

Living Church News

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Inside:

**"Return" to God
In EVERY Way!.....3**

**Hold Fast to
Your Spiritual
Treasure.....6**

**How To Escape
Satan's Snares9**

**Are You a
Pillar or
A Pillow?12**

Rule Your Money.....14

**Why Be
Thankful?17**

**Local Church
News22**

Commentary24

Do Not "Kid" Yourself!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

We in this Work cannot serve you or genuinely help you unless we encourage you to *face the facts*. Therefore, we continually put before you the **reality** of what lies just ahead. You—as a member of the Living Church of God—should be very familiar with the absolutely **terrifying** events prophesied to occur within the next several years. And you have also been warned that *God's own people* will suffer great trials and persecutions at the time of the end.

Remember Jesus Christ's own direct warning: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. *I did not come to bring peace but a sword*. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household'" (Matthew 10:34–36).

Also, Christ warns us that Satan, the "accuser," will soon be cast down to this earth, "having **great wrath**, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:10–12). At that point, probably in the *next several years*, Satan will **strike** at the true Church of God that is *directly preparing* its members to be kings and priests who will *replace* Satan and his demons in ruling this world. Yes, Satan knows *who* we are and *where* we live!

So, we *cannot afford* to be anywhere but in the very "center" of God's will. We *must* be truly close to God to have *His divine protection*—and to have the spiritual **strength of character** to go through whatever trials and persecutions God may allow to come—even *on us*. For we will soon be *tested* by "fiery" trials such as have **never** descended upon us before! As Peter was inspired to tell us, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Are you genuinely "ready?"

Are **you**—in your daily life—developing the *strength of character* to go through these trials with **faith** and with the love of God?

For *your sake*, please do not "kid" yourself! "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

So, *think carefully!*

In *your* daily life, do you often "cut corners"—so to speak—by only praying for a few minutes? Do you fail, sometimes for days at a time, to really

study the Bible? Do you only fast once or twice in *an entire year*?

Also, when you are not really close to God, do you find yourself drifting into “worldly” attitudes and thinking *vain* thoughts, *lustful* thoughts, *hateful* thoughts—thoughts you would be ashamed to have God know about? Of course, He *does* know about them! In your conduct throughout the day—including the very *way you use your time*—do you indicate by your *actions* that God’s Kingdom is absolutely “first” in your life? Or does God seem “way off,” such that instead of drawing closer to your brethren and your Savior, you find yourself *criticizing* and *judging* your fellow Church members, and even God’s true ministers at times? And do you then find yourself feeling *bitter* against others, or “letting down” in *many other ways* from the standards of Jesus Christ—perhaps drifting into drinking too much, smoking, lying, cursing or cheating in various matters?

Be honest!

Brethren, if we are to survive the coming trials, tests and persecutions, we simply must be *filled with* and *led by* God’s Holy Spirit! For our daily actions—the “fruits” of our lives—reveal whether or not we are spiritually strong, and whether we are up to facing the enormous challenges and trials just ahead. Godly character *cannot* be instantly created or granted by fiat. It must be carefully developed by each of us, over a period of time. Character is that moral or spiritual force within which impels one to integrity. *True character* is exercising the power of the Holy Spirit so that we resist the wrong thoughts and actions and, on the contrary, determine with all our heart—through prayer and study and conscious effort—to do the “right thing” in every thing we think and say and do.

Therefore, asking God for His extra help and guidance through His Spirit, we must nevertheless *drive ourselves* to develop godly habits, consciously make godly choices, and always be sure that we constantly think godly thoughts. Otherwise, wrong thoughts will *pull us down*. Remember, sin begins in the *mind*—not in some part of the body. That is why we are told to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). It must begin in the *mind*. And then we must carefully determine to *develop those habits* of humble Bible study, heartfelt prayer, meditation and regular fasting so that we may truly be “drinking in” of the mind and character of God on a regular basis. Otherwise, the attitudes of self and Satan—which are literally *swirling around us* in this sin-filled world—will predominate in our thoughts and actions!

Certainly, as so many Protestants would be quick to tell us, we are not “saved” by consciously doing good. However, what the Protestants really misunderstand is that we are *justified*—forgiven our past sins—through the sacrifice of Christ. Then,

Continued on page 21

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“Return” to God in EVERY Way!

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

As the 21st century gets underway, God is obviously positioning the Living Church of God to do a **powerful** Work. Prophesied events are occurring with increasing frequency. Christ is coming soon. And we are among the very few people on earth to grasp the true significance of all these things.

Yet, the Work of God is not going forward nearly as fast as it seemingly should. We are now able to be on only a small fraction of the number of commercial television stations in North America, compared to the number in Mr. Armstrong's day. **Why?**

Part of the answer is that too many of God's people are **not** fully obeying a fundamental and extremely important law of God. Therefore, the Creator's blessing cannot be fully given to these people or to the Church until this sin is rectified.

What Is This Sin?

The book of Malachi is a prophetic book that helps bridge the gap between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In Malachi 3:1, God says: “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the LORD, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming.” Here, the Logos or “Word” of the Old Testament predicts both His first and second comings. For He describes (v. 4) how the “offerings” of His people will again become acceptable. This certainly did **not** take place at Christ's first coming. Instead, His own people actually demanded His crucifixion!

So, in this dual prophecy, Christ has shifted to describe His Second Coming and shows how He will be a “swift witness” against sorcerers, adulterers, etc., who do these things. He indicates they commit these sins, “because they do not **fear Me**” (v. 5). Then, in this prophetic passage bridging both Old and New Testaments, the One who became Jesus Christ says: “For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances” (vv. 6–7). At this juncture, the living Christ challenges His people: “**Return** to Me, and I will return to you.... But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’” (v. 7)

God answers, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this.... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (vv. 8–10). Yes, how can many of God's people who have grown lukewarm truly “return” to their Creator and receive His full measure of blessing?

In the confusion that followed the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God, it is perhaps understandable that some became very lax in tithing. They had been confused in many ways. And some had heard or read all kinds of ideas or “reasonings” trying to get around the Bible's clear teachings and examples regarding tithing.

But God commands me, as His minister: “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My peo-

ple their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1). It is my responsibility to **warn** God's people about this violation of His law. For it is not only slowing the progress of the Work of God, it is profoundly hurting the spiritual life of those non-tithers. It is severely damaging their personal relationship with God!

For note again—in His own words—the way God looks at this matter: “Will a man **rob God**? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In **tithes** and **offerings**” (Malachi 3:8). Does that sound like some “minor issue” in the mind of God? Notice also God's very clear concern about the lack of **offerings** as well as the duty to pay a full **tithe** to our Creator! The point is that if you have an income, you **can** afford to tithe because—in this very passage—God promises to **bless** those who obey Him in this vital matter. Most of you are doing this, and you are experiencing for yourselves God's blessings as a result. But too many are hurting themselves by neglecting this vital instruction from Almighty God!

For many, it has been a long time since they have carefully reviewed what the Bible teaches about tithing. Let us take a look at what God has shown us about this vitally important topic.

The EXAMPLE of Abraham

Long before the Old Covenant was even proposed, God guided Abraham to tithe. In the New Testament book of Romans, Abraham is referred to as the “father” of the faithful (Romans 4:11, 16). In fact, Abraham's very example of acting on **faith** is set forth in this chapter as the “key” to Abraham's righteousness! The very promise that Abraham would be “heir

of the world” was *not* through the law, but “through the righteousness of *faith*” (v. 13). So Abraham’s shining *example* of acting on faith is here set forth as *the way* to eternal life and to an eternal inheritance of this earth!

One of the primary examples of that “saving” faith of Abraham is given in Genesis 14. After telling the story of Abraham’s rescue of Lot and the return of *all* his possessions, we read: “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a *tithe* of all” (vv. 18–20).

Here God is described as “the Possessor of heaven and earth.” For *everything* belongs to God. He made it. He made us. He gives us our lives and He gives us every breath of air we breathe. Melchizedek described God in this way and then indicated that it was *God* who delivered Abraham’s enemies into his hand.

So Abraham, who obviously “walked with God”—who actually conversed with the One who became Jesus Christ, and who knew God and His will in a profound way—gave God a *tenth* of everything he recovered. That was the inspired *example* of Abraham.

Later, we read of the patriarch Jacob vowing to God: “And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a *tenth* to You” (Genesis 28:22). So the principle of paying God a *tithe* was well understood by the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Actually tithing is not only a principle, it is one of God’s “statutes” just as surely as the Holy Days and the law of clean and unclean meats! And God tells us that our spiritual father, Abraham, was blessed, “because Abraham obeyed

My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My *statutes*, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5).

Old Covenant Tithing

When the Old Covenant was introduced, God—for that time—directed that the tithe be given to the Levitical priests for the “work” they were doing in and around God’s Tabernacle or Temple. In His instruction to the Levites, God commanded, “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’s. It is holy to the LORD. If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD” (Leviticus 27:30–32).

In Numbers 18:20–21, God instructed: “Then the LORD said to Aaron: ‘You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.’”

