

Living Church News

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We Must Appreciate Christ’s Sacrifice!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

As we approach the Passover season, it is vital that we focus on the real *meaning* of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Many times, because the world emphasizes the idea of loving a “little Lord Jesus” in a wrong way, we may tend to *deemphasize* that aspect of the Gospel that concerns Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. However, as Mr. Armstrong proclaimed a number of times in sermons and in writing, *we must not do that!*

For Christ is the Savior by whom we enter the Kingdom of God. He is the coming King of that very Kingdom. And He must *live His life* within us through the Holy Spirit, or we will **not** be in that Kingdom!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the **gospel** of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **concerning His Son Jesus Christ** our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:1–4). Paul clearly emphasized the *pivotal role* of “Jesus Christ our Lord” in the “Gospel of God.” We must not let any false teachers ever turn us away from the very *foundation* of our message—which cannot be separated from Jesus Christ, His death, His resurrection, His functioning now as our High Priest, and His future as *King* over the coming Kingdom or Government of God.

As we approach the Passover, let us *meditate* on the fact that the One who existed with God the Father from eternity was willing to make Himself “of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:7). He “emptied Himself,” (KJV), coming into the human flesh to be horribly *beaten* with whips, and was then taken out and *crucified* to pay for our sins. We must constantly recognize that He *was* resurrected, *did* ascend to heaven and *now* sits in glory as our High Priest and coming King. Through Him, we come boldly to God in prayer. Through the Holy Spirit, He must now *live* His life within us (Galatians 2:20).

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he stated, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1–2).

Especially at Passover time, we should remember—and focus on—the fact that Christ had to be **scourged** just *before* He was crucified! The *purpose* of this scourging, as we understand from Scripture—was to pay the penalty

for our *physical* transgressions of the laws of health and laws of nature. In that way, Christ became our *Healer*. The Apostle Peter wrote of Christ “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose **stripes** you were **healed**” (1 Peter 2:24). When the Apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians the meaning of the Passover, he reminded them, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23–24). As we have explained many times at the Passover service, the *broken bread* is taken *before* the wine. For that bread clearly symbolizes *Christ’s body broken* in payment for our physical transgressions and carelessness in the way we treat our bodies, the temple of God’s Holy Spirit. Next, the red wine is taken—symbolizing Jesus’ **blood**, which was poured out as payment for our *spiritual* sins.

Later in the above passage, Paul declares, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. *For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep*” (vv. 28–30).

It should be clear, then, that we must exercise genuine *faith* in Christ’s broken body for our healing if we expect God to heal us! At Passover time, we must “*discern*” the full meaning of the broken bread and the red wine which are taken as symbols of Christ’s sacrifice.

However, because certain leaders crept into the modern Church of God and began to “water down” the entire approach to the Gospel, the knowledge and understanding of Christ’s sacrifice was gradually *blotted out* in the minds of many! Instead of looking to God as Healer, many brethren began to forsake totally the practice of looking to God *first* for healing. Rather, they *automatically* took various pills and potions, or went to doctors for drugs and operations *instead of* being anointed first, when possible, and asking God in any case to go *above and beyond* what man can or should do!

The entire focus of *faith* in regard to healing was gradually obliterated in the minds of thousands of brethren! We all need to realize this and do everything we can to get back to the faith “once for all delivered”—even in regard to divine healing! So please remember, brethren, as you approach the Passover, that Christ paid a *terrible penalty* so that you could be healed. If you come to the Passover *without* this understanding and this faith, many of you—like the Corinthians—may become weak or sick and “many sleep”! For Paul continued in the above passage, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But

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Go “All Out” to Serve Your Creator!

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

In today's society, it is often considered fashionable to be “cool.” Young people—and older people—sometimes pride themselves on not appearing to be “trying too hard.” Yet, that is exactly the *opposite* of what our God wants us to be and to do! In fact, most of us in God's Church may need to “try harder” than those endowed with more natural ability, who have perhaps been afforded more opportunities for education and learning the social graces than the majority of God's people.

Why?

Because, as God clearly states in His word: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). God states this same point in several different ways throughout His word.

In God's Church, we should deeply love and appreciate one another and the various gifts that we do have—even though we may know that very few of us have truly great physical wealth, or great natural ability. God recognizes that, because we are more like “most ordinary folks,” we may be more humble and may not have the same temptations to vanity and to resisting the Truth as have those with so much more ability. There are not

now, nor have there ever been, very many Winston Churchills, Margaret Thatchers, Albert Einsteins or Marie Curies in the Church of God. These magnificently gifted people will have their opportunity in the Great White Throne Judgment.

But you and I are being called *now* to prepare to become full sons of God. We are called to emulate Jesus Christ. We are instructed: “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16). And to achieve this awesome goal, we are commanded by our Savior: “But *seek first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

We must not allow *anything* to come between us and our transcendent *goal*. Our ultimate purpose must always come *first*. Moreover, because we are not the “great” of the world in natural ability, social standing or material wealth, we will need to put forth *greater effort* and to exercise a special *zeal* in our quest to fulfill God's purpose for our lives. *But this is nothing unusual!* For nearly every top athlete, senior corporate executive or major world leader has been willing to put forth extra effort in order to achieve his or her goal. Our young people in the Church, especially, need to realize this and be inspired to accomplish great things—for they *can do so* with God's help and earnest extra effort on their part! It is inspiring to see many of our young people excel in their professional lives, while also making it a priority to help in their congregations and to help the

brethren when God gives the opportunity to do so.

In his very inspiring biography of Winston Churchill, Robert Lewis Taylor describes the drive and unceasing energy Churchill poured into the effort of leading his nation during the critical days of World War II. Taylor writes: “The burdens of leadership take an incalculable toll in the passage of six war years, but Churchill seemed never to tire. He traveled thousands of miles, he worked each night until everyone else had gone to bed, and he arose refreshed to hurl the oratorical thunders that rallied a people from despondency and defeat” (*Winston Churchill: The Biography of a Great Man*, p. 363).

Here was a man who did not even begin his career as Prime Minister until about the time in life when most men were ready to retire. Yet, because his supreme *goal* was to enable his nation to survive Hitler's onslaught and win the war, Churchill drove himself to accomplish an agenda that would have staggered most men even half his age!

Each of us must apply the example of Sir Winston (and of others like him) to our *spiritual* growth and accomplishment. For our God wants us to go “all out” in serving Him and in doing His Work! During this Laodicean era, God specifically warns us all: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15–16). Then God tells us: “As many as I love, I rebuke

and chasten. Therefore be **zealous** and **repent**” (v. 19).

God appreciates those who go “all out” to serve Him. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Colossians: “And whatever you do, do it **heartily**, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24). And Solomon was inspired to tell us: “Whatever your hand finds to do, *do it with your might*; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

When we read of Olympic champion swimmers rising before dawn to train themselves in strenuous swim workouts, then driving to their regular jobs and working all day, then returning home again at night for more strenuous exercise in the pool, we can appreciate the fact that they are willing to put forth *great effort* to achieve their goal. If our true goal is to reflect the **zeal** of Jesus Christ and to *make a difference* by giving our lives today in His service as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), how vital it is that we demonstrate the same **zeal** that Jesus Christ Himself, the Apostle Paul and most of the other great biblical leaders demonstrated in their service to God.

Because many of us have grown up in “average” families, we may not have seen the examples of outstanding drive and zest that the world’s great leaders exemplify. Yet we are called to be truly great leaders—if we truly “overcome” (Revelation 2:26–27). We need to *understand* the *reality* of the situation, and start building the *wisdom*, the successful *habits* and the **zeal** of top leaders. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How

much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:2–3).

Remember, a vital part of the Fourth Commandment tells us: “Six days you shall *labor* and do all your **work**” (Exodus 20:9). Jesus told the Jews: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). Even in this aspect of His human life, Jesus set us an example of zest and accomplishment.

In his very interesting book, *Sam Walton: The Inside Story of America’s*

God appreciates those who go “all out” to serve Him. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Colossians: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24).

Richest Man, author Vance Trimble describes *how* the founder of Wal-Mart became fabulously wealthy even though he was born to average parents, in average circumstances in the state of Arkansas—where he spent much of his life even after attaining wealth few of us can even begin to imagine. Over and over, Trimble cites comments from Walton’s friends and associates describing *how hard he worked*. Though not wealthy, his father did teach Sam a wonderful *work ethic*, which helped Sam later to become America’s richest man. Trimble relates: “Although not personally

feeling the worst effects of the Depression, ‘Sammy’ Walton was living up to his dad’s ‘work, work, work’ ethic at Hickman High School. In addition to his man-killing regimen in academics and athletics, he found time for odd jobs and was more and more becoming self-supporting. Rolling out of bed at dawn, he delivered a route for the M.U. journalism students’ *Columbia Missourian*. Significantly, he also became a part-time helper in a Columbia five-and-ten-cent store” (p. 33). Sam Walton had to *work really hard* to succeed the way he did.

