are written after the 70 years captivity.

Now, if you were going to a Bible college someplace and you were paying \$50,000 a year to learn the Bible, they would tell you this. They would say to you that when you begin to study the Old Testament, you are going to find that the Old Testament books from 2 Chronicles on fall into three categories. The first category would be pre-exilic. The second category would be exilic. The third category would be post-exilic. Now, what he is trying to tell you is this. The word exilic means the exile. He is telling you that some of the books are written before God comes down and sends them into captivity. They would be the pre-exilic. The exilic books would be the books that are written during the exile. The post-exilic would be the books that come written after they come back. Now, see, when you say pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic, that sounds great. If I get up here and preach to you that way, I could just about get any amount of money from you I wanted. If you were hanging on to the words that I said and I was impressing you with my vocabulary, and I would get up here and I would say, "You see," it sounds really good. But when you come up here like me and the college professor get up and he says, "It is pre-exilic, it is exilic, and it is post-exilic," I would get up and say, "No, no, no, no. It is before God kicked the snot out of them, when He was kicking the snot out of them, and after He kicked the snot out of them." That is the way it works. You are going to find that there are some books that are written after He whipped the tar out of them. Haggai is one of them. So they go back, the exile is passed, and the Jews begin to rebuild, and this is where Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra is their return, Nehemiah is their rebuilding process, and they begin to begin to work on the temple.

Wow. But in a short time, and you see this in Ezra and Nehemiah, in a very short time, what happens? Oh, the opposition shows up. The pressure comes in. We study this when we come through those two books, and we begin to see how that the adversaries show up, and the Bible says in Ezra and Nehemiah that they trouble their hands in building. Let me translate this for you. This is a picture of you getting saved, starting in the Word of God, and then not letting go of your old friends, hanging out with the wrong crowd, getting into things and not cutting the ties with things that you should, whether it be people or places in material, and then you try to build your temple for God, and what happens is they trouble you in building, and you know what happens? The same thing that happened here. You realize that Haggai is a post-exilic book, but it

takes place 16 years after they started to go back. You know what happened? The same thing that happens in your life and my life. They went back, they got the order to rebuild, they began to rebuild, and then suddenly they stopped building the temple, and now the temple of God has set destitute, not finished, for 16 years. You know what that is a picture of? That is a picture of a lot of you. That is a picture of 90% of God's people out in the world today. I am telling you, the number one thing you have got to guard against is the devil coming down and shutting down the building of God's temple and stop your spiritual growth, and that is just the way it is. I mean, you can argue with it all day long. You may not like it, but I am sorry, that is the truth, and Haggai shows up and he lets them have it, and obviously he is not very popular, and neither will you when you begin to take God's stand against God's people. He preaches a set of fiery messages, brother, on the fact that they have let their personal affairs, they have let their lifestyles, they have let all of the things that they want to do interfere and stop the work of the building of the temple, and they are living like kings high in the hall, have everything they want, very satisfied in life, but the house of God, the temple, sits unfinished.

Now, let me just explain to you about this temple. I think that is, you need to understand that. The temple of God, basically in the Old Testament, was a literal place. It was a building, and it was a building where they, it was the absolute center of Israel's religious worship and the center of everything that God did. He did everything through that temple. In the New Testament, we know that God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. We know that your body and my body, once we get saved, becomes the temple of God.

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

That is you. In the New Testament, the temple is your body. So the parallel here is a picture of somebody who got saved, began to get the building and the temple going, and then the opposition came in, and now while they are living high in the hog, while they are, and I promise you, I guarantee you, all during this time, these Jews are talking about God, they are, they are, they are going through all of their religious traditions that they do with God. The problem is they just have forsaken the number one thing that is the central part of their worship. That is the way God's people are today. You look at God's people today, they have been saved 5, 10, you know, I always give you a five-year break around here. I give you five years just to figure out what is going on. I never, never castigate anybody for the first five years. I give you a free pass, a free ride. So whatever I am saying, if you have been saved five years or less, other than do not let this happen to you. I am not even talking to you. Mainly I am talking to me, but I am telling you, the thing is you have got to guard against, you have got to guard against, you stop growing spiritually. When you come down through here and you begin to see this, you begin to see how the book lays out a great picture of Israel losing their effectiveness, their cutting edge, and you

and I as God's people losing our cutting edge and our effectiveness because somebody stopped our spiritual growth.

## V. Intellectual vs. Conceptual Spiritual Growth

Now I want to talk again and make a reference again to some of you future pastors here because you have got to learn from this, and I am going to take the time this year to point these things out. If you are a wife, you have got to learn them too because someday you may be a guy who is going to be a pastor, and they are going to affect you. You never want to just say never when it, you know, never want to say, "Well that ain't going to apply to me." Well, you have got to have a way to see how God makes it apply to you. But for you guys that someday are going to stand in pulpits, you are going to be in charge of people, you are going to be in charge of ministry, you are going to have to deal with people. You need to know what you are going to have to face when it comes to God's people.