Since the Levites were not given their own territory or allowed to take “regular” jobs, they were given the tithes of the people of Israel “for the *work* which they performed.” Today, very few indeed of God’s pastors and evangelists have the time for secular jobs. With a truly globe-girdling Work to perform via the electronic media, publishing and a worldwide network of congregations and video groups, there is *no way* for our key ministerial personnel to make the telecasts and radio programs, write and edit the articles and booklets, counsel and coordinate the ministry and brethren all around the world and still be able to hold down a secular job!

A CHANGE in the Tithing Law

Just as God transferred the tithes to the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament, so He transferred them back to the priesthood of Melchizedek in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews makes this clear. After describing how Abraham gave Melchizedek a “tenth” of the spoils, God describes how Melchizedek “remains a priest continually” (Hebrews 7:1–3). Obviously, as has been explained elsewhere, Melchizedek was the One who became Jesus Christ. Then God describes how the priests had a “commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law” (v. 5). He proceeds to show how even Levi “paid tithes” through Abraham to Melchizedek—clearly the greater priesthood (v. 9).

Finally, the inspired author of Hebrews tells us: “Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (vv. 11–12).

Brethren, the term “law” in either the Greek or Hebrew language is similar to its use in English. It can mean civil law, natural law (like the law of gravity), or a spiritual law. It all depends upon the context of the subject under discussion. In this passage in Hebrews 7, both the priesthood *and* the law of tithing are under discussion.

As the respected *Interpreters Bible Commentary* states: “When the priesthood is changed, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. What could this mean? That the whole law was set aside? Then why is the argument based on the priesthood of

Melchizedek, relying as it had to on Genesis 14:17–20? As Calvin observed, in the law we find ‘many remarkable sentences by which we are instructed as to faith, and as to the fear of God. None of these were abolished by Christ, but only that part which regarded the ancient priesthood.’ Jesus Himself had said, ‘Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished’ (Matthew 5:17–18). If the whole law were abolished, why should such pains be taken to establish the validity of Christ’s priesthood?” (Vol. 11, p. 667).

Notice, brethren, the rather tortured logic that this and other Protestant commentaries employ in this passage. On the one hand they are reluctant to admit that any part of God’s law is still binding. On the other hand, they have great difficulty with the very clear words of Christ and especially the Apostles James and John about the continuing validity of God’s laws (James 2:10–12; 1 John 2:3–4).

So consider again the context of Hebrews 7:11–12. Again, both the priesthood and the law of tithing are being discussed. Does this passage say that God’s priesthood is now *abolished*? Of course not! It says, rather, that the priesthood of Melchizedek has been reinstated in place of the Levitical priesthood. And does it say that the law of tithing has been *abolished*? Again, of course not! It has merely been changed, as the priesthood was changed or “transferred,” so that the tithes are once again paid to the priesthood of Melchizedek—nowadays, to the ministry of Jesus Christ!

For the Greek word used in both places in Hebrews 7:12 is *metathesis*, which does *not* mean to “do away

with,” but to “transfer.” W.E. Vine, in the *Expositor’s Dictionary of Biblical Words*, expresses it this way: “*Metathesis*, a transposition, or a transference from one place to another” (p. 95). For in Hebrews 11:5, speaking of Enoch, this same Greek word is rendered “translation.” Was righteous Enoch “translated” or “transferred” to a place of safety? Or was Enoch *abolished*? Obviously, neither Enoch nor God’s tithing law were abolished! The right

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to receive tithes was simply transferred from the Aaronic priesthood to the ministry of Jesus Christ!

Further New Testament Instruction

The direct teachings of Jesus Christ have *not* been done away! In spite of long-winded arguments and “reasonings” of deceived men, it is very difficult to get around Jesus’ direct statement regarding tithing.

Jesus was teaching the multitudes and His disciples in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. He warned them not to follow the wrong example of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1–4). In this context Jesus corrected these misguided religious leaders:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (v. 23).

These self-righteous hypocrites were very zealous about tithing on every little plant and herb in their gardens. But they grossly neglected the loving application of justice, mercy and faith. “These,” Jesus said, “you ought to have done *without* leaving the others [conscientious *tithing*] undone.”

How clear!

The Son of God commanded us *not* to forsake carefully paying our tithes to God! And Jesus *never* rescinded this very clear instruction. And nobody *else* had better try to rescind it either! For this inspired instruction about Christian living is certainly no less important than the biblical prophecies. Yet, Christ tells us plainly in Revelation 22:18–19: “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

This living Christ inspired the Apostle Paul to write: “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). So it should be very clear that God does want His faithful ministers to be supported—*not* by begging or whining over television, from the pulpit or anywhere else for “gifts” from the brethren—but by the *tithes* which all humans owe their Creator who gives them life and breath!

As Herbert W. Armstrong wrote years ago, a true Christian cannot af-

Continued on page 20

Hold Fast to Your Spiritual Treasure

By Richard F. Ames

Years ago in Mira Mesa, California, two men were attempting to anchor a U.S. Navy dirigible to a docking mast. They carefully maneuvered the two ropes attached to the nose of the airship. Suddenly, a gust of wind blew the airship up into the air, catching the rope handlers by surprise. The men held on to their ropes as the airship climbed several hundred feet into the sky. One man let go, and fell to his death. The other man wrapped the rope around his wrist, leg and whole body, and gripped the rope tightly. In about half an hour, the airship slowly returned to the ground, and the man who had held fast had saved his life!

The Bible tells us to hold fast, and not let go of the spiritual treasure God has given us—His truth! There are many scriptures that urge us to hold fast, to hang on and to persevere. Will you hang on to God's truth until the very end of your life? Will you continue to live by every word of God? Or will you *compromise*?

Most of us are familiar with Christ's message to Philadelphian Christians. After describing the open door He sets before them, and reminding them that because of their faithfulness they will be protected from the greatest tribulation ever to come upon the world, He gives this exhortation: "Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast** what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). Or as the NIV states it: "I am coming soon. **Hold on** to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

Our Father in heaven has called us to train as kings and priests. That awesome calling leads to eternal life in the royal family of God, but it requires perseverance. The Apostle Paul persevered and wrote about that promised crown of royal rulership: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me

only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Think of physical situations in which one holds something tightly. We already saw the example of a man who held fast to a rope and saved his life. Circus acrobats and aerialists will somersault through the air from trapeze to trapeze. They catch each other flying through the air, supporting one another by an interlocking grip—they hold

tight, they hold fast. By contrast, some of us become careless and may even drop a glass of water or a plate of food. Can you imagine someone challenging you in a tug-of-war, trying to snatch away your crown? Will you hold fast with determination?

We need to ask: to *what* should we **hold fast** spiritually? Billions of human beings are holding fast *not* to the truth, but to false doctrine and false authority. In this article, we will consider *five spiritual treasures*—five spiritual fundamentals that we need to internalize,

develop and hold tightly until we die! These will overlap, but each has a special emphasis. We need to hold fast to these five essentials.

Key 1: Hold Fast to True Values

God tells us: "Test all things; **hold fast** what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The *King James Version* states: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" and the NIV states: "Test *everything*. Hold on to the good." We know that God's word is "good" and that He is "righteous in all His ways" (Psalm 145:17).

God's word teaches us true values and how to recognize false values. God expects us to apply the principles of His commandments, statutes, and laws in every facet of our lives. Godly character includes honesty, wisdom, patience, giving, caring, responsiveness, and diligence. God's people need to recapture true values of life, work,

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family relations, entertainment, industry, business, literature, music. The very process is stimulating! Consider humor for a minute. Do you laugh at every joke you hear or “humorous” e-mail you receive, just because *others* find it funny? My wife and I enjoy good humor. We can appreciate the irony, the exaggeration, or the incongruity of a situation or story. Some humor effectively illustrates a biblical principle. But I am generally on guard to filter and test what this world has to offer. Think before you laugh.

You may have heard Mr. Davy Crockett’s sermon, “Recapture True Values” (Sermon 408, which should be available in your local congregation’s library, and is also available online at www.lcg.org), in which he emphasized *modesty, temperance and frugality*. We need to ask ourselves: Are we honoring God in our dress and appearance on the Sabbath? Are we setting a good example in our lifestyle? Are we applying God’s financial laws in our life?

Once you have tested certain principles in life, you can enjoy life with confidence, and with God’s blessings. The book of Proverbs compares living with wisdom to the sweet taste of honey: “My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste; so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; if you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 24:13–14).

Brethren, hold fast to true values, hold fast to that which you have tested and proven is good. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. *Cling* to what is good” (Romans 12:9). Recapture *true values*, based on the word of God and hold fast to what is good!

Key 2: Hold Fast to the Words of Truth

We all know that God’s word is truth (John 17:17). How thankful we are that God’s truth, when applied, gives us true freedom (John 8:31–32). Paul wrote to Titus that an elder must be blameless, “*holding fast the faithful word* as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). When we determine to live by God’s word and not compromise, we internalize God’s way of life, and it becomes a part of our spiritual character. But we must study and apply the words of truth. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*” or as the NIV translates it, “a workman who does not need to be ashamed and *who correctly handles the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15).