We all admire the Apostle Paul’s passion for Jesus Christ. However, many of us may sometimes forget that Paul *also* had a passion for work and for accomplishment. Paul states: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I **labored** more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Because he did love Jesus Christ, and because he was not afraid of *hard work*, the Apostle Paul evidently did more evangelizing, raised up more churches and wrote more books in the New Testament than any other man! What a magnificent **reward** Paul will receive when Christ returns as King of kings!

If we are to become even moderately successful in our endeavors in this life, we all need to learn to use our time and talents wisely. We need to “go the extra mile” on many occasions. And above and beyond all this, we should learn to go “all out” in *working*, in *serving* and in doing everything we can with **zeal** to prepare for the Kingdom of God. For Christ Himself said: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to give to every one *according to his work*” (Revelation 22:12). ■

Self-Examination: A Vital Key to Growth

By Richard F. Ames

Every spring, we in Charlotte, North Carolina enjoy the beauty of colorful flowers, and the buds blooming on a stunning variety of trees. Over several weeks, we see the white blossoms of the Bradford Pear trees, followed by the pink cherry blossoms that line the street in front of the Headquarters office. Soon afterward, the redbud, crepe myrtle and dogwood trees come to life throughout local neighborhoods.

God created the seasons, and His calendar reveals the weekly and annual Sabbaths. In 2009, sunset on Wednesday, March 25 marks the beginning of God's New Year. Thirteen days later, after sunset on Tuesday, April 7, God's people will observe the most sobering of His festivals—the New Testament Passover.

The world around us generally observes January 1 as the beginning of its new year. Many people have fun making New Year's resolutions; some even take those resolutions seriously. As the Passover approaches, and we anticipate the start of God's new year, what resolutions will *you* make? God's people know that human beings need to overcome their carnal human nature. When we observe the Days of Unleavened Bread, we determine to put out the old leaven of human nature and replace it with the unleavened divine nature, through God's Spirit. How can we ever overcome? One key is to *understand* carnal human nature, and to clearly see how it is reflected in our own personality. But often, we do not see ourselves clearly.

Eighteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Burns composed his famous poem "To a Louse" while looking at a tiny creature wandering through the hair of a lady seated in front of him. The eighth stanza of the poem contains a well-known phrase: "O wad some Power the giftie gie us / To see ourself as ithers see us!" Or, in modern English: "Oh, would that some Power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us!"

Do you and I have character flaws that others can see, but to which we are blinded? How can we see our "invisible" flaws? How can we "see ourselves as others see us"? God's word, and His law, can help us see what we normally cannot, but are we willing to act on what He shows us? We read: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:23–25).

Yes, we *all* must examine ourselves. Only baptized Church members should take the Passover, but we all should be examining ourselves during this season of the year. Younger children, teenagers, young adults and anyone else who is not yet baptized

should still be setting goals for the coming year—determining how to improve, grow, change and develop! We should all deeply appreciate the vital role young people play in God's Work, whether helping in their congregations, singing in a choir, or remaining faithful in their prayers for the Church and the Work.

God's annual festivals reveal His awesome plan of salvation for all humanity, a plan relatively few understand! As King David wrote, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever" (Psalm 111:10).

When we observe God's Holy Days, He gives us a good understanding of their meaning. The Passover is a time to renew our dedication and commitment to our Creator. But there is more to Passover than just showing up one evening. We need to prepare for that time by reviewing the sermons we have heard, applying their lessons to our lives, and conducting some serious introspection.

Considering the meaning and proper perspective of this festival season will help in our self-examination. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). And remember what John the Baptist told the multitudes when the Messiah passed by: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)!

In Egypt, the blood of the Passover Lamb was first applied to the lintel and two doorposts of each Israelite home. Why? "For the LORD will *pass through* to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will *pass over* the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you" (Exodus 12:23).

We thank God when He passes *over* our sins—that is, when we have repented and accepted the blood of the Lamb. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul describes the bread and wine—symbols of the New Testament Passover—then he warns us: "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But *let a man examine himself*, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (vv. 27–29).

What does it mean to "let a man examine himself"? How should a man—or a woman—do this? What questions should we ask ourselves? Remember, we must focus on examining self, not judging and comparing ourselves with others. As Paul wrote: "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chas-

tened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:31–32).

Notice another key scripture: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Corinthians 13:5). The Greeks to whom Paul wrote knew the classic quote from Socrates (469–399BC): “Know thyself! The unexamined life is not worth living.” Are you examining, testing and judging everyone *except* yourself? That is the carnal human tendency, but God tells us to judge ourselves, to discipline ourselves, and to examine ourselves, particularly for the Passover.

How well do you “know yourself”? You may have noticed that many Living Church of God ministers encourage engaged couples to complete the “Prepare and Enrich” inventories, which help couples know themselves—uncovering areas of strength in their relationships, as well as areas where they especially need to grow. Many of us have taken aptitude tests, interest inventories and personality profile analyses. Some of these tests are of greater value than others, but if you approach them with the right care, you can often learn more about yourself by using these tools.

The Bible gives us valuable tools through which we can examine ourselves. As you prepare for the Passover, pray that God will reveal to you the areas in which you have improved in the past year, as well as your weaknesses that remain and must be strengthened. Pray that He will reveal how He has blessed you in this last year, and that He will help you see the hidden sins in your life, of which you must repent. Indeed, repentance is the first of the ten points we will consider in this article, as we look for ways to analyze our spiritual condition with the help of God’s word.

REPENTANCE: Examine your attitude toward repentance. Have you repented of your sins? Do you right now have a repentant attitude? Have you made a *commitment* to maintain a repentant attitude to the end of your life?

Paul described the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:10–11). Have you seen the fruits of repentance in your own life? Has your repentance produced indignation toward what is evil? Do you live with a godly fear, with a strong desire to do what is right, and with a zeal to do God’s Work and live God’s way of life?

Remember what John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism: “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of

repentance” (Matthew 3:7–8). Ask God to produce within *you* the fruits of godly sorrow and repentance.

Years ago, when China was afflicted with incredible poverty, a minister asked, “Have you shed a tear for China?” That question helped me identify with the sufferings of others around the world. Have you, in recent months, shed a tear for the starving people in Darfur, and other troubled regions of our world? Have you shed a tear for the oppressed and the enslaved? Or have you hardened your heart? Ask God for the gift of repentance, acknowledge your sins, express sorrow for them and ask forgiveness: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:9–10).

Determine to repent of your sins. Before the Passover, make a heartfelt commitment to always maintain a teachable and repentant attitude.

PRAYER: Examine your pattern and practice of prayer. During this past year, have you let a day go by without praying to your Father in Heaven? If you did, you had another god before the true God—you transgressed the first commandment.

Prayer is our lifeline to God. He wants us to rely on Him, and to make requests of Him even though He already knows our needs (Matthew 6:8). Think of the biblical examples: King David prayed three times a day (Psalm 55:17). The prophet Daniel prayed three times a day, in spite of the threat against him (Daniel 6:10). In fact, we should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)—we should *always* be in an attitude of prayer.

“I don’t know what to pray about,” some might say. Well, then, just open your Bible and pray about what you read. You will have practically unlimited subjects for prayer. You can also follow the outline prayer in Matthew 6:9–13. And remember to “pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). As an aside—parents, have you taught your children to pray? Do you pray together on occasion as a family?

If you have difficulty praying, start by thanking God for all your blessings. How many times has God blessed you in this past year? When I think about my life and activities this past year, I realize that God has saved me from accidents, has healed me and has blessed me abundantly.

If you have been inconsistent, lazy and Laodicean in your prayer life, repent and get on your knees every morning! Come boldly before God’s throne of grace, that you may obtain *mercy*, and grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Confess your sins and thank God for all His blessings this past year, and you can approach the Passover with a positive attitude.

BIBLE STUDY: Do you read the Bible daily? Or do you only read it occasionally—maybe during a congregational Bible Study, or during a Sabbath sermon? Remember what Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy: “Be diligent to present

yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

God speaks to us through Scripture. He wants us to understand His word—the truth (John 17:17)—and He wants us to *live* by His every word (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4)! The Bible reveals the mind of God! It reveals great mysteries about which the world’s philosophers and thinkers can only wildly speculate! You need to spend time in serious Bible study, in addition to reading thoughtfully through Scripture. The *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course* is available in print and through the Internet, and you can complete it at your own pace, if you want a structured program of Bible study.