Let me tell you something. The number one problem in churches, and now we talked about this Thursday night, I think Nikki asked a question about 1 John over there, the world, flesh, and the devil, we lined him up back there, and we talked about how that you and I as a Christian, what we are up against is the world, flesh, and the devil. But I want to tell you something, that is not the number one problem you are going to face as a pastor. That is not the number one problem this church is going to face. The number one problem this church is going to face will never come from the outside world. It will never be people who hate this church, hate me, hate you, or hate anybody else. It will never be that. The problems will always be in whatever church you are pastoring, or whatever church you are dealing with, or whatever group you are leading, will always come within the group you are leading. It will always be a direct relationship back to their spiritual growth. I am telling you. What he does in the first part, in the first chapter here, is he deals with three issues. In fact, what he does, he gives them a prophecy. He says, "This is what is going to happen to you because you refuse to finish the temple." I will say to you, this is exactly what will happen to you if you quit growing spiritually. It is just that simple.

Now, I need to stop and explain this because I am giving you a lot of information, but I do not want you to miss the key points. Let me explain for you spiritual growth. Everything in the Bible and everything in your life, there has to be a balance. We know that. We have heard me talk about that many, many times. In spiritual growth, there also has to be a balance. You are going to find God's people. You are going to find that when they quit growing spiritually, they do it one of two ways. The first way they do it is they just quit coming to church. Or maybe they will come for a while, but then it will just, it is too hard for them to listen to this every week. So they will just, you know, they will go someplace else. The other kind of person, Christian, is someone who could never think of leaving this church because, you know what, you are in a place of leadership or people look to you or whatever. Or maybe you have just been around too long or maybe you just realize there is no place else to go. So what happens, it affects you. It affects you that you keep coming to church, but you just do not grow anymore. It begins to have an effect on everything around you in your attitude, in your personality.

You are going to find that there are two aspects. The first aspect of your spiritual growth is what I would call intellectual. You have got to learn the Bible. You have got to learn the Bible. You have got to learn the Bible. You have got to know how the Bible lays itself out. You have got to learn the things that I am talking about on Thursday night. You have got to understand the things that I am laying out in Joshua. You see, basically all those things that I give you, my preaching and my motivation and my teaching really comes down to meet those two needs. I recognize that you as a child of God have an intellectual need when it comes to that Bible. Intellectual in the sense of learning the Bible, not intellectual in a sense of a bad way. You need to have an intellect about God and the Bible. You need to know who God is. You need to know about the Bible, when it was written, how it was written, how it breaks down. That is intellectual stuff. That is being able to go into your Bible and lay out this or lay out that and break it down, doctrinally, historically, that is all intellectual. That is very important.

But then spiritual growth has to take another form, which is conceptual. Conceptual is that you take what you see and apply it, and it has an impact on your life. Do not you ever think for a second, not even a millisecond, that some of God's people cannot take the intellectual side and never deal with the conceptual side. Ray said it, man, last New Year's Eve. He said it. You know, every church, depending on where it is at and what it does, it has the danger of breeding its own form of bad stuff. There is no church that is against, does not have to deal with this. Every church, no matter where you are at, no matter how good it is, how mediocre it is, how bad it is, they all are going to have the danger of producing some form of bad concept heresy that has the ability to hurt the work of Christ. Every church does. In all my years, I have never found a church that did not have to deal with that. I found a lot of churches where the pastor did not know that, but I have never seen a church with that. Ray hit it right on the head. This is one of the, this is the downside to our church, if it is a downside. But this is a problem in our church. It is a good problem, but it nevertheless, it has the potential of a breeding ground. This church, because of what you get, because of all the material. Ray, he amazed me the other night when he went through that. I forgot we even done all that stuff. For a minute there, I was thinking about, he was talking about another church. I had forgotten how many things we went through together. But I sat there and I thought to myself, boy, Ray, that is exactly, I do not know what else could have been said, because the church, this church, real danger is getting you to get all the material from an intellectual standpoint, but never take it in the conceptual standpoint. This church has a real danger of producing a lot of Pharisees. It really does. Pharisees are saved people, or unsaved, but Pharisees are saved people who learn the Bible from an intellectual standpoint, but they never, never learn it from a conceptual standpoint.

You know what? I have judged over the years. I have been a great study of human nature. I have tried to compress everything I have learned in my own life down to a very simple formula that I can use in any given situation. I do that a lot with things, because I do not have the ability to remember everything. I have got to put everything down into small concepts where I can grasp it and retain it and then use it. I have learned that if you want to, if you want to find out what the depth of a real Christian is, if you want to find out as a tool, and I probably should not even give you this, but if you want to find out the real depth of a child of God, you only have got to look at three things in that person's life. Those three things will detail them out just about 99 percent of

what you have got. It will show you if they have got it from an intellectual and a conceptual, or just an intellectual.

The first thing I look at in somebody, and the first thing I look at this thing, is I look at what you love. I look at what you love. I listen to what you talk about. I look at, I look at what you love, see? But that in itself can be deceiving, because what you love can be, you know, that is intellectual. That does not tell me I think about the conceptual.