How many in this world of 6.5 billion human beings understand the truth of the Bible? Even if as many as 65,000 understood, that would be one out of 100,000 people. Brethren, I hope you will come to understand the incredi-

ble blessing it is to know the truth! Years ago, when I was a young man being called into God’s Church, the Protestant minister of my former church asked me, “Why are you leaving the church?” I told him, “When you find the truth, you go after it!” He replied (and I believe God led him to say this), “Oh, the Pearl of Great Price!” I said, “Yes!”

Jesus gave several parables illustrating the precious value of the Truth, including the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45–46) and the parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44). How many of us have been willing to give up all of our selfish desires, and go after the true treasures? Do we understand how priceless and valuable the truth is?

What *truths* do you treasure? Here are just a few of the many we could list:

- The nature of God. He is the Creator and Lawgiver, and He is love.
- The purpose of life. We are preparing to be born into God’s Kingdom as glorified children in His Family.
- The truth about heaven, hell, death and the resurrections. The truth frees us from false religious myths and deceptions.
- God’s way of life. We strive to live by His every word and to fulfill His law of love.
- God’s plan of salvation. He reveals His plan through the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days.
- The purpose and revelation of prophecy. God wants His people in the end-time to understand how He is working on the earth, so we can be ready for His return.
- God’s promises to His children. His promises lead to the abundant life now, and in the future.

Brethren, we should be striving to be faithful disciples (students and followers) of Christ, and should be studying God’s word daily. We must hold fast to the words of truth! The Apostle Paul exhorts us “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if *you hold fast that word* which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1–2).

Key 3: Hold Fast by Committing to Persevere

Remember that Christ has given us a *command* to persevere! “Because you have kept My *command to persevere*, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10). All of us who have been baptized made that commitment to persevere to the end; we

“counted the cost” and gave our lives to Christ as His servants. Every year, as we examine ourselves for the Passover, we ask ourselves, “Am I still deeply committed to persevere to the end? Am I willing to continue in the faith and even give my life for the faith? Will I be faithful to God and Christ until the day I die?”

There are many physical analogies for perseverance, especially in sports. The 2008 Summer Olympics provided many examples of those who did not give up under pressure and stress. The book of Hebrews exhorts us to run with endurance: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

God gives us the spiritual strength to “run” daily. He promises us: “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:29–31).

We all face trials, and Satan tries to discourage and deceive us. But we must resist the devil and persevere in the Truth! Think of all our faithful brethren who have endured, and those who in the past few years died in the faith. The faith chapter, Hebrews 11, assures us: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v. 13).

Hold fast to your commitment to endure: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Always persevere in your commitment to supporting God’s Work of preaching the Gospel to the world (v. 14).

Key 4: Hold Fast to Hope by Exercising Vision

God has revealed an awesome future to His children. Bible prophecy gives us a vision of the Kingdom of God on earth and the glory of the Millennium and beyond. This vision gives us hope for the future. We must never

lose hope; we must hold fast to the hope God has given us. The book of Hebrews emphasizes this principle several times: “Let us *hold fast* the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

We must exercise faith in God’s promises. We demonstrate that faith by the way we live, which includes our observance of the weekly Sabbaths and annual festivals that give us vision for the future. The next two verses of Hebrews 10 exhort us: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (vv. 24–25).

Some of God’s people are “letting go” instead of *holding fast*, by neglecting Sabbath services when they could make the effort to attend. Certainly, some face genuine obstacles of insurmountable distances and unaffordable fuel expenses, which we in the ministry do understand. However, we must do what we can, as best as we can, to obey God’s instruction that we assemble ourselves together.

The book of Hebrews also discusses the faithfulness of Moses and Christ. Christ is building a spiritual house—but will we remain faithful as a part of that house? “And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if we hold fast* the confidence and *the rejoicing of the hope* firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:5–6).

In one sense, hope is an enthusiastic expectation of the future. We must hold fast to that hope, based on God’s promises, and on the vision He gives us for a glorious future.

Key 5: Hold Fast to God

The first great commandment is: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). God has called us to have an intimate, close relationship with Him. The Apostle John wrote that “truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1

Continued on page 19

How To Escape Satan's Snares

By Dibar K. Apartian

Could you ever fall victim to rebellion, pride or covetousness—sins that can turn even a seemingly solid, balanced Christian away from God's way of life?

From time to time, sad to say, we all hear of cases in which once-faithful Christians burn out, sour on God's Work or are caught up in some problem or distraction that takes them out of God's true Church. Many of us know such people—even former close friends—to whom this has happened.

When it occurs, we are shocked and disheartened. In disbelief, we may ask ourselves, "Why?" But it might be more appropriate if we asked ourselves, "Could that ever happen to me?"

Could it, really? Is there any possibility that you, too, might one day turn away from the Christian way of life—rejecting the calling God has given you? What assurance do you have that you are firmly rooted in God's true Church? How can you be sure—absolutely sure—that you are immune to such tragedy?

You Cannot Serve Two Masters

No matter how converted we are, it is possible for every one of us to become preoccupied with the cares of the world. Then we are easy prey for Satan's snares. We overlook Satan's relentless efforts to tempt us and attack us on our weakest points. Without realizing it—and certainly without wanting to—Christians are actually trying to serve two masters when they fall victim to the cares of the world.

Christ said: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

The more deeply you are involved in God's Work, and in the aims and activities of God's true Church, the less likely you are to fall prey to Satan's snares. It is a matter of setting your priorities right.

Strangely enough, those who leave often spend more time thinking about the Church than some of us who are still in the Church! But the concern of dissidents is destructive; they seem to want to fill their minds only with what they imagine is wrong with the Church. They want to find ways to hurt and destroy the Church.

Our focus must be the exact opposite. We must constantly look for ways to build up God's Church and His people—and must constantly work toward unity, harmony and peace.

Have you taken the time to find out what other master you may actually be trying to serve? Could it be your ego, perhaps? Your vanity? Your ambitions? Your job? A close friend or one of the other members of your own family? When you are facing trials and tribulations, do you begin to doubt your calling? Are you tempted to turn away from God's Church? Do you start to seek other ways to satisfy your desires or solve your problems?

In this article, we will take a brief look at three broad areas through

which Satan works to trap God's people, and to spur them to give up on their opportunity for salvation!

The Spirit of Rebellion

Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), is rebellious against authority. He wants you to be like him and to follow his example. He will set all kinds of stumbling blocks, hoping you will trip and fall.

Swayed by his own ambition, Satan turned against God, fought and lost (Isaiah 14:12–14). He also wants you to turn against God, fight and lose!

He will, therefore, do anything in his power to make you rebel against authority—whether at home, at work or in God's Church. He will do everything he can to work on your emotions and put all kinds of doubts in your mind.

In the name of "freedom," people all through history have turned against authority, and have chosen rebellion. Human beings have not understood that there is no place for rebellion in true freedom. Only God's way leads to real freedom—to peace, joy and happiness. The Apostle Paul reminds us that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7–8).

Is your mind set on worldly things? What preoccupies you most, day after day? Physical things or spiritual things?

Of course, you must take care of yourself as well as the needs of your

family. That has nothing to do with serving two masters. What Christ meant is something totally different: you cannot have other gods before the true God. You cannot be slave both to God and to the ways of the world.

Actually, in a world where Satan is still ruling (2 Corinthians 4:4), you do not need too much encouragement to set your mind on rebellion. Satan knows this better than anyone else. He is always available to give you the push you need. He will help you be more carnal—to become enslaved to the works of the flesh.

Scripture recounts Korah's example of rebellion. Korah and his men, 250 strong, turned against Moses and rose up before him in protest, saying, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy" (Numbers 16:1–3).

Is this the way you sometimes reason? Whenever you wonder whether you should submit to authority, remember the fate of Korah and his group: "And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment'" (vv. 20–21).

God was truly angry with the people. It was only because of the fervent intervention of Moses and Aaron that the whole congregation did not perish.

Moses strongly pleaded with God, saying: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?" So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram'" (vv. 22–24).

Notice what happened: "And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred

and fifty men who were offering incense" (v. 35).

There is a great lesson for all of us to learn. If we, too, are stirred up by Satan, we can sometimes nurture similar thoughts. We judge and criticize. "Why should I obey that order? I don't agree with it," we may say.

When you look at the world today, you can see how hard Satan is working. Everything he does is directed toward rebellion, in one way or another. Satan's attacks are primarily directed against God's Church, however—that is where he wants to do the most damage.

In a society based on Satan's principles of selfishness and vanity, obedience does not always seem pleasant or easy, but with God's help we can overcome Satan's snares. "Submit to God," wrote the Apostle James. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

This is a strong commandment. But what should you do in order to resist the devil? And how can you submit yourself to God?

James gives the answer: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (v. 8). In other words, you can draw close to God by submitting yourself more and more to Him, by hungering and thirsting for His word and His way of life. If you always put God first in your life, you will not be serving two masters.

The Snare of Pride

Another of Satan's snares—one that affects us all—is pride. Satan will tempt us by working on our pride and vanity.