I try to make Bible reading and study a priority. When I get home from work, I generally take at least a few minutes right then to read God’s word. My wife will often join me and sit on my lap. Yes, we also take the time for serious research—and you may also want to consider using some of your Festival tithe to buy a new Bible, or a Bible dictionary, or Bible software, or Bibles for each of your children.

As we prepare for the Passover, we should examine our commitment to reading and internalizing Scripture. Remember the Bereans’ example: “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:10–11).

FASTING: When was the last time you fasted? Was it on the Day of Atonement? If you have not fasted since then, you need to examine your commitment as a Christian, and you should consider humbling yourself through fasting in preparation for the Passover. Jesus made it clear that His servants would make a practice of fasting. “Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and *then they will fast*’” (Matthew 9:14–15).

Christ went on to explain, using the example of the wineskins, that fasting as a mere ritual will not produce lasting changes (vv. 16–17). It must be done with a teachable heart and attitude.

The prophet Isaiah described the fruits of a true, heartfelt fast: “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard” (Isaiah 58:6–8).

If you have not fasted since the Day of Atonement, consider fasting before Passover. And remember Isaiah’s spiritual approach to fasting.

LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN: How much love have you expressed toward the brethren during this past year? Have you prayed for the sick? Have you given of your physical goods to needy brethren? Have you forgiven those who have sinned against you or offended you? Have you apologized to those whom you have offended? The Apostle Peter gave us this profound principle: “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

Jesus gave us the example of serving with a humble attitude. Baptized members of Christ’s spiritual body, the Church, will follow His example during the foot-washing service at Passover. If you have lacked in brotherly service and attitude this past year, determine next year to grow in brotherly love. Remember Jesus’ words: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:12–13).

Our time is our life. We must use our time in serving our brethren—praying for them, forgiving them, giving needy brethren of our physical resources as we are able, and having compassion on those experiencing trials, persecution and suffering.

Examine yourself with respect to brotherly love. Love one another fervently. And determine to grow in this special quality. As Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

PROGRESS IN OVERCOMING: The Days of Unleavened Bread teach us the need to *overcome* self, Satan, and society. Have you made any progress in overcoming this past year? Paul explains the spiritual meaning of this festival: “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Ask yourself, “Have I grown spiritually this past year?” We should be able to see fruits in our lives, mainly the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit. Does your life show the fruit of active outgoing concern for others? Are you growing in patience in our stressful world? Have you grown, this last year, in emotional maturity and stability? If you have, then thank God for your progress in developing godly character.

On the other hand, are you weak and easily tempted to sin? We must heed Paul’s warning to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But

you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). If you are practicing any of these sins, you need to repent of them. You need to make drastic changes in your life. You can do that through fasting and seeking God’s help and power through heartfelt prayer—and you may need to seek ministerial counseling for help in overcoming.

Some of us repeat the same mistakes over and over. The world has certainly not learned the lessons of history. Have *you* learned any life-changing lessons this past year? Examine yourself with respect to spiritual growth and overcoming. Commit yourself to overcoming some specific weaknesses and flaws. Set goals for this next year. Then thank God for any spiritual growth and progress God has given you!

GROWTH IN THE NEW COVENANT: Have you allowed God to write His spiritual law on your heart and mind? Have you energetically sought to internalize the Ten Commandments as a way of life? Many mainstream churches wrongly say that the Ten Commandments are “done away,” but the truth is that we in God’s Church are pioneers of the New Covenant, allowing God to write His law on our hearts. So, examine yourself to determine how thoroughly you have internalized God’s law of love.

The Old Covenant promised physical blessings for obedience to God’s laws. But for ancient Israel, the commandments were external—they were not made a part of people’s very character. By contrast, the prophet Jeremiah described the New Covenant: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

Jesus instituted that new covenant at the Passover. And we are *pioneers* of that covenant. Ask God to write His laws on your heart and mind. Consider each of the Ten Commandments. Are you honoring your parents? Are you faithful to your spouse, and not committing adultery? Are you faithful to your spiritual Father in heaven? Do you steal, lie, cheat or *lust*? Repent of these sins and ask God for His forgiveness. As you identify sinful tendencies in your character, you will desire all the more to take the Passover because you need God’s forgiveness. Be sure to confess your sins. Be willing to accept Christ’s sacrifice, and God’s forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Meditate on God’s law. Ask God to help you apply the Ten Commandments in loving Him and your neighbor. Commit yourself to being more humble, responsive and obe-

dient to God’s law of love. Determine to grow in God’s loving nature as He writes His law on your heart and mind.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS: Have you been faithful in paying your tithes to God this past year? Have you been faithful in giving offerings? Be honest with yourself. Stealing from God is a serious 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. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation” (Malachi 3:8–9).

God owns the earth, and everyone and everything on it. He promises to provide our every need (Philippians 4:19). God provides for His children, but some have “little faith” and do not trust Him (Matthew 6:30). He gave this admonition: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, ‘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’” (Malachi 3:10). God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and He promises to abundantly bless the tithepayer. Those who have faithfully saved their Festival tithe know firsthand the joy God gives at His annual festivals.

Examine your degree of faithfulness this past year with God’s tithe. Have you stolen from God? Have you saved a full Festival tithe? Ask God for the *ability* to give. Trust and honor Him in your tithes and offerings. If you have been a thief this past year, ask God’s forgiveness, determine to trust Him this coming year, then take the Passover in faith!

THE ADMONITIONS OF REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 AND 3:

These chapters give us a special way to examine ourselves spiritually. Christ reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the seven churches. Notice the challenge God gives us: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). The messages to the seven churches were powerful instructions to the Church of the first century, but they also reveal characteristics of the Church over time, from the first century to Christ’s return. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong stated it this way: “These seven messages DO apply to seven successive Church eras. BUT they also apply to the WHOLE CHURCH through ALL eras. In other words, the Ephesus characteristics DOMINATED in the first era, and the Laodicean will dominate in the last, but SOME of these characteristics are found in EVERY era. The messages apply to the WHOLE Church (and so I have said and written for more than fifty years) but certain characteristics predominate in the various eras” (*The Incredible Human Potential*, p. 158).

Yes, “some of these characteristics are found in every era”! We need to examine ourselves with respect to *each* church message. Have you, for example, “left your first love”? (Revelation 2:4). If you have lost your zeal for the Truth, you must respond to Christ’s command: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works”! (Revelation 2:5).

Dr. Douglas Winnail's article, "Seven Lessons from Seven Churches," can remind us of our responsibility in responding to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Dr. Winnail wrote: "The letters to the seven churches—and the seven Church eras they represent—contain *important* lessons! Those lessons were meant for the churches in the first century *and* for Christians down through the ages. But they are vital for Christians today—individuals living at the end of the age, in the Laodicean era!" (*Living Church News*, January-February 2006, p. 7).

Brethren, take time to examine the message to each of the churches. Acknowledge any of your weaknesses highlighted by these messages, determine to change, and thank God for the privilege of taking the Passover.

SUPPORT OF GOD'S WORK: How zealous are you for God's Work? Our Savior expressed His commitment to fulfilling His mission on the earth: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to *finish His work*" (John 4:34). Are you totally committed to Christ's mission? We whom God has called have been given His command to preach the Gospel of the soon-coming Kingdom of God, to feed the flock and to preach the Ezekiel warning to the modern descendants of ancient Israel.

How do we support God's Work? In an important sense, we are all "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20), in that the people around us see us as representing the Church. As a supporter of the Work, are you aware of the times and stations on which the *Tomorrow's World* telecast is shown in your area? Do you watch the telecast, and if people ask you about the Church, do you encourage them to watch the telecast? If not, you should. If you are reading this, we thank you for your example of diligently staying in touch with what the Church is teaching its members and proclaiming to the world. Is every member of your family diligently reading each article in *Tomorrow's World* magazine and the *Living Church News*? Reading Church literature should help you be ready to give an answer when those around you ask about your faith (1 Peter 3:15).

Do you pray regularly for the Work, for open doors to preach the Gospel around the world? Do not underestimate the importance of keeping your heart in the Work. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong emphasized this key to spiritual growth: "And God has given us 'the WORK' to do as the VERY MEANS BY WHICH we may grow spiritually, so we may enter His Kingdom at Christ's coming. In 47 years I have observed that ONLY those whose hearts are fully IN THE WORK continue to overcome and grow SPIRITUALLY, and ENDURE" (*Co-Worker Letter*, November 18, 1974).

Ask yourself, "How zealous have I been for the Work of God? Have I prayed for its success? Have I supported the mission of God's Church? Have I personally been a light to the world, and the salt of the earth?" As we approach the Passover, now is the time for each of us to rededicate ourselves to serving God's Work zealously!