The next thing I look at, the next thing I look at, and I do this, and I mean this, every church I have ever been associated with, every group of people I have ever worked with, this is how I view it, and this is what I look for, and this will tell me it has never failed me in 30 years. It tells me where people are really at, because the Bible says, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the man speaks." You cannot fake true spirituality. You may try, you may put out a lot of intellectual stuff, but it is the conceptual that will mess you up every time. I mean, what good is it the fact that you know all these things about the Bible when your own family will not come to church? You think that impresses me? You think that, you think that cuts some ice with somebody? That it is, that it is, that you know you can, you have got all these things you know, but your own family looks at you and says, "You do not know what I know about it." I am not impressed with that. God is not impressed with that. You see, that is intellectual. It is not conceptual.

The second thing I look at is what makes a man mad. I think those two things are very telling. I think those things are very, very telling. What a man loves, and then what makes a man mad or upset. I think those two pivotal points will tell you a great deal, but then the third thing, it really pulls it all together. I always look at what, not only what they love, Christians now, and what makes them mad, but I look what they complain about. I guess the greatest component in that three point is what you complain about. What you focus on as the issues. I mean, I have been in churches where people are dying and going to hell. They are fighting over the cover of the choir robes. I have been in churches where people are dying and going to hell. The kids are running loose like crazy, and they are worried about how hot or how cold it is. I have been in churches where they have got great crowds, and everybody, but the people are lost. Nobody, but everybody is more concerned about what kind of toilet paper we had or what kind of this we are doing over here or that or that. Those things mean absolutely nothing in the whole scheme of thing with God. But because they have some little power concept, because they have the intellect, but not the concept, and spiritual Pharisees are something that will destroy a church.

I remember years ago I had a lady, and this lady used to drive me nuts. She was one of these people who nitpicked everything that I did. She just, no matter what I did, and finally one day I just had it with her. I mean, she was a nice lady, do not misunderstand me, but she was Miss Spiritual, Miss Spiritual. Now her own kids would not come to church, but she was Miss Spiritual. Her husband thought she was nuts, but she was Miss Spiritual. Every time I would do something, she would be there telling me what I did wrong with it. Now, I am like anybody else. I make my mistakes. If I do something wrong, you need to tell me. But this lady was coming down with a plan where she just was, and it was very obvious to me that she had some real issues. A lot of people like that, they have real identity issues. They are always trying to prove to you that they are spiritual. You know what? You do not prove to me how spiritual you are by

what you know about the Bible. If I really want to know how spiritual you are, you know how I find out? It has nothing to do with the Bible. I will ask your wife. I will ask your wife. Not in your case, Kyle, do not worry about it. Boy, I saw that big old smile come on your face. There is an accepted heavy role, Dolly. I am not impressed with what you know. If I really want to know where you are at, I am not going to ask you. I know what you are going to tell me. You want to find out what I am really like? Talk to her. Talk to her. If I want to find out what you are really like, I will talk to your wife and then I will talk to your kids. That is the proof. I mean, everybody can get it intellectually. Your wife, your family is not impressed with your intellect if you cannot make the concepts work. It is just that simple.

Well, this lady every time, and I cannot remember the exact deal, but I had it with her. It was coming in and it was a Bible study. It was not the Monday night. I forget where it was or how it was, but anyway. I was getting up and I was talking about my ministry. I was talking about the fact that my ministry and laying things out and talking about it, and she was sitting right about where you are sitting in the front. In fact, she looked a lot like you. I have not seen you for years. No, I am just kidding. She raised her hand, and I had 40 some people in there, and she raised her hand, and she says, "Brother Bob," she says, "I appreciate what you said, but you know it is really the Lord's ministry, do not you?" And I said, "It is?" She says, "Yes, it is." I said, "Good, let Him teach it." I was going to get something to eat. I was hungry anyhow. 45 minutes later, I came back. They were all sitting there in disarray. Miss Spiritual was sitting there too. I said, "How did He do?" Now, you think I do not understand when I say this is my ministry, I do not understand how that thing worked. It is God's ministry. You think Paul, when he said, "This is my gospel," did not understand the concept? Sure. But you have got some people who are so spiritual intellectually. They just know, I mean, they cannot take your own fair, but they can pick apart everything you do. Have you met people like that? They are all over the place, and I love them. I pray for them. The Bible says to pray for the feeble minded. I do. But I am not impressed with them. I am not impressed. When a guy comes up and he comes along and he does good, he does that, you know what I, I do not, I quit watching him. I really do. I mean, we all come up, and I should not even give you my trade secrets away. I do not know what is wrong with me today. When I watch somebody come up and I watch them grow up and I watch them come and they get into things, you know, the first thing I quit watching them. I watched them for a while to see how they are doing. But after a while I know now that it all passes off on intellect, and you can fool me with intellect. You cannot conform me with concept. So I quit looking at him, and I look at his wife. I look and see what she is getting. I will ask certain questions. I will watch his kids because then I will know that I got the balance between the intellectual and the conceptual. Spiritual growth is both.