We often do not recognize it in ourselves, but pride is potentially one of our biggest pitfalls. It makes us unable to recognize our faults—unwilling to apologize

when we are wrong. We want to maintain our own ways because of pride. Satan loves that, because he himself maintains his own ways and does not recognize his sins.

The Apostle James, in the course of telling us to draw closer to God in order to resist Satan, states, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Do you grasp the meaning of this verse? Pride will draw you closer to Satan's "friendship," but will put a wall of separation between you and God. Is your pride worth that tragic price? Will you turn your back on God because of your own vanity?

One of the most important lessons God gave His people through Moses was His command that they remain humble: "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.... Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses... your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage... then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth'" (Deuteronomy 8:3, 11–17).

This warning applies to us today as much as it did to our forefathers. It is only by the grace of God that we have whatever we possess.

Pride will also incite people to judge and criticize; it will make us think we know better and that our opinions are wiser. Christ said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Think of it—there is no place for the carnally proud in the Kingdom of Heaven!

Do not condemn. Do not criticize. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).

The more you know God and study His word, the more you will realize just how little you actually are.

Always be ready to admit your faults. Correct them and forgive your neighbors. When you return good for an evil deed, you will have God for your partner. He will be your friend, and will help you resolve your problems surely.

Continuing in James: “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (v. 11).

Covetousness

A third major snare of Satan’s is covetousness. Satan wants you to covet—to go after something that is not yours, or to which you are not entitled. Humanly speaking, covetousness appeals to our nature. We want to get rather than give—to have and keep for ourselves rather than share.

God actually spelled out, in the Tenth Commandment, a whole list of items after which we should not covet (Exodus 20:17).

In Satan’s world, everything is geared toward lust—false pub-

licity, sex and material wealth. The media encourage us to covet: we are given many vain but appealing reasons to buy things we do not really need, or to lust after things that are neither right nor good for us.

Are you guilty of breaking the Tenth Commandment? Are

Satan wants you to covet—to go after something that is not yours, or to which you are not entitled. Humanly speaking, covetousness appeals to our nature.

you deceived by Satan’s snare of encouraging you to covet?

There is danger in much wealth, just as there is danger in much poverty. In each circumstance, Satan can effectively use his tool of covetousness.

Agur said, under God’s inspiration: “Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die): remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:7–9).

Do you pray this way when you are asking God to supply your needs? If you have everything you want, you may deny God and turn away from Him, claiming you do not need Him anymore!

And if you have too little, you may allow Satan to tempt you to judge and condemn, and you may even end up stealing.

By contrast, Christ taught us to ask God for our daily bread—just what we need from day to day (Matthew 6:11). This will help us avoid falling into temptation. It will teach us to trust God—and not to set our hearts on material things, which are temporary (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Remember Christ’s warning: you cannot have two masters. If you lust after wealth or anything else, you will actually be trying to serve two masters.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

Be Courageous!

God has promised never to forsake you. If you let Him fight your battles, and if you resist evil by using His Spirit, you will never need to fear Satan’s snares. They will have no power over you. Satan will be powerless—totally disarmed.

Perhaps you have not thought of it this way before, but those who leave God’s Church let themselves fall victim to these three major snares of Satan: They rebel against God’s authority, they are too proud to admit they are wrong, and they covet personal gain (whether power, possessions or personal glory) ahead of God’s Work.

But you can be courageous! Act and live as a true Christian! Ask God daily to help you, then do your part in fighting against Satan’s snares. Your victory over them will speed you on your way to the Kingdom of God! ■

Are You a Pillar or a Pillow?

By Adrian Kaefer

What will our future role be in the Kingdom of God? The Apostle John recorded one description: “He who overcomes, I will make him a *pillar* in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more” (Revelation 3:12). We are to become parts of God’s government structure—pillars in His temple.

Why does God use this description? What is the function of a pillar—and how can we prepare to become pillars?

Many of us have seen the famous ancient buildings of Greece and Rome, in person or in pictures. Those buildings featured prominent pillars on the outside. Pillars supported the roof, and were important for the stability of the building. Different cities at different times favored different designs of pillars, and to this day we can discern the era in which a structure was built by looking at the shape of its pillars.

What will be the design of pillars in God’s temple? From Exodus 27:12–17 we gain a glimpse of the beauty and the meticulous detail God places on His pillars’ design. We can understand that God also places great importance on the design of His symbolic pillars as described in Revelation 3:12. God is creating in us, His symbolic pillars, a distinctive design—His own *character*.

People looking at the designs of ancient pillars can distinguish them by sight as Corinthian, Doric or Ionic pillars. Soon, the world will be able to recognize us—by our design—as belonging

to the Kingdom of God. If you are a Philadelphian Christian, this is what God promises you, if you overcome and endure to the end: you will be a pillar in the temple of God.

Are you a pillar? Are you preparing now to become a pillar? Or are you a pillow? What is the difference between a spiritual pillar and a spiritual pillow?

Some Christians today could be called “fair-weather Christians.” As long as the sun is shining on them—as long as everything seems to be working out fine—they are “good Christians.” But God expects more of His pillars, and He is testing us to see what we really are. We read: “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Over the years, most of us have met people who seemed to be pillars—people on whom we could lean and rely. They were always open, friendly and serving—yet they fell away. What lesson did we learn from this? If you lean on people, you may fall when they move. If you place your faith in other people, and your vision is to become like those other people, what happens if they fall away? Your stability is gone, and you may fall as well. Those who have placed their faith in other people, looking to them for guidance, vision and support—rather than looking to Christ—have often found that their Christian conviction can topple like a house of cards when

the ones they looked to have fallen away. This does not mean we should have a “just Jesus and me” attitude; it means that when we follow others, we should do so as they follow—imitate—Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). If others stumble, it will not cause us to stumble, as we are keeping our eyes on Christ.

The difference between a pillar, and a pillow in the shape of a pillar, can be seen when both are under pressure. That pressure may be a test from God (pressure from above), or it may be peer pressure (which presses us against each other), or it may be pressure from “every wind of doctrine” (which can push us apart). When pressure is removed, a pillar and a pillow-shaped pillar may look identical, and both can stand tall. But when they are under pressure, the difference becomes obvious: a spiritual pillow gives in to every form of pressure, while a true pillar will continue to stand tall and unmoved.

Not every Christian is a Philadelphian. Scripture describes another group of Christians in the end-time who are known for their “laid-back” attitude. These Christians are, in a sense, functioning as spiritual pillows rather than pillars, as they are quick to “bend” to the world around them, often seeking ways to fulfill the “minimum” requirements while “doing their own thing.”

When we compare the properties of pillars and pillows, we can see some areas in which we need to examine our own charac-

ter and attitude, if we hope to realize our calling as Philadelphian pillars in the temple of God:

Pillars are unbendable and strong. Pillows are flimsy—they do not sustain weight without bending as they give in to pressure.

Pillars are solid, inside and out. The outside reflects what is inside. Pillows may have a firm exterior, but they contain a softer filling inside. Some pillows are filled with air, which makes them look more substantial than they truly are.

Pillars stand upright; they serve a higher purpose above themselves. Pillows usually lay down flat, serving to increase comfort at their own level.

Pillars are built to carry weight; they become stronger and more effective when they stand with others. Pillows are built for comfort. If you increase the number of pillows, you may gain more comfort, but you will lose stability. Sitting on one pillow may be comfortable, but try sitting on a stack of pillows and see what happens!

Pillars are fixed in place, supporting a building. Pillows are movable interior decorations, providing comfort for those inside the building.

For some of us, it may be much easier to fall into the category of “pillow.” Especially when we are spiritually weak, or feel drained by the challenges of Christian life, we may tend to seek comfort, the relief of pressure, and the “easy way out” of our troubles. But quick momentary relief will not help us fulfill our calling. There is no “vacation” from our Christian commitment. If you take a

piece of metal out of the fire before it is refined, it will be ruined. If you try to use a piece of rock as a column before it is hewn, it will fail. So we, who are called to be pillars, must strive to develop the qualities of a pillar—learning to remain strong, consistent, serving, effective team members and focused on a mission above and outside ourselves.

Ancient King David wrote: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). God is right now creating in us the ability to support His Church and its brethren. He, through His Spirit within us, is developing us by pu-

A pillar is useful not only because of what it is made of, but because of where it stands. We must be sure of where we stand so we can carry out our God-given responsibilities.

rifying and strengthening us to become pillars of solid substance. We read: “For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined” (Psalm 66:10). Strong pillars are refined—purified—into unadulterated substance when the process of refinement is complete.

A pillar is useful not only because of what it is made of, but because of where it stands. We must be sure of where we stand, so we can carry out our God-given responsibilities. A single pillar standing at the edge of God’s word will not be very useful. To fulfill our potential, we need other pillars with whom we can help share one an-

other’s loads. Each pillar must be sure that it stands on solid ground.

A foundation does not move to where the pillars are; rather, pillars must be built on the proper foundation. We know that any pillar is only as strong as the foundation on which it is built. No matter how strong or how stable it may seem, a pillar built on sand will eventually fall. Jesus warned us that “everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7:26–27). We must be careful that we are built as pillars on the solid foundation of the Rock—which is Christ, the Word of God.