God loves every human being who has ever lived, or who ever will live. He has demonstrated His unconditional love for

His creation and for every human being. We need that love to motivate us in fulfilling our calling in life (Romans 5:5). Recall how Dr. Meredith expressed his love and compassion in one very moving co-worker letter a few years ago: "Dear Brethren and Co-Workers with Christ, Greetings from Charlotte, NC! Talk about natural disasters! Even as I write, radio and television reports tell us that tens of thousands of human beings have perished in the powerful earthquake which just struck Pakistan and parts of India. Perhaps none of these people were truly acquainted with the God of the Bible, but *every* human being is precious in God's sight" (October 10, 2005). Yes, *every human being* is precious in God's sight. We all need God's love to fulfill the mission He has given us.

What Is the Result?

What will be the result of your self-examination, as you consider these ten key areas of your spiritual life? You should see your human nature more clearly, and your need to overcome it. You should see your shortcomings and flaws. You should identify weaknesses that you must determine to overcome. Finally, in seeing your inadequacies, you should more deeply than ever recognize your need for our living Savior and great High Priest. As Jesus said, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

One result of your self-examination is that you should *desire* to take the Passover. Jesus told His twelve apostles, "With *fervent desire* I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Paul gave God's instruction for keeping the Passover: "But let a man examine himself, and *so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*"! (1 Corinthians 11:28). Yes, self-examination should *motivate* baptized Christians to take the Passover in faith, with deep appreciation for Our Savior, and for the blood that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). As we examine our successes and failures in growing in the past year, we should take the Passover with a deep commitment to grow in the coming year in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Brethren, be thankful for God's intervention in your life this past year. As you examine yourself, you will see how God has worked through you in a positive way to love Him, to love your neighbor, and to serve in special loving ways. You will note the many times He has saved your life, protected you, healed you, taught you, corrected you and blessed you! Be thankful for God's mercy toward you, realizing that you deserved much more correction than you received. As a result of your self-examination, you will have seen character flaws and character weaknesses. You will see how far you have fallen short of your goals, your responsibilities, and your progress in overcoming. But through seeing your failures, you will then more deeply appreciate God's patience and His mercy toward you, and you will be able to pray, as King David did, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and *renew* a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). ■

How To Stay on Course

By Douglas S. Winnail

One of the biggest challenges facing Christians today is to stay focused and to maintain a right course in a world filled with trials, temptations, distractions and deceptions. Especially if we live and work around sincere and well-meaning people, it can be easy to forget that the god of this world deliberately sets dangerous traps to deceive and destroy the unwary (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; Ephesians 6:11–13; 1 Peter 5:8–9). Yet the Bible is filled with *warnings* about the consequences of losing our focus, and gives *instructions* for staying on course—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear!

Warnings and Advice

There is an old saying that those who do not learn the lessons of history will repeat the mistakes of history. The Bible records numerous examples of this fundamental truth. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because their focus was diverted away from God's instructions. They listened to Satan and his subtly twisted half-truths and their own human reasoning (Genesis 3). The ancient nation of Israel went into captivity because it followed misguided leaders and focused on pagan ways of worship instead of following God's commandments (1 Kings 12:25–33; 14:15–16). David got into trouble when he focused on the physical creation (the opposite sex) instead of obeying his Creator (2 Samuel 11; 12). The united Kingdom of Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms after the reign of Solomon, who had focused too

much on the physical instead of staying focused on God's instructions (1 Kings 11:1–11). These examples are recorded for the admonition of Christians who live at the end of the age (1 Corinthians 10:11).

One of the major strategies Satan uses to pull us off course is to appeal to our intellect and reasoning abilities. When our focus drifts away from the word of God, we gravitate toward ideas that seem reasonable to us, and that justify what we want to do. Yet the Bible warns repeatedly that “there is a way that *seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Unless we stay focused on God's instructions, and heed His warnings that human reasoning can lead us astray (Jeremiah 17:9), we will deceive ourselves and reap serious consequences. However, we are told that when the eye is *single*, the whole body is full of light (Matthew 6:22–23, KJV). Staying focused in the *right direction* and on the *right goals* can help us stay on course avoid making big mistakes (v. 33)!

The parable of the sower is particularly applicable to the subject of staying on course (Matthew 13:18–23). In the parable, Jesus describes four categories of people. The first hear the truth and are immediately *distracted* by Satan, never gaining the right focus. The second accept the truth with enthusiasm, yet because they do not take time to carefully prove what they believe, they are *blown off course* and stumble “when tribulation or persecution arises *because of the word*” (13:21). Such trials could include doctrinal controversies, church splits, ridicule, the ap-

peal of popular misguided leaders or novel ideas—and fables. The third become preoccupied with worldly concerns (self, family, job and health), the pursuit of money and material possessions and the attraction of worldly pleasures (acceptance, prestige, hobbies, entertainment—having fun) that divert their focus from the truth of God. Only one of the four groups remains focused on the right goal; the rest lose their focus and drift off in other directions. In light of these strong warnings, we need to consider seven vital keys that will help us stay on course.

The Word of God

Our modern, fast-paced world of today is riddled with confusion about God, the Bible, truth, the true Church and the purpose of life. The pagan ruler Pilate ridiculed the idea of truth (John 18:38). We hear the same skeptical comments today. Yet Jesus said that knowledge of the truth can set us free from the confusion of this world (John 8:32). The Bible asserts that God's word, His laws and His commandments *are truth* (Psalm 119:142, 151, 160). Scripture contains the absolute truth (John 17:17). That is why it is important to *study* the Bible so that we *know* what God has revealed in His word (2 Timothy 2:15). We must carefully evaluate ideas before accepting them, prove what is right and hold onto what we prove, or we will lose our focus and our direction (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

God's Church teaches the Bible's truth about God and His plan of salvation, how to worship Him, the true

doctrines to teach and believe, the true purpose of life, the right way to live, the right goals to pursue—and warns us about what we must avoid in order to stay away from trouble. This is why it is so important to *know* what the Bible really says. The Bible provides a standard against which everything else can be measured. Sadly, today, human opinions (our own or somebody else's) often carry more weight than the truth God has revealed in the Bible. We cannot afford to be ignorant of the real source of truth, or let other interests interfere with *regular study* of the word of God. If we do, we will lose our focus and wander off course.

The True God and the Real Jesus

The God of the Bible is a God of mercy and of justice (Psalm 101:1), who gave human beings the ability to learn to choose between the right way God has revealed and the wrong and deceitful ways Satan promotes (Deuteronomy 30:11–20). The God of Scripture revealed great and *wondrous things* in His law to His chosen people, so that they could be examples to the world and a blessing to mankind (see Deuteronomy 4:1–14; Psalm 119:18; Hosea 8:12). The real God promises blessings for obedience to His laws, and punishments for disobedience (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He specifically warns us not to add to or delete from His word (see Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18–19) and not to borrow ideas from pagan religions (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; John 8:44). The God of the Bible does not change (Malachi 3:6)—yet He is actually *rejected* today by many who claim to believe in Him. In place of the biblical God, many have created a god with whom they are more comfortable—a less threatening, much less demanding, permis-

sive parent who has no required rules to follow and practices no specific form of government. This man-made and imaginary god is happy with people who worship in any manner they choose, even if their worship includes practices taken from paganism. Like the ancient Israelites, many who today call themselves Christian have *forgotten* the true God, and have adopted perverted ways (Jeremiah 3:21; 2 Timothy 3:5). If we want to stay on course in a mixed-up world,

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The real Jesus warned that *many* would come in His name (claiming to be Christians) and *deceive many* (Matthew 24:5). Paul warned of teachers preaching about “another Jesus” who bears *no resemblance* to the biblical Savior (2 Corinthians 11:3–4). The long-haired and effeminate image of a false Christ, worshiped today by billions, contrasts sharply with the Bible's clear admonition for men not to wear long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). The image of a “soft and effeminate Jesus” does not fit the young carpenter who overturned tables, sent animals and money changers scurrying out of the Temple, and told priests and misguided believers that they were hypocrites and sons of the devil because they were teaching and acting *contrary* to the laws of God (Matthew 23:13–33;

John 2:13–17; 8:42–44). The biblical Jesus observed the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and the Holy Days (John 7), as did the Apostles He trained (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 21; 1 Corinthians 5:8). He taught plainly: “If you love me, *keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). For the Christ of the Bible, the laws of God were *not* burdens or outdated relics of an old covenant! Scripture states that Jesus Christ does not change (Hebrews 13:8). Like His Father, He is also concerned with mercy (Titus 3:4–6) and justice (Isaiah 9:6–7). He is coming back to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God, reward the saints and destroy those who have corrupted the earth (Revelation 11:17–18). The return of the *real* Jesus will shock the world! The *biblical* Jesus is a striking contrast to the Jesus worshiped in most churches today! Sincere Christians cannot afford to go off course by accepting the “different” Jesus that has been pawned off on an unsuspecting world for centuries!