There is a process that takes place when you stop growing. Haggai gave you a while back the seven automatic laws. Two of the laws that happen in your life once you begin to quit growing spiritually, take over just like that. I can throw this up in the air. Watch. You know what just happened? Two laws. The first law is I threw it up, and the law of gravity was broken. When it reached a point, the first law of aerodynamics ceased to exist. Law of gravity took back, and it automatically. I did not have to program it. I did not have to tell it. It happened automatically. When you begin to quit growing spiritually and you grow either from an intellectual standpoint

and not a conceptual or you just walk away from the whole thing, automatic laws begin to take effect in your life. This is why coming into this year, you need to see what Haggai is saying to these people who have left the temple of God desolate for 16 years. Incredible.

## VI. The Process of Spiritual Decline

Now there is a process that takes place when you stop growing. When you stop growing, you know, the first thing that you do, the first thing that you do is you replace God with something. One of the things I want to do in the book of Romans, one of the things that I want to do in the book of Romans is I want to show you how the mindset works between a Gentile and a Semite. That is you or anybody from that Semitic side of its Shem. That is what Romans really does because the book of Romans is the key book that shows you how to understand both groups. You are going to find that Gentiles, Gentiles, the first time, the first time, that is why, you know, one of the things that, you know, just give this to you too here in the process, I am thinking all these things. When you learn that, you will learn a better way to deal with different kinds of religions. You deal with Gentiles one way, Gentile religions, you deal with Semite religions another way. You do not deal with Muslims and Jews the same way you deal with Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons. They have two different mindsets. You sit down with a Jew or you sit down with a Muslim and try to run him back to Abraham and dingle with him in the Bible, you are going to get your tail whipped every time. That is not how you deal with them. You know how you know that? Because Romans 1-3 shows you the two different mindsets. You want to deal with them? You have got to deal with one this way and you have got to deal with one that way. How many times I have seen somebody sit down with a Muslim and try to run them back through the Bible and try to contend with them one-on-one about Abraham and who was the real sacrifice back there? You are an idiot. You play right into his hands. Every time you go with him in the Bible, you are just giving him credibility. That is how Shem thinks. You know why we are losing a war right now? Because we are fighting the war like a lot of you try to debate a Muslim. You know how you defeat the Semites? You watch them. You do not party with them. You think you can negotiate a peace with the radical Muslims? You think that they will tell you, "Oh yeah, we will sign a peace treaty," and tomorrow it will be worth the paper it was written on? That is our problem. You know what is wrong in our government? Besides a lot of other things, we look at the war in the Middle East and we think we are fighting the Germans. You know why we lost Vietnam? Because we went up against a Semite. We thought we were fighting Germans. They do not think the same. In the Christian realm, you do not deal with them the same. But of course, you know, that is just where it is at. Some of God's people, they just, they cannot ever get to that point. We will get to that when we get into the Romans.

But you stop growing. Gentiles, when they stop growing, Semites do not do this. When Gentiles stop growing, they replace God with something. That is exactly what they do. That is exactly what they do. In time, you replace God with something and your life as number one. In time, that mindset will lead you away from God, fellowship will get broken, and you will get into sin. Then the next process is you rationalize it. Now see, at this point, you either keep coming to church or you will quit coming to church. This is a defining moment. Some of them will quit coming to church, and then they will blame them not coming back on the people in the church or me or the

church itself. Translated back, it is, "I do not really want to come to church." Then what they will do is they will try to be buddy buddy with Christians that are out there. See, because when you and me in our stupidity do not hold them accountable and we hang out with them and buddy buddy with them, they use that to rationalize that they are really okay. The problem really is not them. The problem is what they have rationalized it to be. You at that point become part of the problem and not part of the solution. You have got a guy, a friend or a girl or girl, is somebody that that quits growing spiritually. It is your obligation to say, "You know what, I love you and I pray for you. But the bottom line is you have got your world. I have got mine. I can be friends with you. I can be nice to you. But you know what, that is where it has to stop. We are not going to be buddy buddy together. We are not going to do all these things together. You know what, your world is over here. My world is there," because what he will do, they all do it. They replace God with something else. Then they try to get you to be part of their rationalization. "Well, so and so she still likes me. Well, she still likes me." See, it cannot be me. It is tough being a Haggai sometimes. It is tough. It is tough being a Haggai sometimes. But you know what, let us face it. That is what separates the men from the boys. It is not easy. But they will always replace God with something.

Now, on the other hand, they will keep coming to church. But you will find out that as they goes on and time goes on and, you know, they try to in the in it, the old spiral goes down instead of instead of confessing their sin, they hide their sin. They want to blame it on somebody else. Then you will start seeing where they start nitpicking about everything. It means nothing. They will hear a sermon and they will say, "Well, he said this wrong and I do not agree with the answer." They will look at that. "I do not like this or like that." They began to dismantle everything. Oh yeah. Yeah. You cannot get your care family to come to church. Your husband thinks you are an idiot. Your wife thinks you are an idiot. Yet you are going to stand there and detail out for me the problems in the ministry. Thank you very much for your concern. You idiot. If I had asked your wife, she would give me one of these. In some cases, if I had asked your husband, he would give me one of these. "Well, I do not know. You have got a guess as good as mine. I do not figure it out." I can figure it out.