Now that we have heard the qualities that define a real pillar, what will we do? We are told: “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11). Let us each keep and revive the zeal we had when we were first called. Let us be sure we are building on the foundation of Christ, rather than self. We must avoid overconfidence, remembering the Apostle Paul’s admonition, “therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). What good are we as pillars if we let ourselves fall? The choice is ours.

The next time you lay your head on a pillow, be thankful for the comfort it provides, but remember: *your* calling is to be a strong pillar! ■

Rule Your Money

By Rod Reynolds

"Money can't buy happiness," the old saying goes—and it is a true saying. Many people who have more than enough money live empty, frustrated and miserable lives. But it is also true that learning to manage your money, and keeping it in proper perspective, can relieve you of much distress and add a great deal to your enjoyment of life.

How can ruling your money well help you in life? There are several ways. First, it can help you avoid the curses of poverty, chronic indebtedness and never having enough to "make ends meet." Second, it can keep you from being ruled by such evils as greed, avarice, miserliness and lust for material possessions. Third, it can help you reap the blessings inherent in exercising the principle, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In this article, we will look at each of these ways in which ruling your money effectively can enrich your life.

Rule Money and Avoid Poverty

Contrary to a common belief, it is not a sin to be rich. Poverty is not an inherently righteous circumstance. God Himself is rich, inasmuch as He is the owner of everything. "All that is in heaven and in earth is Yours... O LORD" (1 Chronicles 29:11). It is He who makes it possible for others to be rich. "Both riches and honor come from You" (v. 12; cf. Deuteronomy 8:18).

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, David and Solomon worshiped God and were very wealthy. Having wealth, and at the same time being able to use it wisely to enhance life's joys, is a gift from God. "As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart" (Ecclesiastes 5:19–20). Poverty, on the other hand, is a curse that often brings with it destruction. "The destruction of the poor is their poverty" (Proverbs 10:15).

When we are talking about ruling our money, we are really talking about ruling ourselves, because self-control is the key to handling money wisely. This will become more and more evident as we study into this subject.

Learning to save, and saving from an early age, is an important aspect of ruling money. But the natural tendency, especially when we are young, is to spend all we have on immediate and temporary pleasures. The Bible says that those who squander what they have are foolish. "There is

desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it" (Proverbs 21:20).

Scripture uses the lowly ant not only as an example of industriousness, but of wisdom in saving a portion of what is earned. "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest" (Proverbs 6:6–8). In this regard, God inspired Joseph to save the grain in Egypt during years of plenty so that, when years of leanness came, there would be enough in reserve (Genesis 41:47–49, 53–57).

Christ's parable of the talents illustrates the principle of saving so that our money grows with interest. The unprofitable servant was told, "you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest" (Matthew 25:27). One who starts saving just \$100 a month at age 20, assuming an average annual 10 percent growth rate compounded quarterly (note that historically, since 1929, the U.S. stock market has averaged a bit more than 12 percent annually), will have accumulated more than a million dollars by age 65.

Working and saving, in order to be assured of having plenty later in life when we are unable to work—or simply to ensure our financial security—is a most important principle in learning to rule money. Another benefit of saving is that if we do so, we will be far less likely to borrow money and incur debt.

Certainly there may be occasions when borrowing is necessary, if not desirable. However, by saving diligently for anticipated needs or unexpected emergencies, borrowing can be kept to a minimum, if not eliminated altogether. Remember, those who borrow put themselves in the position of being servant to the lender, who profits from the borrower's labor. "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). Those who save are putting themselves in the position of the lender and owner, who is in a position to profit from the labor of others.

What if you are already in debt? You can make a plan to get out of debt, and commit to following it carefully and systematically. First, change your spending habits. Put yourself on a budget. Start keeping track of every dollar you earn, and every dollar you spend. Plan your spending in advance, so you can know exactly where your money is going. Get rid of your credit cards (or perhaps keep just one, in case of some extraordinary emergency), and resolve not to add any further to your debt. Make sure your tithes

and fixed expenses are taken care of, then set aside the money to cover your basic necessities. With your remaining money, set aside enough for an emergency fund—perhaps two months' salary—to cover unforeseen expenses, then set yourself to paying down your debts as fast as you can. Begin with the smallest debt, then gradually work your way up to your biggest debts. It may take time—and you may need to take on an extra job and do without treats you have long taken for granted—but you can gradually work your way out of debt, to the point where you are actually saving enough money so that you may never need to go into debt again. Remember, while you need to do your part, you can also rely on God to bless and sustain and guide your efforts—so be sure to stay close to Him in prayer, Bible study and fasting while you work to pull yourself out of debt.

Especially for those who have grown used to the convenience and easy temptation of credit cards, it requires moderation and great discipline to save money and manage money effectively. The lack of self-control will eventually lead a person to poverty. This can occur when one's lack of self-control leads to laziness or irresponsibility. "He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes one rich" (Proverbs 10:4). One important aspect of diligent living is planning and preparing for the future. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5). Rushed, hasty plans lead to poverty. As Scripture explains here, it is not enough to work hard; we should also strive to "work smart."

Smart planning is planning ahead. This means planning your life. Young people, just starting out in life, should plan and prepare to get the right education so they can do what they *like* to do to earn a living, rather than what their circumstances *force* them to do. It takes time to carefully make decisions about a career, just as it does to choose a mate or to resolve any other important matter in life. It takes time—and open-mindedness—to get the facts before making life-changing decisions. For example, it is wise to date widely before marriage, so you can get to know yourself and the opposite sex well before making a lifetime commitment. Similarly, before choosing a career, it is wise to learn about many possible careers. Analyze your interests. Identify your strengths and weaknesses. Pray diligently and ask God for guidance. Planning properly is an important key to success in any endeavor. Even if you are older, and are already married and in a career, planning is still important, as you consider the future of your marriage and your career.

Some brethren get the wrong idea that they need not plan for the future, because they expect Christ to return in just a few years. Some who used such erroneous reasoning

a few decades ago chose not to have children, not to get an education, and not to save for the future. They deprived themselves of the opportunity for a richer and happier physical life—and in many cases, when their expectation of Christ's return did not come to pass on their timetable, they became embittered against their Savior and ruined their spiritual life as well. While we today can see clearly the signs of the times we are in, we also understand that none of us knows the exact time of Christ's return, nor how many years out into the future it will be (Matthew 24:36). The principles we are discussing are valid today, and will be valid far into the future. The wise approach is to plan as though you were going to live out your full life in this age, while keeping yourself ready at all times for Christ's return (vv. 42–44).

Intemperance in food and drink has led many to skid row. "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:21). The same is true of going to excess or practicing lawlessness in seeking any other physical pleasure. "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17).

Sexual immorality, in particular, tends to result not only in dishonor, but also in poverty. "A companion of harlots wastes his wealth" (Proverbs 29:3). "By means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread" (Proverbs 6:26). Many men and women have lost careers, families and fortunes because of immoral sexual conduct.

It is no accident that the greatest number of those whom the government labels as "poor" are single women along with their children. Few of these women are widowed; most are divorced or were never married. Often, their families were broken apart by sexual misconduct by one or both partners in marriage (*Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?*, National Center For Policy Analysis, 1994, pp. 14–15). More than half the marriages in the United States end in divorce, and financial problems and infidelity are often listed as the two chief reasons.

For decades, in the United States, the percentage of children born out of wedlock has been spiraling upwards. In 1999, for the first time, government statistics showed that fully one-third of births in the U.S. were to unwed mothers ("Unwed Mothers Set a Record for Births," *Washington Times*, April 18, 2001). By 2005, the percentage had risen to 37 percent, according to government statistics (*Associated Press*, November 21, 2006). For nearly two decades, the rate of out-of-wedlock births in many of the nation's major cities has exceeded 50 percent. This has fueled a cycle of poverty, as those who grow up with unwed parents are much more likely to themselves become unwed parents, and add to the rolls of welfare recipients (*Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?*, pp. 15–16).

These statistics represent a serious ongoing moral, spiritual, economic and social calamity that affects our entire

society. Between 1965 and 1994, *five trillion* dollars (not counting private assistance to the poor) was spent on welfare in the U.S. (*ibid.*, p. i). Since then, despite the welfare reform measures passed by Congress in the mid-90s, welfare spending has continued to mushroom, and trillions more dollars have been spent (*Means-Tested Welfare Spending: Past and Future Growth*, Robert E. Rector, Heritage Foundation, March 7, 2001). Much of this could be avoided if families remained intact and a well-educated, hard-working father could provide for his children.

Do Not Let Money Rule You

Money should not be your god. Only God should be your God. When you are motivated by an inordinate desire for wealth, by greed or by lust for material possessions, you become a slave to what you desire. Many greedy, lustful and miserly people have become rich, but have done so to their own hurt and destruction. God may allow such people to prosper for a time, but the day of reckoning will come. “He who trusts in riches will fall” (Proverbs 11:28).