The True Gospel

The *true* Gospel message proclaimed by Jesus Christ will surprise many professing Christians who have lost their focus. The world generally assumes that Jesus came with a pleasant message about love, grace and salvation for all who give their heart to the Lord and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet the Bible reveals that *even demons believe these things* (see Mark 5:1–8; James 2:19). But Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the *true* Gospel, emphasizing the reality of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 9:35; 10:6–7). This was the Gospel which Christ preached before His crucifixion. Jesus emphasized that to be in the Kingdom of God, one must repent of sin and keep the commandments of God (Mark 1:15; John 14:15).

After His resurrection, Jesus added an *additional* dimension to the Gospel message. He told the disciples

that they were to be witnesses to the world that His suffering, death and resurrection were necessary for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:44–49; Colossians 1:13–14). Yet Jesus continued to focus on the Kingdom of God, as did the disciples (Acts 1:3, 6). The Apostolic Church understood and taught about *both* the coming Kingdom of God *and* the things concerning Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). Sadly, the “mainstream Christian” world has lost track of the Gospel of the Kingdom, and has mistakenly focused only on the life and person of Jesus Christ. Many churches have *missed* half of the true Gospel message because they have followed misguided leaders who have gone off course. Today, many professing Christians do not realize that they have been sold a “different gospel”—a deception about which Paul repeatedly warned in his epistles (2 Corinthians 11:1–4; Galatians 1:6–9). This becomes obvious when we read the Gospels and notice the true Gospel that Jesus preached (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:43; 8:1).

The True Church

Many today think of the church as a building. For others, the church is vaguely considered as a collection of people who believe in God and Jesus. Supposedly, millions of people belong to this “mystical body” of Christ. Yet when we focus on what the Bible reveals about the Church, we find just the opposite. Jesus said that the Church He established would continue to exist—as a *real entity* (Matthew 16:18). He said it would be a small, scattered and persecuted group of people (Luke 12:32; John 15:20; 16:32). Jesus said that true Christians are “not of the world” (John 17:16), but are commanded to

come out of the world and be separate (2 Corinthians 6:17). Christ also said “woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Jesus was cautioning against seeking acceptance and praise from the religious establishment. Yet for many today who have lost their focus, seeking acceptance by mainstream Christianity is a major goal—even though

The challenge facing real Christians today is to stay focused on the right priorities: the true God, the real Jesus, the word of God and the true Gospel. Real Christians must develop the knowledge and character that God can use to accomplish the mission of His Church and bring to fruition His great plan.

many mainstream beliefs originated in pagan religious practices *condemned* in Scripture (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Matthew 15:8–9).

The true Church founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles *can be recognized* if we focus on what the Bible reveals. The Church has a biblical name—a dozen times, the New Testament refers to the “Church of God” or “Churches of God.” The true Church is not characterized by “doctrinal diversity” but is composed of members “joined together in the *same mind* and in the *same judgment*” (1 Corinthians 1:10). The biblical Church of God has a hierarchical structure, through which leaders are

appointed based on qualifications and the fruits of conversion in their lives; they are not elected by appeal to voters (Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5). The Church Jesus established kept the Sabbath and Holy Days, following His example (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 44). However, just as Jeroboam changed the days of worship in ancient Israel and led the nation astray, theologians have rejected God’s Sabbaths (Leviticus 23) and adopted Sunday worship and Christmas and Easter celebrations originating in pagan antiquity (Ezekiel 20:28–32). As a result, God’s chosen people have lost their focus and their national identity (see Deuteronomy 32:16). The Bible reveals that God’s rebellious people will also lose His protection and their freedom because they have lost their way. This will be a costly lesson.

The Church’s Mission

Today there are many different ideas about the mission of the Church. This is not surprising. A *different gospel leads to a different mission*. The *true Gospel* provides the Church of God with a *powerful vision* and sense of mission. Many sincere people assume that the mission of the Church is to meet in little groups and talk about Jesus. It might also include spreading the good news that “God loves you... Jesus died for you... just love Jesus and you will go to heaven.” Yet Jesus commissioned His disciples to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and to all the world preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, healing, raising the dead and casting out demons (Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 16:14–20). They were to *warn* Israelite nations and the world to *repent* of their sins before the coming Great Tribulation that will precede

Jesus Christ's return (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The disciples "turned the world upside down" with their message, in spite of being persecuted by the religious establishment in both pagan and Jewish communities (Acts 17:6). They were not just preaching about a baby Jesus who loved everybody. They did not portray the Church as a mere spiritual hospital for lost souls. They were preaching about a *real* coming Kingdom and the return of a *powerful* Christ who will shake the nations and restore the government of God to this earth (Revelation 11:15–18). Historian Edward Gibbon records that this attention-getting message of the coming Kingdom of God was the "reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers" during the early centuries of the Church, but that it was gradually relegated to the realm of heresy (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 15). As members of the early Church lost their focus on the true Gospel, they lost their true sense of mission, and the majority of professing Christians drifted away from the Christian mission and the plain Christian truth! Regrettably, this is occurring today to those who listen to misguided leaders. Is this happening to you?

Our Personal Goal

Many sincere professing Christians believe that their personal role is merely to love God, love their neighbor and utter pleasant-sounding phrases like "Praise the Lord!" However, if we focus on what the Bible reveals, we find very interesting advice. Jesus told us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). We are told to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), and to develop the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–11). This means learning to live by the commandments of God—in

the spirit and the letter—as Christ did (John 15:10). We are told that God gives His Spirit to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32), and that God wants us to *bear fruits* of that Spirit (Galatians 5:22–26). Individuals who *overcome* the pulls of human nature and grow spiritually will be given the opportunity to *rule* with Christ on Earth, and *teach* mankind the way to true peace, joy and happiness (Revelation 5:10; Isaiah 30:20–21)—which will involve learning to live by the laws of God (Isaiah 2:2–4). The true purpose of human life is to *prepare* to be in the Kingdom of God, where today's true Christians will work with Jesus Christ to change the course of history. The idea of forever sitting on a cloud in heaven, playing on a harp, is fantasy spun by those who have lost their focus. If we lose our focus, we will lose our reward (Revelation 3:10–13)!

The Plan of God

Many assume that God is earnestly trying to save everyone now. This idea persists because the "mainstream Christian" world has lost sight of the plan of God. The *real* plan of God is pictured in the biblical Holy Days (Leviticus 23). The Passover reminds us that Jesus suffered and died so that our sins can be forgiven. The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that we must eliminate sinful thoughts and actions and begin to think and act like Jesus Christ. Pentecost reveals that to those who repent and obey His instructions, God gives His Spirit, empowering them to overcome sin (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:38; 5:32). The Bible explains that only those whom God calls will have an opportunity to understand the truth at this time (John 6:44–45)—and that this number will be small (Luke 12:32; 1 Corinthians 1:26–27). The truth of God is a *mystery* to those who are not

called (Matthew 13:10–17; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16). However, such individuals—most of humanity—are not lost! The fall Holy Days reveal that Christ will return (the Feast of Trumpets), put Satan out of commission (the Day of Atonement—Revelation 20:1–3), establish the Kingdom of God on this earth (with the resurrected saints—Revelation 20:4–6) and begin to reeducate those alive at that time (the Feast of Tabernacles). Those who died down through the ages without hearing or understanding the truth of God will come up in a second resurrection and have their opportunity for salvation (The Last Great Day—Revelation 20:5, 11–12). This is an encouraging message. Yet most professing Christians (and followers of other religions) have never heard this good news, because religious leaders of this world have lost their way and have no knowledge of the plan of God (Romans 1:18–25).

The challenge facing real Christians today is to stay focused on the right priorities: the true God, the real Jesus, the word of God and the true Gospel. Real Christians must develop the knowledge and character that God can use to accomplish the mission of His Church and bring to fruition His great plan. Scripture reveals that only a *few* of those called now will be chosen to receive a reward (Matthew 20:16). They will be chosen because they *remain faithful* to the truth they are given to understand (Revelation 17:14), and they will grow and produce the fruits that God is seeking in their lives (John 15:1–8). They also *endure* through trials and persecution (Matthew 24:13) and they *finish* the race (2 Timothy 4:1–8). The amazing rewards God promises to those whom He has called to become saints will only go to those who *stay on course*! Will that include you? ■

Have You Had the Mumps Yet?