Now you develop an attitude toward God, toward Christians, toward the church, anybody who is in a form of accountability. This is where the people who once helped you, oh, it is foolproof. The people who once helped you now become your enemies. Paul faced the same thing in Galatians 4 when he said to the Galatians, "Hey, because I tell you the truth, I am there, your enemy." Hey, you want to find out if there is really any substance in any relationship, just look the person in the eye, call them on the carpet, and find out if they are still your friend tomorrow. Everything else is an illusion. We become part of people's grand scheme to justify themselves. That is the way it happens. You now are on the downward slippery slope that leads to all of the problems of bad decisions and tragic consequences. Again, the longer you wait to deal with it, the more damage gets done. In time, it comes irreparable. You lose your marriage, you lose your kids, you lose your job, you go into financial ruin, you go through all of the process, and you just try to, and you just scratch your head because you are so dense, you have got yourself so convinced you have deceived yourself or maybe God deceived you because He does when you get in that mode. Even when you get right with God many, many times, the consequences are not

only immediate, they are eternal. I have known people who got right with God and got things going with God, and they had to live with the fact that one of their kids died and went to hell. It was killed in the car wreck because they would not want to go to church early on in life. That is a tough thing to bear. That is tough. I do not even know if tough is the right word for that. But sometimes there are eternal consequences. We get what we want, we thumb our nose at God, and we bring our little buddies around us and our little girlfriends around us so everybody, you know, even though they do not want anything to do with God anymore, you know, you ladies know how it works. You will get your little groups out there, and somebody does not want, but they will always want to do this, always want to do that. The bottom line is you all just jump in, and at the end of the day, what happens? A kid dying to go to hell. You are part of the process. Tough to be a Haggai. Tough to be a Haggai. Tough to be a Haggai.

You say, "What is the answer to all this?" I gave you the answer over there in 2 Kings. The answer is to go to the man of God and ask where, showing where you lost the axe head. That is the answer. Go back to the man of God and say, "Hey, I lost my cutting edge. I lost the axe head. Help me restore it so I can get back online with God." That is what you do. Somebody would not want to do that. See you, pal. You have got your world. I have got mine. See you, sweetheart. You are on your way. I am on mine. You have to get back to growing spiritually. You have to put back God back in the temple of your life.

## VII. Consequences of Spiritual Stagnation

You know what? There are two things in this passage here. One in verse 5 and verse 7 that really I should have gave it each from the very beginning. I forgot. Look what it says. "Consider your ways." If I can give you any advice based on the message this morning to help you through the next year, I would simply give it to you twice like he did. "Consider your ways."

Now I want to give you quickly here three or four things that he tells them is going to happen. These are the exact things that happened in your life in my life. Hey, I have been here. I know, man. I know this is true. These are not something that I am preaching to you and never have not experienced it. If you are a child of God, you would all have to admit we have all experienced it. Probably somebody who is experiencing it now.

Look at verse 2. "The people say, The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Now that is God's people for you. God gave them the mandate to go back. God gave them the leaders to get them back. God produced the miracle to get them back in the land through hopeless situations. Now in the face of all that God has done, they have got the audacity to say it is not time. I will tell you what, ladies and gentlemen, the number one thing that will cut you out of growing spiritually is procrastination. Never do today what you can put off tomorrow. Boy, that is true. Procrastination, laziness, not developing priorities in your life. Not sitting down and looking at this next year and saying, "I want to get some goals I want to accomplish." Write those goals down. Keep yourself accountable. Better yet, get somebody in this church that you love, that helps you stay accountable. You know what would be good in this church? Two of the three of you getting together in little groups and keeping somebody accountable. I cannot do everybody. I just do the ugly ones now because I feel sorry for you. But I do not need to do

everybody. There is enough people in this church, and you have got enough friends in this church that if you really mean something that you need to keep spiritually growing, get you a little core group of three people, two people, and say, sit down in a little meeting in your home. I do not need to be there. Exercise some leadership, exercise some ability, and sit down and say, "Hey, look, tell me what you see wrong with me." Oh, we do not want to hear that. Say, "I want it. This is what I want to do next year. I want you to help me stay accountable in this." You know why some of you will not do that? Because six weeks from now, you will not do it. You will be by the wayside, and you do not want to have to face that person. I know how it works. I have been there.

The next thing, when you stop growing and you turn your attention from God, you know what you do? You turn it from God and you start to turn it to the things that you want and your things. He says in verse 4, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" Now let me talk to you about cieled houses. Cieled is where we get our word, ceiling. What we have got here is this. God's house, the temple, does not even have a roof over it. It is four walls, no roof. He is saying, "You have got your homes, you have got your ceilings. What about God's temple? What about God's house?" In fact, the implication is in 2 Chronicles 3:5 that they are using the materials that were set aside for the temple to build their own homes with. Well, that is God's people for you.