Trusting in riches—setting your heart on money or the things it can buy—blinds you to the deeper and more lasting values that make life really worthwhile. For this reason, the Bible speaks of the “deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:18–19). As the parable of the sower and the seed shows, those consumed with material interests shut themselves out of the Kingdom of God. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives to us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

We need to realize that money, like everything of this world, is only temporary. “Riches are not forever” (Proverbs 27:24). But the Kingdom of God is forever: “Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:31–33). God is the provider of all things. He has the power to make us rich or poor according to His will. “The LORD makes poor and makes rich” (1 Samuel 2:7).

When we worship God and put Him first, allowing Him to bless us with riches, we avoid the sorrows of ill-gotten riches. “The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22). By contrast, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Christ warned us: “‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool!

This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:15–21).

When we look at the world around us, we see that it is not at all unusual for unscrupulous people—fraudulent religious leaders, businesspeople, politicians and others—to try to take advantage of the poor and the gullible to make themselves wealthy. Jesus warned us to beware of false religious leaders “who devour widows’ houses” (Luke 20:46–47). Anyone who watches a little television can see a multitude of charlatans who misuse Scripture and make illicit emotional appeals to per-

suade well-meaning but deluded people to empty their bank accounts and retirement funds, and even to give up their homes, not caring that their victims may be left penniless and homeless. God, however, commands that the poor are not to be robbed and plundered; rather, they are to be treated fairly and justly by all (Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 22:16, 22–23; Jeremiah 22:3, 16–17; James 2:1–9). No less guilty are corrupt politicians who enrich themselves at public expense while feigning concern for the poor, or the crooked businesspeople who amass wealth through fraudulent financial dealings (Leviticus 19:11).

A terrible tragedy in today’s America is the lax enforcement of immigration and labor laws. Poor and vulnerable people who have entered the country illegally are often given



Continued on page 20

Why Be Thankful?

By J. Charles Ogwyn

As the elementary school teacher walked alongside the lunchroom table where her students were seated, all eyes were on her—and on the cups of ice cream she was carrying. One by one, she reached down to hand each student a cup of ice cream and a wooden spoon. Silence marked the trail where she walked, as students eagerly dug in and began enjoying their special treat.

Soon, the lunch period was over, and her students were lined up in the hall, ready to begin their walk back to the classroom. This generous teacher then paused to address her class. “Last week, I promised that I would buy a cup of ice cream for everyone, if everyone completed their homework over the weekend. Today I kept my promise, and handed out 32 cups of ice cream that I bought with my own money. Does anyone know how many times I heard the phrase ‘thank you’ as I passed out 32 cups of ice cream?”

Her question was met with an uncomfortable silence. Only one student had thanked the teacher for his ice cream that day. I do not know how much of an impression this made on the other 31 students in the class, but those words from my teacher made a lasting impression on me.

In both the United States and Canada, Thanksgiving Day is observed as a holiday for giving thanks to God for His great and manifold blessings. Yet, as our nations stray farther from our Creator and His way of life, the purpose behind the holiday is increasingly glossed over or forgotten. In our greed-driven society, far more attention is lavished upon the heavily commercialized (and pagan) holidays of Halloween and Christmas than on the wholesome national holiday of Thanksgiving.

As a result of Abraham’s obedience, the Israelitish nations of this earth have been blessed tremendously and above all other nations. How sad, then, that Abraham’s modern-day descendants have largely chosen to pursue their own selfish desires, losing sight of the Giver of those good gifts. Because of these choices, God is removing—one by one—the great national blessings He once gave to the family of Abraham.

The book of Deuteronomy foretold and described what is now happening. In detailing the great national curses that would come upon the house of Israel, God said they would occur because “you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of

everything” (Deuteronomy 28:47). Our peoples have not served God; rather, they have rejected Him, and have even sought to remove His name and His laws from public places. Ungrateful modern Israelites now attribute their history of abundance to their own ingenuity, or to happenstance—in short, to the self. As God has been taken out of the picture, our peoples have increasingly felt free to do what seems right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6). The result has been misery and unhappiness.

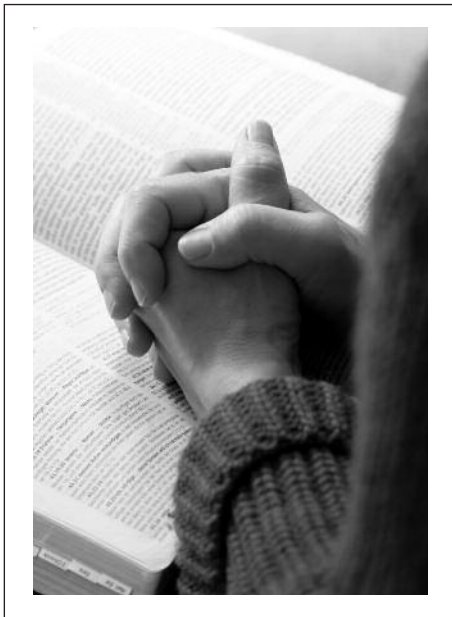
Those who enjoy abundance without recognizing and honoring its source will end up in idolatry, which leads to destruction. We see this in God’s words foretelling Israel’s rebellion against Him. “When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant” (Deuteronomy 31:20). Israel forgot the reason for its blessings, and the nation went astray. Yes, there is a connection between ingratitude and destruction. Ingratitude is more than simply being impolite; it is a sin (2 Timothy 3:2). Attitudes lead to actions, and an unthankful approach to life leads to destruction. The Apostle Paul tells us about this process, describing that, “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:21–22).

God delights in giving His children good gifts, and He expects us to be thankful in return. He tells us: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). God should always be in the forefront of our thoughts, and our approach toward Him should always be one of deeply appreciating what He is doing with us and for us. We know that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). If we truly know this—if we understand and appreciate this—how can we fail to give God thanks and praise?

Paul told Christians: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). What God has done—and is doing—should indeed fill us with great joy. We live in a society where many are troubled, and where there is much suffering and injustice—yet we have hope. Our hope is not tied to the outcome of a particular election or eco-

nomic policy, but rather to the return of our Savior. As we deeply reflect on our hope—so that it is not just words on a page, but rather is the reality for which we are eagerly preparing—we cannot help but rejoice!

Christians are advised to “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). Instead of being anxious, we are to tell God our concerns in prayer, then turn those concerns over to Him. When we make our requests to God, we are to do so with thanksgiving. This attitude of thanksgiving, when we make our prayerful requests to our Father, is actually a vital key to our overcoming feelings of anxiety.



When we focus on remaining thankful as we make our requests to our Father, we must also be aware of what He has done for us—and what He is doing with us. We must think about His omnipotent power, and on how dependent we are on it. We need to remember that the Creator of all that exists, sitting on His throne in heaven, actually wants to hear from us—and promises to help us. Faithfully filling our prayers with profound thanksgiving will produce an inner peace described as that “which surpasses all understanding” (v. 7).

An attitude of thanksgiving is an antidote to depression. When we focus too heavily on the problems around us, and on our inability to resolve those problems, we can easily fall into depression. By contrast, in order to maintain an attitude of

thanksgiving, we must keep a very different focus. Being thankful does not mean that we ignore our troubles; rather, it means that we keep problems in their proper perspective. It means that we remember God’s promises in Scripture, and take comfort from them. Scriptures like Hebrews 13:5–6 encourage us, because they remind us that we are never alone. Scriptures like Romans 8:28 re-

mind us that God is so powerful that He is able to cause even bad situations to work out for ultimate good.

An attitude of thanksgiving is an antidote to pride. Pride comes as a result of focusing too heavily on our own glory. By contrast, an attitude of thanksgiving comes as a result of a c-

knowledging our limits and our need for God. When we recognize that all we have—and all we are—comes from God, it is rather difficult to become puffed up about ourselves. When we remember that God gives, and that He also takes away, it is rather difficult to become puffed up over what we recognize is not our own doing (Job 1:21).

An attitude of thanksgiving is an antidote for envy and jealousy. Envy and jealousy come about when we focus on not having what someone else has. When we consider James 1:17 along with Romans 8:28, however, we have to realize that everything good comes from God, and that He has a good reason for letting us do without those things we do not have—and about which we might be tempted to envy.

God enjoys giving us good gifts, and sometimes He gives us the opportunity to build character by doing without something we desire. Just as a child can be spoiled if it is given everything it desires, so too can we be spoiled, if we do not sometimes have to learn how to do without.

God has given all of us a variety of physical blessings for which we should be thankful. However, our greatest blessings are spiritual, not physical. God has opened our minds to understand His word. Our knowledge of God’s law keeps us safe from many pitfalls in life. But it is more than just knowledge that helps us. Many who know of His law do not understand that it is relevant to their own lives, and that it will guide them toward lasting happiness. Many who are worried about the future of our world—and about what is in store for them and their loved ones—have not had their minds opened to the understanding of God’s plan that we in His Church have been given. While we do not know all of the smallest details, we *are* privileged to know what lies ahead—that God does have a plan, and that His plan involves all who were created in His image.