By Dibar K. Apartian

Have you had the mumps—yet? What a ghastly question! You may expect to be asked if you had your morning cup of coffee *yet*—or even perhaps your daily Vitamin C supply *yet*. But *mumps*? Who would expect such a question?

Mumps is said to be *contagious*—and it is. But what does “contagious” mean? Are we supposed to catch anything and everything that is contagious? Is it automatic? Is there such a law in the Bible?

Physicians tell us that mumps usually attacks children between ages 5 and 15. Consequently, we more or less *expect* our children to catch it. It is considered normal and even routine when they do. In fact, because parents know how disabling “childhood diseases” can be when an adult catches them, they sometimes go as far as to *hope* that their children will come down with these diseases *as soon as possible*! Their reasoning is that children usually recover rapidly from the “childhood” diseases, whereas the opposite is quite often true so far as adults are concerned.

Such reasoning is *natural*—and in a carnal way it makes some sense to the adult mind. Nevertheless, something is lacking in such thinking; something is misleading. If we only catch contagious diseases because they are contagious, then where is *our* responsibility in catching and spreading them? If children are bound to catch a “childhood” disease because of contagion, does *sin* fit into the picture?

We know from the Bible that sickness is a result of sin (Deuteronomy 28:58–61). Contagious diseases are *not* exempt from this law. Nor are the “childhood” diseases. But, then, how strange does it sound when a parent says, “I hope my children will catch measles or mumps before they grow older”? That is like hoping they will sin—or have their share of sin’s penalty—*as soon as possible*, so that the ensuing punishment will be milder. When we think of it that way, we can see such thought as futile!

Of course, we never think of it in quite that way. But how often do we examine our responsibility when our children—or we ourselves—come down with a contagious disease? Often, even though we ask to be anointed, we assume that in our particular instance the responsibility was not really *ours* but was *partly* or even *mostly someone else’s*—perhaps the fault of the person through whom we were infected.

A contagious disease *is* contagious, for sure—yet, when properly understood, we cannot call ourselves entirely *guiltless* in succumbing to one. Even when we cannot assign any personal guilt directly to ourselves for an illness, we are by our physical existence participating in a degenerate world into which much suffering has entered through the violation of God’s laws (Romans 5:12). So, are we truly suffering be-

cause of our own sin, or because of others’ sins, or because of society’s sins? Our suffering from a contagion may not be just a question of mere time and chance.

Moreover, we cannot repent of someone else’s sins—only of our own. It is not that when we are healthy and our neighbors are sick, we are somehow more righteous than they are. Rather, we must each examine ourselves to determine where *we ourselves* have broken God’s laws, and what is *our* share of the sin that let us succumb to contagion (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Why Me?

I still remember the Friday afternoon, decades ago, when after returning home from work I told my wife that I had a strange sensation under my ear—possibly even a swelling.

“Oh, dear, you’re not coming down with the mumps, are you?” she chuckled. “You’ll never live it down! At your age, it won’t just be dangerous; it’s going to be *embarrassing*.”

It was—but not quite the way I had expected it to be. My embarrassment was not only before men, but also before God! Indeed, I had never thought of it before, but it suddenly occurred to me that if something is embarrassing before men, it must *first* of all be embarrassing before God. Truly, I did feel embarrassed for having caught the mumps. I felt embarrassed for the way I took the disease for granted—for my poor understanding of my necessary repentance at the time I was anointed for it.

As I tossed around in my bed, deep in thought—with my jowls practically hanging over my shoulders—I asked myself: “What did I actually *do* to catch the mumps? *How come I got it*? Where did I go wrong?” Since mumps is generally a childhood disease, and since disease is ultimately the result of sin, is there some sin more common to children than to adults? Or was I just irresponsible with my own health? Did I fail to take care of myself—and did sin play some part in that?

You might think I was delirious, but I was not! When you have much time to think, you try to be philosophical about things—and you follow a certain line of thought which somehow seems quite “logical” to you! Especially as we prepare for the Passover—which God’s Church will observe in 2009 on Tuesday evening, April 7, after sunset—we need to be examining ourselves. My mumps certainly gave me ample time and material for self-examination!

Discerning My Responsibility

Sin can be *physical* or *spiritual*. But it is useless and nonsense to try to pinpoint any particular sin—especially in the case of a contagious disease—and label it as the single *cause*

of mumps or measles or whooping cough. It just does not work that way. Even though sinful actions produce obvious results—for instance, if you have a bad fall, you may break a bone—nevertheless, sin is sin; whatever the extent, it still represents the *transgression* of God's laws.

In my particular case, I could think of a number of reasons why I should be down with the mumps—and each one, *individually*, would be valid, because each, *individually*, represented a transgression of God's laws. Granted, our human bodies are pitifully degenerate—but surely I must have *my own share* of responsibility in the matter. Surely I contribute to the general degeneration by the very life I lead in this present corrupt world. And surely my body—if it is properly taken care of—has sufficient antibodies to fight against any contagious disease! Did I—or *do I*—take care of my body the way God intended me to? In all this, have I fallen short? Have I neglected my responsibilities?

If you have allowed your body to be in a *run-down condition*, susceptible to catching any kind of disease, can you see how this is a kind of sin? And how about the fact of being *careless*—yes, exhibiting just plain carelessness—in faithfully following God's laws?

Think seriously! Do you *really* consider such carelessness as sin—either your sin personally, or the result of our sin-sick society, or both?

Any human beings, anywhere and anytime, are liable to catch any sickness (including, of course, the contagious ones), if they have been careless of *diet*, careless of *sleeping habits*, careless regarding *physical exercise*, careless of the *rules of hygiene*, careless of...

As an aside, this type of enumeration reminds me of an amusing record I once heard at Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's home. On that record, former President Lyndon B. Johnson was naming *ad infinitum* all the medical doctors who were consulted when he suffered a simple cold! However, though President Johnson's list, by the laws of mathematics, was bound to come to an end, the list of *human carelessness* never can and never will.

Carelessness Is Sin

It is high time that we begin to associate carelessness with sin, because to be careless in keeping God's laws means plainly not keeping them. No justification or compromise is possible; living carelessly is like being half-alive!

It is easy—so very easy—to be careless. All it takes is the failure to use your head, or the neglect of what you ought to do. If you took time to think about these matters, to meditate seriously on what sin and its ramifications actually are, you would never be asking yourself, as I did, “Where did I get the bug? Who gave it to me? Was I bound to catch the disease because of its contagious nature?” Rather than seek the answers to such questions, and rather than blame someone else, you would

search your heart to know where *you have gone wrong*, where you have failed in doing your share, where you have been careless, even negligent, in taking proper care of God's temple.

And then, there is another phase. In cases of sickness—whether contagious or not—after we repent and are anointed, we sometimes tend to believe that if God, in His infinite mercy, allowed our plans to be changed, it was to protect us from another calamity or accident, a more serious one, perhaps, which otherwise would have been our lot.

Let me explain this.

Did God Really Cause This?

Have you ever wondered, when you were sick or undergoing some hardship, just what was the underlying lesson God wanted you to learn? *You should* wonder, because there is always a lesson to learn in everything that happens in our life. But in so wondering, have you also *assumed*, subconsciously perhaps, a somewhat self-righteous attitude—seeking first to understand what *other* calamity you were spared, or the “meaning” of the adverse circumstances, rather than admitting you brought them on yourself?

I am sure you get the point. There is always—for each one of us—a lesson to learn in whatever happens to us. But all the changes brought in our lives as a result of such circumstances are *not* necessarily of God's doing—nor are they always a divine “sign” of His intervention. When our plans are upset—and, in such circumstances, they usually are—we tell ourselves, “It must be God's will.” This way of thinking is rather convenient, since it lets us *de-emphasize our personal responsibility*! In other words, in our eagerness to rationalize the “divine” intervention, we forget our own role—whether personally, or simply by living in today's degenerate world—in creating the mess we are in.

No doubt, God can and does—*when He so chooses*—intervene in a dramatic way in our lives, causing our plans to be upset, our decisions to be reversed, trips and appointments cancelled, and all sorts of such disturbances. However, more often than not, such upset of our plans is imposed on us *by our own actions*—and not necessarily commanded by God.

My Plans Upset

The same was true, to be sure, in the case of *my* mumps. “My” mumps—in this particular case, for once, I hated that adjective “my.” In my vanity, I found myself more preoccupied to understand just *why* God allowed sudden changes in my plans and schedule, rather than to understand the part I played in the matter. For one thing, I knew my sickness would set me back in my work; it would prevent me making new broadcasts to the French-speaking people for some length of time, and of course would upset my regular schedule as well as all of my immediate plans. “Why—oh, why did God allow this to happen?” I

asked myself, quite oblivious to the reasons for my catching the mumps, as though *He* were responsible for it.