Let me tell you something. I have learned this a long time ago. You might as well get it down straight. When it comes to you and me and our flesh, there is no satisfying the flesh. You cannot give it enough. You cannot make enough available to it. I will give you the good rule of thumb. You can put it in your little book someplace. Never give yourself more than you give God. Now our whole Christian mindset has gone 180 from that concept. Partially it is because of, not partially, it is because of the pastors and the churches. Now I cannot speak for you. I am a pastor, so I will speak for me. I have been a pastor for many, many years. Been around hundreds of thousands of them. Seen them tall, small, big, little. I have seen every kind that there is. I want to say to you, I do not understand this, and I am not speaking to you now. You may have some thing that you need. I am not, do not take this in any way, reflection. I am speaking to me as a pastor and other pastors. If you were all pastors here today, I would ask you this question. I would ask you this question. I would ask you, "How do you justify your lifestyle in front of your people?" What pastor in the world needs a car that costs \$60,000? Now maybe you do. I am not even talking to you. I am pretending you are all pastors. I am a pastor. I am speaking as a pastor. What pastor needs a car that costs \$60,000? What pastor needs a car that is decked out from one end to the other other than it is some kind of status for him. Because we have got the mindset today in Christianity that the more you have, the more spiritual you are. The bigger and the brighter and the shinier and the newer it is, the more that is the approval that God is pleased with you. I will say it again, I said it last week. 99% of what we do with God's people, I am firmly convinced God has nothing to do with. I would ask the pastors, "What in the world as a pastor do you need a \$300,000 home for?" When I looked at Jimmy, not Jimmy, the guy, the baker guy, when he finally got busted and went to prison for whatever time he went and all the things come out, he had a dog house that was bigger than the house that we moved into the first time we got here. Now you are going to tell me that you are going to understand the suffering of ministry when

your dog lives better than most people do in your church. You know, you have got women on their pensions that did not have anything at all, including brains that were sending that guy money and all the rest of them there of what they got. Those guys are living like kings. Now, I do not care what size house you have got, I am not talking to you. But what church needs to cost \$60 million to build? What pastor in his right mind, unless he is looking for some kind of status, what kind of pastor would take his people into some kind of building program that would run them 20, 30, 40, 50, \$60,000 in debt? What is your purpose? I will tell you what the purpose is, it is status.

You see, it was a long time ago that the Catholic Church throughout Europe and even in America, they build the biggest grandiose old churches you ever saw. They took up city blocks. The Cathedral of Notre Dame is known for its magnificence in architectural structure. Its magnificence in all the gigantic bell tower. By the way, what is brown and crinkled and lives in the bell tower of Notre Dame? The lunch bag of Notre Dame. Hey, sorry, in the fifth grade, it went over really big. But we as Baptists, we have come to the same concept. We think that when people come to town because they see some Taj Mahal, that that is just must be where God must be. Let me tell you something. Let me tell you something. You want a good reality check on the way we live? I check myself all the time. You want a good reality check? Jesus Himself in the New Testament, when He was talking to the disciples, He said, "Boys, I do not know if you want to follow with Me. The foxes and they have holes to hide in. Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Put yourself in that perspective. Now He was not saying if you really want to love God and serve God, you ought to just live out in the street. But you do get the point, do not you? I would think so. In the Old Testament, when before they built the temple, but in the Old Testament, they do not have time to get into all the typology between the temple of the tabernacle before it was built into the temple. There is incredible study. But in the Old Testament, before they built it, before Solomon built it, when that tabernacle was the temple of God, when place to place throughout the wilderness, if you would have walked into the Israelite camp and you would have said, "Where is the tabernacle?" They just said, "Well, it is right there." You looked at that and you said, "My God, that is ugly." It was covered with badger skins, coyote skins. It was covered with camel skins. From the outside, it looked just like any old tent that you saw down at Mickey's Surplus. But when you got on the inside is where the glory was. There is nothing magnificent about a beautiful church building. Spending \$80,000 for a sound system, big screen TVs, all kinds of decorate, ornate, covering all of the sanctuary to give you that nice, warm, spiritual feeling. There is no value in that from the Bible. The beauty is never in the building. The beauty is inside you and inside this church of what we teach. That is where the glory is. I do not care how big they build them. I do not care how grandiose they get. I know where the real beauty of God is, and it is not in a building. I would not care if somebody donated a Safeway warehouse to us. I would not care what it is because the beauty of it is. If somebody says, "Well, I am not going that church because of the way it looks." Good. We do not want you here anyhow. We need your seat. Success is never measured by what you get. It is always measured by what you give. I am telling you, we need a reality check today. I said it a couple of weeks ago. God's people today live in their homes are more articulate, are more careful with their furniture and their carpet and their little door leaves and their little knickknacks. Yet the temple of God stands bare with no roof on it. That is Israel. That is God's people.