Most people in the world only experience joy in relation to their present physical satisfaction. By contrast, when we come to understand God’s word, we experience a joy in our lives that is not tied exclusively to the here and now. We understand that real lasting joy is not tied to physical things, but rather is a fruit of God’s Holy Spirit dwelling within us (Galatians 5:22). The joy that is a fruit of God’s Spirit in our lives is based on the hope that lies within us. Because of the source of our joy, it is not taken from us when we go through the inevitable trials of life, for we recognize that those trials are preparing us to be members of God’s family (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 4:12–13). Many

around us seek joy without understanding its true cause, or its ultimate effect. As Christians, we should be filled with joy and thankfulness for the understanding of God's way of life, and for what it produces in our lives.

In the Western nations, we often hear talk of “peace on earth” at this time of year, yet few if any actually expect to achieve peace. We in the Church, however, are blessed to know that God will soon establish His government on this earth, ushering in a time of global peace and harmony. This will not be a mere temporary peace; it will be a lasting peace extending even to the animal kingdom (Isaiah 9:7; 11:6–9). At a time when many in society see very little reason for hope, we in God's Church can be thankful that we have hope. Our hope is not bound to a particular political candidate or financial situation, but rather to God's word, which cannot fail (Isaiah 46:10).

Governments and leaders around the world seek “peace” based on treaties and agreements between opposing parties. Rarely expressed is the understanding that true peace is not simply the absence of fighting—it involves unity and harmony, which no treaty between belligerents can accomplish. Real peace is the result of obedience to God's law. Here is how the Apostle Paul summarized that law: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). We can begin building peace now, in our relationships with other people. Are we truly thankful for the people around us? Do we love them and truly want to sacrifice of our time and our treasure to help and to serve them? Only when we truly understand God's love—His law—is peace truly possible. We should be deeply thankful that God has given us this understanding, and that He has given us the ability to reap in our

lives the benefits of that understanding—even during this time when most of the world has been blinded by Satan, the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

God wants to have a loving relationship with His children. As Psalm 23 describes, He wants to lead them, to protect them, to provide for them and to bless them greatly—but He cannot do this unless His children follow Him. The opportunity God will later give to the rest of humanity—to understand His word and experience its blessings in their lives—is being given to us now. Are we sufficiently thankful for that wonderful blessing?

We in God's Church certainly have much for which we ought to be thankful. To take God's gifts for granted is a sin that ultimately leads to our forgetting the source of every good gift. As followers of Jesus Christ, let us resolve to be thankful always! ■

Hold Fast to Your Spiritual Treasure

(Continued from page 8)

John 1:3). God expects us to fellowship with Him and with Christ throughout each day. We pray throughout the day; we give thanks to God throughout each day and we may even sing psalms and hymns in praise to Him.

How committed are you to stay close to God? The Apostle James tells us: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). Several scriptures exhort us to **hold fast** to God. Moses told ancient Israel, “For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to **hold fast to Him**—then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves” (Deuteronomy 11:22–23). Joshua, in his farewell address, warned ancient Israel to avoid idols, and exhorted them, “but you shall **hold fast** to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day” (Joshua 23:8).

The prophet Isaiah shows us that we must persevere; we must aggressively and humbly “wrestle” with God as

did Jacob (cf. Genesis 32:22–31). Isaiah warns us: “And there is no one who calls on Your name, **who stirs himself up to take hold of You**; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities” (Isaiah 64:7).

Brethren, we must hold fast to God, and we must **stir ourselves** to take hold of Him. We must hold fast to true values, to the word of truth and to our commitment to persevere, keeping our hearts in the Work and our eyes on the hope and vision God has given us.

It is a tragedy when people lose their grip and fall to their death physically. Others, even more tragically, have neglected to hold tightly to the Truth, and as a result have fallen to their impending death spiritually. God has given us exceeding great and precious promises for our salvation and for our future. Brethren, we must hold fast to God's spiritual treasures, to the spiritual fundamentals and to God's truth! We need to internalize that truth and hold onto it tightly until we die! We should be striving to persevere as faithful servants of Christ, doing the Work of God. We need to rejoice in His love, and always remember His message: “Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast** what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11). ■

Rule Your Money*(Continued from page 16)*

substandard wages and working conditions—and are sometimes kept literally in slavery—because greedy business owners know their illegal employees have no recourse to justice. This hurts the illegal immigrant, and also the legal citizen who is out of a job, as well as the cruel and greedy business owner who flouts God's standard to make an illicit profit. God commands, "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother" (Zechariah 7:10). These very sins were among those for which God sent divine punishment and scattered the ancient nations of Israel and Judah (v. 14). He will do so again, unless we as individuals and nations repent!

More Blessed To Give Than To Receive

In the final analysis, the real meaning and pleasure in your life will come not from what you get, but from what you give to God and to others. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). By ruling your money effectively, you will improve your ability to give to others—enriching their lives, and in turn enriching your own. We are commanded to "honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase" (Proverbs 3:9). As God is a giving God, He also wants us to learn to give (Matthew 5:42–48). That is one reason He requires us to tithe and to give offerings (Deuteronomy 14:27–29; 16:16–17; 26:9–15).

Jesus commended a poor widow who gave not out of her abundance, but out of extreme poverty (Mark 12:41–44). The churches of Macedonia were also an example of generous giving, even out of deep poverty, to supply the needs of others (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). What God values most is not *how much* we give, but the *attitude and spirit* behind our gift. Giving should be done as privately as possible, out of a pure motive, not out of a desire for others to see our gift or to praise us for giving (Matthew 6:1–4).

Ruling our money well will ensure that we "have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). We all know that "God loves a cheerful giver" (1 Corinthians 9:7). If we cultivate a generous and giving spirit, wisely using our resources to benefit others, we can expect God to give us even greater blessings in the future. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11:25). We read: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). Also: "Give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21).

If we learn to share what we have with others, and to give generously with a pure heart, expecting nothing in return, God will see that in the end we want for nothing. By ruling our money well, we will discover a deep meaning and purpose in our lives, far beyond what money itself can provide. This is the ultimate lesson of ruling our money well. ■

"Return" to God...*(Continued from page 5)*

ford **not** to tithe. For this very rebellion will cost him—at the very least—the **blessings** from God he could have experienced by faithfully tithing to his Creator. For tithing is not only a matter of obedience, but an act of **worship**—of loving acknowledgement of our God as the great **giver** of "every good and every perfect gift" (James 1:17).

And God **loves** a cheerful giver! As the Apostle Paul was inspired to instruct us: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or

of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).

Note that God appreciates a generous and "wholehearted" approach from His people in the matter of giving offerings—special offerings or otherwise. And, as verse 8 makes clear, God is able to **bless** His people immeasurably when they respond generously and lovingly in supporting His Work.

As we approach the end of this age, we all need to think very carefully about how zealous we are to reach out to the world with the mes-

sage of the soon-coming Kingdom of God—and with the Ezekiel "warning message" to the modern-day peoples of the House of Israel. Again, think carefully about how God looks at you in the light of Proverbs 24:10–12: "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,' does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?"

Are you, personally, deeply and emotionally involved in the **crusade** to get Christ's warning message to

our peoples before it is too late? Are you paying your full tithe to the Work of God—the place where God is most fully preaching His message, where He is sending out the Ezekiel warning and where His servants are feeding and strengthening the flock with real spiritual meat?

To the degree that God has blessed you financially, are you giving truly generous *offerings* even above your tithes? Is your “heart” really in the Work of God? Remember Jesus Christ’s powerful admonition: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your *heart* will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Most of you are already doing this, and God has shown you His blessings as a result. But now, with God’s help, it is time for those who have “held back” to move beyond their confusion and discouragement, and to move forward toward the Kingdom of God. It is time for them to “return” to God with all of their hearts!

And how should they “return”? God Himself commands: “Return to

Me, and I will return to you. But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ in *tithes and offerings*” (Malachi 3:7–8). In verse 6, God had said, “for I am the LORD, I do *not* change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” So God’s law of tithing certainly continues. Will you obey God in *faith* and trust your faithful Creator to bless and guide you in the perilous years ahead? May God lead and inspire all of you who are faithful to respond to His word and to receive His full blessing in your lives—now and forever. ■

Do Not “Kid” Yourself!

Continued from page 2)

through Christ in us, we are ultimately saved by consciously yielding ourselves to let Him live in us!

Speaking of Christ, Paul tells us that we have been “justified” by His blood. Yet he continues, “Much more, having been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*” (Romans 5:9–10).

How so? By the very process described in my favorite verse in the Bible: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, *but Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). So, although it is “Christ in you” who gives you the strength and power to be ultimately “saved”—that is, to be given *eternal life* in the Kingdom of God—you still have *your part* to do in consciously going to God and to Christ, for the needed help and strength without which you would *never* make it! As the Apostle Paul stated, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Dear brethren, as you think of the terrifying times just ahead, I exhort you and implore you with all my heart to *go all out* to build those **right habits** of diligently studying your Bible, *praying fervently, meditating, fasting* and then exercising the Holy Spirit in everything you think, say and do. By building those habits as a daily way of life, by consciously choosing—again and again—to do the right thing,

you will be developing the *character* to obey and to trust in God to help you through the terrible times ahead. *Only* in this way—through Christ *really* living within you—will you make it into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Please do *not* “kid” yourself into thinking that just because you keep the Sabbath, attend Sabbath services and have Church friends, you are somehow guaranteed entrance into God’s Kingdom. Do you *really* think God will let weak, vacillating, compromising individuals into the very *family of God*—to share the awesome *glory and power* of the divine family?