I reflected that we were expecting a visitor from Europe—the teenage daughter of close friends from Belgium. Both she and we—especially our children—had been looking forward to her visit. Because our visitor would speak only French, my children would be forced to converse with her in that language. What an excellent opportunity this would be for them! But because of my mumps, we had to postpone her trip; just a few hours before her departure, we contacted her parents to call it off, at least temporarily.

Now, was this necessarily God's will? It could have been, of course. But was it *really*? I presume you can be philosophical about it and reason your way around, looking for all kinds of plausible arguments to prove that such was necessarily the case. But would it be true?

You might say, perhaps, that God stopped our visitor from flying that day because her plane might have crashed. Actually it did not; the plane landed very safely. You might think of many other reasons. But please try to see the point. Whatever the circumstances, even though “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28), we are on dangerous ground when we *forget* that we have *sinned*—when we blind our eyes to the ultimate cause behind the need to change our plans.

As you see, it all depends on how you look at things—and just how close you are to God. But no matter how you look at things, you cannot justify your sins, your failure to uphold your God-given responsibilities.

What else was disrupted by my mumps? I had been scheduled to visit Barbados, Trinidad and Martinique along with the Deputy Director of the Foreign Work. Of course, we had to call off our visit temporarily. Was this God's will? Once again, *it could have been*, but I had no proof. Later I found out that the Deputy Director had to handle an urgent matter in South Africa at that very time; in the sudden change of plans, I could see God's direction quite obviously.

But the point remained: whatever the “cause,” I had to avoid *rationalizing*. When our plans are shattered by illness or accident, instead of looking out for reasons why it happened to be that way, we must first examine ourselves to see what we have done wrong. Then we must repent of it, and trust God to let things work out the best possible way.

If God, in His infinite wisdom, uses certain circumstances in our lives to make us do—or abstain from doing—a certain thing, will this make us *less guilty* of our wrong actions? Can we consider ourselves *less guilty* because something good came out of it all *by the grace of God*? If we maintain such a wrong attitude, we may miss out on the opportunity to repent deeply for having been careless, and not having upheld our responsibilities the way we should have, rather than justifying or rationalizing the circumstances!

We ought to straighten out our views and see things the way they actually are. If we do our share, God will always do His. He has promised to heal us, and it is by Christ's stripes that we are healed (1 Peter 2:24). Part of “doing our share” is that we must come to recognize our share of guilt in catching a contagious disease. Then, if we discern how God—through His mercy—has worked things out for the best, we should be ever more grateful to Him.

Yes, It Was Embarrassing!

I had to be well past my teenage years—to be a man in his forties—before I could finally say, sadly, that at last I had had the mumps. Yet it is only since then that I have fully grasped the meaning of “childhood” or contagious diseases, which are often looked upon as unavoidable. I was accustomed to taking them for granted, deemphasizing the role of “sin” in their spread. The words “childhood” or “contagious” had somehow misled my thinking, making me—subconsciously perhaps—disassociate them from sin.

It was embarrassing!

But my worst embarrassment, as I came to understand, was before God! I was embarrassed for having *overlooked* my part in today's human degeneration. I was embarrassed for having acted rather *self-righteously* in the presence of a childhood or contagious disease. I was embarrassed for having been *careless* in doing my part; embarrassed for my *negligence* in doing my share in keeping my body in top shape. I was embarrassed for not having fully *discerned my guilt*, and for having instead *rationalized* the consequences. No, I did not catch the mumps *just* because of someone who had not properly quarantined himself; I had *my own part*—a big part—in it, even though that part was at first overlooked and de-emphasized by the reasonings of my carnal mind (Jeremiah 17:9).

It was most embarrassing indeed!

Whether children or adults, we all are subject to catching a “childhood” or contagious disease, not necessarily just because of contagion, but *because of sin* under one form or another. Contagion is a result of sin, and we have *all sinned* (Romans 3:23). A “childhood” disease may be more serious when contracted by adults, because adults are more directly responsible for their actions—they should know better how to take care of themselves, so it should be no wonder that the penalty can be expected to be heavier.

My wife was right. Having mumps was an *embarrassing experience*; not just before men, but especially before God—because sin is always *against Him*.

I learned quite a bit from my experience with the mumps. In its ugliness, and with all the inconveniences it caused, it brought about a self-examination that taught me important lessons. Now, when the opportunity presents itself, I think twice and ponder the meaning of my words before I consider asking someone, “Have you had the mumps yet?” ■

The Apostle John's Excellent Example

By Wyatt Ciesielka

How much do you value your relationship with God? Are there examples you can emulate to help you grow into a more intimate relationship with your Creator?

Christians understand the profound truth that although God has no pleasure in wickedness (Psalm 5:4), and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), He nevertheless loves each of us so much that He gave His Son to die, so that our sins could be forgiven when we repent and are baptized (John 3:16).

But does God want more from us—and for us? Yes, He does. A *true Christian* understands that we show God our love for Him by our willingness to keep His commandments (1 John 5:2–3). We know that God treasures this attitude in us. But is there even more?

A true Christian is deeply convinced that God loves us *and* that we must keep His law. In fact, one way to identify true Christians, as well as true ministers of God, is that they teach, speak *and live* “[according] to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, [according to Biblical truth] it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

Although none of us keep the law perfectly, this does not cancel the requirement that we *try*. We are to “*press* toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). We are to work toward becoming spiritually “mature” (v. 15). So, to help us understand how to work toward spiritual maturity, God has recorded good examples for us, and throughout the Bible we see examples of God’s relationship with those whom He has loved greatly. Yet to benefit from this, we must *want* to be greatly loved by God. We must earnestly desire to be developing an ever-more-meaningful relationship with Him.

If we want to learn how to please Him more, to grow more deeply in His love, we can study and meditate on the lives of various individuals whose lives are recorded in the Bible.

Old Testament Examples

The Bible describes a number of individuals whom God especially loved. Studying these people is important, because as we grow to better understand their relationships with God, we can better understand the attributes God deeply desires to see in us. We can see that while God absolutely requires each of us to keep His commandments, to strive to be righteous, and to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:17–18), He can still deeply love us even if we are not “perfect.”

Daniel is one such example of a person “greatly beloved” by God. Daniel was so beloved that while he was in the midst of a heartfelt prayer, the Eternal sent the powerful archangel Gabriel to comfort him and to reveal amazing prophecies (Daniel 9:20–23). About 500 years later, Jesus Christ Himself would point to prophecies revealed through Daniel as key to end-time understanding (Matthew 24:15).

It is also clear that Moses was greatly loved by God. We know that God blessed Moses with good health and vitality right up to the time of his death (Deuteronomy 34:7). Scripture also records that God kindly showed Moses the Promised Land before He allowed him to die peacefully, then personally buried him in a secret place (Deuteronomy 34:1, 5–6).

We can also see that God had a very special relationship with Sarah.

God greatly loved her and changed her name from *Sarai* to *Sarah*, meaning “princess” (Genesis 17:15). Even when Abraham for a time lost her to King Abimelech, God personally intervened to protect her and save her. Not only had God “closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah” (Genesis 20:18); to secure her release, God also “came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife’” (Genesis 20:3). We know that Abimelech released Sarah back to Abraham unharmed, and with gifts of great riches (Genesis 20:14–16).

Christ Loved and Trusted John

In the New Testament, one person stands out in many ways as someone *especially loved* by God. This person is an example for us today in attitude, faith and obedience. A study of this person can yield significant lessons for Christians living in this age, as we near the end of humanity’s 6,000 years and look to Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom. This person is the Apostle John.

Christ’s own relationship with John is perhaps the best compliment that could be given regarding this apostle’s character and reputation. Five times, Scripture identifies John as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20).

Notice that out of all the disciples Jesus loved and trusted, John is the one on whom He bestowed the responsibility of taking care of His mother after His death. While Jesus hung on the stake, scourged, bloody

and near death, some of His final thoughts were of compassion towards His mother. “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved [John] standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:25–27). There may be no better testimony to the love Jesus had for John, and the trust that He had in John’s character, than when during His final moments He entrusted His mother to him.

Consider that in his later years, the Apostle James wrote one of the most famous commands regarding our responsibility to widows. When Jesus’ brother James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (James 1:27), his own mother Mary had been one such widow! Clearly, James had grown to appreciate this kindness and deep love later in his life, but it is instructive that at the time of His death and resurrection, it was John whom Jesus trusted as being ready for this weighty responsibility! Jesus knew that John would be a kind, faithful and trustworthy provider for His mother, so He chose him for this stewardship—even over His own physical brothers. Jesus’ decision is profound testimony to His love for John and His confidence in John’s character.