Then the next thing, look at verse 6. I love this. He says in verse 1, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." You know what that says? That said without God in your life, it is a dead end street. It means that you go through life getting all you can and canning all you get. It means you sow much in life, but you get absolutely nothing back. You eat to your fulfillment, but you never have enough because there is no satisfying the flesh. You drink, but you are not filled with drink. Oh, I love this one. "You clothe you, but there is none warm." Let me just take that one step further. I will show you. We do not dress today because of society or the weather. We dress today for style. We will pay \$200 for a little coat that would not keep you warm in June, and you wear it out down there in someplace, and you shiver it over there because you spent \$200. You could have went to the army Navy store, bought an old Navy peacoat that would have taken care of you for the rest of your life. No, I am not saying you should. You could have went to Walmart and bought yourself something. You could have went anywhere. Got you a coat that would have just kept you as toast, but no, no, no, no, no. We do not, we do not dress. We do not dress for warmth. We dress for style. Funniest thing in the world is to see a woman in a three foot snowfall wearing high heels. I mean, the concept has destroyed our reasoning process. The funniest thing in the world is watching an out of fellowship Christian try to succeed and how he not only deceives himself, but God deceives him.

You know, Christmas and New Year's were traditionally is the most depressing time of the year for suicide. I know why people commit suicide. They do not want to live another year when a bag without holes, bag with holes. I know why they will not get drunk. They cannot stand another 365 days of dead end streets. Oh, you may have got a great job. You may have all kinds of money, but if you are a Christian, deep down inside when you go to sleep at night and the Holy Spirit of God works on you, it is empty. So you know what you do? You buy more stuff so you do not feel so empty. You go get this, you go get that. You think buying things will fill that emptiness. Then after you have them for a week, they are empty, and you have got to have something else, and you want this and you want that. Let me tell you something. I have learned by experience, my friend, the greatest satisfaction in all the world has nothing to do with anything you buy. It is something God gave you. My favorite verse is Job 9:4. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?" Nobody. I have had people all my life, known people all my life that walked away from God, did what it did. Dumped God, had nothing to do with God. God gave him a good chance. They stuck the sharp stick in God's eye. Went on with life over the years, and I have seen him prosper and go great. Somebody would say to me at some time or the other, "What do you think of that family over there? What do you think of that gal? What do you think of that guy? Hey, they dumped God. Look how successful they are. Look, they have got everything." They fail to see that getting everything, having everything means absolutely nothing when your kids wind up screaming in a lake of fire. There is a reality check coming. You better get it now. You better get your accountability set now. You better find out who your friends are and who you can count on now. Tough being a Haggai.

Listen, my friend, you can write this down in the little book too. Life with God is endless hope. Life without God is hopeless end. Boy, do no true words are spoken because life becomes a bag full of holes. You all through your life, you get, you stick in that bag, you put it in, you laugh, you think you have got one up on God. "Oh, I do not need that church. I do not need that preaching. Oh, I do not need this. I have got all I want. I want this. I want that. I want to have this." When you get to the judgment and you hold it up, it is gone. I think Christians, you know, Christians think God is stupid. All these big churches, you know, all the pastors work it. The creepy were already dumb in there anyhow, because they would not be there if they, if they were not pastors today want to suck every dime out of you. You will go into most churches. You will get 20 minute message in 40 minutes. "We need money." The next week will be the son of, "We need more money." It will just go on down from there. If that is an insult to injury, what they will do is they will get some lawyer to come in in the church and he will say, "You know what? Here is what you need to think about. You need to think about this. Have you ever thought of leaving all that you have to God's ministry? You know, God has been good to so many of you. Why do not you put, why do not put the church in your will? Why do not you tell me you have no family? Show me have your family that you do not want to leave your money to?" You know what? Do what God would have you to do. Boy, the old preachers over there going to change, looking over there and saying, "Look like she is going to die next week. Maybe next week." I mean, I know. I know one preacher one time that they had that, and this one lady, this one lady had donated at the, at her desk. She was worth like 20 million bucks. She signed it all over to the church. She got really sick. Her husband called the pastor, and he says, "Pastor, uh, uh, Miss So-and-so is, is, is really sick. She is lying at death's door." Pastor said, "Well, brother, we will pray. God, pull her through, pull her through the door." She died to get the money. They were terrible.

Let me tell you something. We think God is nuts. We think God is dumb as we are. You think God has not figured it out yet that when somebody, some slick pastor gets up and says that the Christian mindset, I know the flesh. I know immediately where that mind goes. That mind goes, "Wow, I can do all I want to do right now. Then when I do not need it anymore, when I am dead, I can give it to God and whoa, boy." What do you think God is stupid? I want to read you something. You do not have to turn to it because I want you to run divided attention.