No way!

Each of us *must realize* that *only* by going through the crucible of *profound repentance* and the continuing *emptying of self*, going *faithfully* through fiery trials, *truly* learning to “walk with God,” and—along with *all* true saints—learning to “cry out day and night to Him” (Luke 18:7)—only in *this way* can we be certain of living forever in the glorious Kingdom of God! Then, *if* we really go *all out* in seeking and serving our heavenly Father, He has promised to give us the needed help through His Holy Spirit. And, He will *never* give up on us. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will *never* leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).



Local Church News

Anniversaries

On June 21, *Mr. and Mrs. Bernie and Muriel Blick* of New Zealand were honored on the occasion of their fiftieth wedding anniversary by the brethren in the Palmerston North congregation at a luncheon with a special cake after services. Later, their son Gordon hosted a meal in their honor at a restaurant. Mr. and Mrs. Blick have been members of God's Church for more than 30 years and

have provided solid leadership in the Wellington and Palmerston North congregations. They have two sons who are also members of God's Church.

Mr. and Mrs. James and Ruth Shores, of the Montgomery, Alabama congregation, plan to celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on December 25.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Dallas McNeely, of the Terre Haute, Indiana congregation, died on July 22. He was 91 years old. He was predeceased by his wife Lillian, with whom he was baptized in January 1986, and to whom he had been married for 65 years. He is survived by five children, 13 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. He was a kind and gentle man with an infectious smile who would do anything for anyone; he will be greatly missed by all.

Mrs. Geneva Rouse Mealing, of the Walterboro, South Carolina congregation, died on July 3. She was 70 years old. She is survived by seven sisters, four brothers, a daughter and a son. Mrs. Mealing, a woman of many talents, was a professional seamstress and had an associates degree in marketing from New York City Technical College in Brooklyn, New York. She will be missed by family and friends.

Omaha Brethren Host Activity Weekend

Brethren in the Omaha, Nebraska congregation were joined by visitors from Chicago, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri and St. Joseph, Missouri over the weekend of August 2–3. On the Sabbath, Mr. Jason Carper and Mr. John Turner provided spiritual food to 51 local brethren and visitors. Afterwards, brethren gathered at the home of Ted and Deb Carper (local deacon and deaconess) for a picnic dinner. The evening featured much hearty fellowship as well as a group Bible trivia game planned by Mrs. Jenelle Pomicter.

Local brethren and 16 visitors reconvened early on Sunday morning for a visit to one of Omaha's premier attractions—the renowned Henry Doorly Zoo. The zoo is perennially ranked among the best zoos in the country for its contributions to wildlife conservation and for its innovative exhibits. The Omaha Zoo already boasts the world's largest indoor rain forest, a desert dome, a tunnel walk aquarium, and has recently opened a renovated “gorilla valley” as well as a new butterfly and insect pavilion. A picnic lunch, furnished by the Omaha congregation, provided more opportunity for brethren to draw closer together. The success of this occasion and continued interest in visiting Omaha's zoo means that this event will likely become an annual outing!

—Alex Pomicter

Ordinations

Mr. Wyatt Ciesielka was ordained as an elder on Pentecost, June 8, by Area Pastor Mr. Phil Sena. Mr. Ciesielka currently serves the Texas brethren in the Austin and Houston congregations.

Mr. Arthur Morin was ordained a deacon on March 1 by Church Administration Director Dr. Douglas Winnail and Canadian Regional Pastor Mr. Gerald Weston. He serves the brethren in Canada's Toronto, Ontario congregation.

Mr. James Quinters was ordained a deacon on June 14 by Area Pastor Mr. Phil Sena. He serves in the Houston, Texas congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Donald and Velma Yale were ordained as deacon and deaconess on July 5 by Area Pastor Mr. Daniel Hall. They serve in the Hawkins, Texas congregation.

Births

Jackson Franklin Cole was born on June 30 to Mr. and Mrs. Carl and Scarlet Cole of Mudgee, New South Wales, Australia. He weighed 7 pounds, 4 ounces at birth. Maternal grandparents are Steve and Maureen Smith of South Carolina; paternal grandparents are Frank and Virginia Cole of New South Wales, Australia. Maternal great-grandparents are Harry and Shirley Smith and Franklin and Ella Frye, all of South Carolina, and paternal great grandmother is Glenice Hastings of New South Wales, Australia. Jackson was welcomed home by his sister Shanna and brother Brady.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Frye are happy to welcome another granddaughter to their family: **McKenzie Elizabeth Grygier**. The daughter of Steve and Becky Grygier of Edinboro, Pennsylvania, she weighed 9 pounds and 13 ounces at birth.

Mr. and Mrs. Craig and Debbie Hill, of the Perth, Australia congregation, are thrilled to announce the birth of their daughter, **Rebekah Lauren Hill**. Rebekah was born on February 22, weighing 8 pounds, and measuring 20 inches long. She is the first grandchild of Kinnear and Carolyn Penman, of Auckland, New Zealand, and is niece to Joshua and Jenny Penman of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Mr. and Mrs. Gary and Gwen Jones, of the Kansas City, Missouri congregation, are happy to announce the arrival of their son, **Gary Lynn "Trace" Jones III**. He was born on June 13, weighing 7 pounds, and was 21.5 inches long. Big sister Lynnette is thrilled to have a baby brother.

Abigail Daisy Monson was born on July 14 to Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon and Joette Monson. She weighed 9 pounds and measured 22.5 inches long. Her two older brothers and older sister are delighted with the new baby at their home.

Nashville Brethren Enjoy Picnic

A beautiful sunny Sunday allowed for pause from the week's work, and time to fellowship with our brethren in the Nashville congregation of the Living Church of God. A slight breeze blowing made for a comfortable August day for more than 85 hungry, enthusiastic members who gathered in Lee Victory Park in Smyrna, Tennessee, on August 17. A fried chicken potluck lunch seemed to fill everyone's hunger, and delicious desserts from the pie and cake contest topped it all off in style. The youngsters enjoyed several games before lunch, with balloons to pop and prizes for all. For the older set, sand beach volleyball, and basketball on the hot courts helped to work up an appetite, and provided an opportunity to sweat off a few pounds, while enjoying a gorgeous summer day. After lunch, the older crowd had a chance to show their stuff in some entertaining relay races. With running and throwing water balloons, humming Church hymns to figure out the title, setting a formal table with all the utensils, and a Bible riddle to finish, there was something for everyone. We wrapped up the day with a family game of kickball with participation from players age six to 60. Everyone's efforts to work together made for an enjoyable, relaxing day of food, fun and fellowship for all.

—Jason Fritts

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

Commentary

Fear Not the Third Horseman

By Wyatt Ciesielka

Have you been affected by escalating food prices? Are you worried about how you will pay your bills and feed your family if a gallon of milk costs \$10 or a loaf of bread costs \$8?

Rising fuel prices have coupled with rapidly rising food costs to cause *real pain* for the average consumer, even in wealthy nations, and food shortages are *literally starving people to death* in underdeveloped nations! World governments and agricultural experts agree that a food crisis is upon us, and famine is stalking the earth in an unprecedented manner.

Is the nation that was once “breadbasket to the world” now seeing its very ability to feed itself erode? Are food shortages and food riots in the United States and other “wealthy nations” looming? Food scarcity is a *very real problem* that will become much more severe in the years ahead, and is a harbinger of the severe famine that will affect every nation when the third seal of Revelation is opened and the Third Horseman rides!

Note this description: “When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.’” (Revelation 6:5–6). A denarius was worth about one day’s wages during Christ’s time. Converted to 2008 dollars, a denarius would be worth approximately \$100 to \$150! So we see Scripture warning us that, before the Great Tribulation, food prices will increase significantly.

The Third Horseman’s ride *will soon tear apart the very fabric of our society*. Do you fear for your family’s safety, or do you trust in God? If we truly repent and seek God, He promises us eternal life (1 John 5:10–12) *and He promises to provide for us in the midst of global famine*—even during the ride of the Third Horseman of the Apocalypse! As the Psalm assures us, “the Eternal’s eye rests on His worshippers, who rest their hopes upon His kindness, that He may rescue them from death, and during famine-days keep them alive” (Psalm 33:18–19, *Moffatt*).

God promises to provide for us *if we obey Him and seek His Kingdom* (Matthew 6:31–33). So we need not fear the rising food prices. Do not fear the Third Horseman! Instead, humbly submit to and obey God. His kind eye will then indeed rest on you and your family—now, and in the days to come. God loves every one of us, *but we must seek Him*.

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org Web sites.