*2 Corinthians 5:10*

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

You get nothing after you are gone. You only get what you do in the body. After that, done. It does not matter what you do with it. God has got your little game figured out. He knows how I think. He knows how a human being can look at that thing and says, "Wow, yeah, man, I can do have all I want right now, and I will just put it in the will that God gets everything after I am done." God says, "Checkmate, only in the body." Only in the body. No, I am not saying you should not leave money to the church, but I am just saying you do not get any credit for it. Get that mindset. I am sure there are people that do it with the right mindset. I am sure there are people that do everything for God all the way down. They just do not want their grubby little kids to get their hands on it. So I am not talking about that. I am talking about us. I am talking

about the way we think. I am talking about we are always looking for an angle on God. Always, always, always said a couple of weeks ago. Said it already once today. Most of what we do for God has absolutely nothing to do. You see it in the book of Judges where they play to pretend to be spiritual, but there is no king in Israel, and every man does what is right in his own eyes. We see in the book of Esther where everybody is pretending to be what God wants, and you cannot find God anywhere in the book. Not even mentioned one time. Only book in the Bible. Boy, we sure play our games.

Then the next thing, really the last thing. He said down here in chapter 2, verse 3, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" You know what you lose? The next thing you lose. Not only do you, do you lose everything in life because everything you put the bag has holes in it. Not only do you lose all the other stuff that we talked about, but now you lose your point of reference. You lose your perspective. There was not anybody there that was remembering the glory that when Solomon built that temple back in 1 Kings and Chronicles or 2 Kings and Chronicles was not anybody that remembered what the glory was. You know what? That is the problem we have today. That is one legitimate thing. I feel bad for some of you young guys trying to learn how to preach and be in the ministry. I try to give you the best I can, but it is, it is, it is, I do not know what to do is the fact that we now have it in this Laodicean church age so long that there is just no good representatives of what it really used to be like. This is the, this is the really the number one problem that pastors have. There are two pastors today. They have no doctrine. They have no truth. They have no history. They have no point of reference. It is true of God's people. They do not know the real thing. They cannot tell what is real by what is phony. They sit down and listen to me and sit down and listen to a Jehovah Witness or a Mormon or a Muslim or somebody else. They are confused. Why? That they do not have a point of reference. They do not know history. They do not know what was real. They do not have any landmarks. They forgot in the great days of Israel in the Old Testament that that they were a landmark. They forgot that there are benchmarks through the Bible and through history that you can measure where you are at, that you can always know what is real versus what is phony. We get to the point when we get to this place here, we lose our perspective.

You know, I never hunted with a dog, bird dog. I knew lots of guys that do. Some of you guys have them. Another guy told me one time, I asked him, I said, "How long does it take to train a really good bird dog?" He says, "Well, it depends on the dog and depends on the guy that trains him. They have all different kinds of ways they train him." I said, "What is the first, what is the number one thing you want your dog to do?" Because I always ask these questions because I usually know there is some kind of biblical context. "What is the number one thing you want in a bird dog?" And old boy told me, and maybe everybody has something different. I do not know. I never did an in-depth study on bird dogs. But I asked this a while, I said, I said, "What is in your mind, what is the best bird dog?" He said to me, "The best bird dog is one that when he goes on point, he never gets off point, so I call him off." I said, "You mean he never, he does not lose his focus." I said, "That is right." I said, "The best bird dog is a dog that no matter what the distractions are around him, he never gets off point of what he knows to be what he is the point for." I walked out to myself, you know what, I wish I could train God's people that way. I wish I

could get some of you to see the real issues instead of some of the stupid issues we invest our time in. I wish I could get some of you to see and get on point and understand how this thing that you never get distracted, and that you stay growing spiritually. Growing spiritually is the number one thing, and this year as we enter into this time period, I am telling you, it is the number one thing that we have got to focus on. It is the number one thing that you, no matter what you have got to do, no matter who you have got to do it with, you build your accountability factor into it that you do not let yourself slide. Because once you do, once you just get the intellect and the conceptual and let it all go, you are going to just head down that slippery slope. Once you just get the intellect and you are going to drop the conceptual, you are going to become a spiritual Pharisee. You are going to be like that lady so many years ago that just look around here, just nitpick everything because you are so spiritual, you are the discerner of truth at Old Path Baptist Church. Not so. But that is what you get into. You have to, this next year, if you are going to get to where God wants you to go, you have to grow spiritually.

## VIII. The Call to Spiritual Growth and Accountability

Now the good news.

Haggai 1:14-15

They finally got back to work. Now, brand new day, 2008, your decision to serve God, your decision of going to make this year count, of not falling in the same old traps you did last year, your decision to change about you, what you know needs to be changed, is going to come down to one issue, ladies and gentlemen, your spiritual growth. That is going to come down to one single issue, your accountability and your spiritual growth. I suggest to you, do not come to me with it, there is enough people in here that can deal with it. If you are somebody who has got a special, I will help you, but the bottom line is, the majority of you, you get in your little groups, you come over and see me, I will cut a plan for you. I will get you going in the Bible, I will help you. You know, my door is always open 24/7. The bottom line is this, you need more than that. You need to make sure that the balance between your, what you get intellectually, and what you do with it conceptually, stays in balance. You keep growing spiritually. We do not need any more Pharisees in this church. We do not need any more dead wood in this church. We just need some dogs. We are all dogs who just know how to stay on point. That is what we need. Everybody had a bow and everybody closed. Now I am going to say this today very quickly, and we are going to be finished this morning.