What else can we learn from John’s example, to help us grow into a deeper relationship with God?

John Had to Grow in Faith and Love

Just as Paul tells us that “all have sinned,” it is important to note that John was not naturally “perfect”—and was probably not even inherently very

compassionate or overly kind as a youth or young man.

Scripture does not record much about John’s early life, but we do know that he worked closely with his father (Matthew 4:21), that he grew up in Bethsaida of Galilee, and that his parents were somewhat affluent, as his father was a successful fisherman. It also appears that John had a very close relationship with his mother, Salome, who would later accompany her sons as they traveled with Jesus. Additionally, we know that Salome was earnest (if not somewhat presumptuous) in desiring success for her sons (Matthew 20:20–21).

Scripture gives us strong clues that, like his mother Salome, John was *by nature* rash and impetuous. Revealingly, Jesus nicknamed him a “Son of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) implying a strong, quick temper. When this epithet is coupled with the incidents in Mark 9:38 (when John forbade the stranger to use Christ’s name in casting out demons) and Luke 9:54 (when he asked if fire should be called down on the Samaritans), we gain interesting insight into John’s natural personality and his human nature before conversion.

However, we also know that John, through self-discipline and through the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, subjugated his strong natural inclinations in order to become a humbler, kinder person. We see in John someone who—perhaps like ourselves—was not inherently kind, gentle, or somehow “naturally righteous.” However, we also see that John, just a few years after deciding to follow Christ, had grown to such a great extent that his Savior could trust him with the responsibility of caring for His mother.

As do all who have been “crucified with Christ,” and who yield to the direction of Christ living in them (Galatians 2:20), John grew tremendously in faith, obedience and all of the fruits of the Spirit. John’s teaching reveals some vital truths for us today,

and his example is an excellent one for those who want to deepen their relationship with God.

John’s Writings on Love

John’s is the only Gospel that details the relationship of Christ as the Word, pre-existing for all eternity with God the Father (John 1:1–5). The beginning of John’s Gospel is one of the most revealing descriptions of Christ (the Logos) and God (the Father) in their relationship. In addition to this deep appreciation for Christ’s and the Father’s relationship from eternity, John’s writings are rich with various additional manifestations of “love”—including *redemptive love* and *binding love*.

John wrote of *redemptive love*: “That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:15). Likewise, “This is how the love of God has appeared for us, by God sending His only Son into the world, so that by Him we might live” (1 John 4:9, *Moffatt*). Through Christ sacrificing His life for us, God’s profound desire for our redemption was illustrated through action. This truth is represented in many other passages in John’s writings, such as John 3:16, and in the writings of other Apostles. Notice that Paul equally understands that the ultimate act of love was the act that allowed our redemption—and allowed us eventually to receive “all things” as our inheritance. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

As did the other apostles, John observed Jesus establishing the New Testament Passover. John closely watched and learned from Christ’s loving example of washing His disciples’ feet. Moreover, John personally witnessed Christ’s arrest and trial, and ultimately the laying down of His life for us. Notice that it was John and Peter who followed Jesus into the courtyard of

the High Priest (John 18:15–18). And notice that it was John who secured Peter's entry (v. 16). This is loyalty, devotion and an absence of fear that is made possible only through true love. As John later writes, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have *boldness* in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is *no fear in love*; but perfect love casts out fear..." (1 John 4:17–18, KJV).

John fully understood the intent of the authorities who had just arrested Jesus. When he faithfully followed Christ into the courtyard of the High Priest, John not only showed love, but also showed boldness, which is a manifestation of love.

John was a person just like us. He knew that by following Jesus into the court, he could be accused, attacked and beaten. But John's relationship with Jesus was based on true, strong love. If we were in the same situation, would we be so bold? If not, it is because our love for God is not yet mature.

When John records, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13), he not only fully appreciates Jesus' literal sacrifice for us, but he also gives us a model to follow. This is a model of lifelong service, kindness and commitment to each other and to God, even unto death. This is the example Christ showed of His redemptive love for us.

John also wrote of *binding love*. The "children of God" are *bound together and bound to God* through love. Many scriptures such as John 17:20–22 show that those who are the "children of God" (God's Church, or *ekklesiā*) are bound together and bound to God in a very special way. This bond is based on love. This is *agapaō* love, which is "to love a person dearly."

Those who are called out of this world and are really following Christ, as members of the "flock" (Luke

12:32), also have *loving fellowship* with others in the flock. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have *fellowship* with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Also, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

These verses are a powerful *encouragement* for those who are truly following Christ, and they are a powerful *indictment* of those who claim to follow Christ yet mistakenly believe they can be "stay-at-home-Christians," neglecting fellowship with God's faithful flock and His faithful ministry.

Finally, notice John 1:12 in the *Revised Standard Version*. "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave *power* to become children of God." The RSV appropriately uses the English word *power* for the Greek word *exousia*. The Greek *exousia* means "physical and mental power" and "ability or strength which one exercises."

John understood that being bound by love is not a passive, "feel-good" concept. Rather, it is a *powerful, dynamic strength* that flows among God's begotten children, and between Christians and God. When we are the "children of God" we are *bound* to God and to each other through a *powerful force*.

John Teaches Us to Practice Righteousness

Too often commentators and theologians extract only small fragments of John's writings in an attempt to turn him into a kind-hearted grandfatherly figure who "grew beyond the severity and the restrictions of the law." The truth is quite the contrary.

As we know, sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). John also

powerfully records that he who sins is "of the devil," and that he "who practices righteousness is righteous" (vv. 5–9). Notice that John records, "Whoever abides in Him does not sin" (v. 6). Does this mean that a Christian never sins? No. Any honest linguist recognizes that the verb translated "*does not sin*" is the Greek *hamartanō* and *ou*—meaning to "not practice sin." A Christian will not live a life *practicing* sin.

John also strongly admonishes us that "being righteous" includes wholeheartedly preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. John writes that if we love the world, lusting after physical things, we do not have the love of the Father, "but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). When the young Christ's family found Him in the temple, He explained that He "must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). What was that business? It was "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14–15). Sadly, many today do not realize that a large part of what John is instructing us to "do" is to preach the Gospel of the soon-coming Kingdom of God. This is "the will of God."

Christ's followers continued to do His will after His crucifixion, and the authorities continued their persecution. The book of Acts records that John and the other apostles were arrested and thrown into prison multiple times for continuing to preach the Gospel boldly. Nevertheless, God protected them—just as He had protected Sarah years before!

We know that through God's powerful intervention the apostles were released from prison (Acts 5:19–21) and continued to preach the Gospel. Furthermore, we see that God was pleased with their boldness (Acts 4:29–31) and granted them powerful miracles (Acts 5:12–16) as followers were added in great number (see Acts 5:14). Though the apostles were often arrested, imprisoned and scourged (Acts 5:40), John and the other apos-

ties never ceased preaching the Gospel.

Practicing *agapaō* love is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This is Christ's and the Apostles' example. This is the Church of God's commission that has continued through the time of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, to our time today. Mr. Armstrong taught, as does the Church today, that Matthew 28:19–20 commissions the Church to preach the Gospel as a witness, to baptize those who repent and believe, and to teach observance of His commandments. This is a true mission of love and it has never changed. This is doing the will of the Father.

Applying the Excellent Example of John Today

Dr. Meredith has well summarized how Christians in any age should apply the lessons from John's excellent example. These lessons are especially meaningful as we approach the end of the age. He wrote:

“As we have seen, in order to keep God's spiritual law and to overcome our own sinful ways,

we need the love that only God can give. And this He has promised through His Spirit. Furthermore, we have just learned from 1 John 5:3 that God's love operates through keeping His law.

Again, John—the Apostle whom Jesus especially loved in a personal way—writing near the end of the Apostolic Era, tells us that God's love leads us to ‘keep His commandments.’ And in spite of clever modern theological arguments to the contrary, John says God's ‘commandments are *not* burdensome.’

A true Christian, then, will have God's love flowing through him like ‘rivers of living water’ (John 7:38–39). As he deeply *studies* the Bible and feeds on it, and as he fervently *prays* to God every day on his knees for the spiritual strength, faith, guidance and love he needs, the true Christian *grows spiritually*” (*What is a True Christian?*, pp. 17–18).

Likewise, as Mr. Dibar K. Apartian wrote in the September–October 2008 *Living Church News*: “What is the greatest gift you can receive in this

life? Surely it is God's Spirit. If you are a member of His Church, God has given you something the rest of the world does not have. Much will be required of you, because much has been given to you (Luke 12:48)” (“Be a Profitable Servant!” p. 7).

John understood this profoundly. He understood that through God's Holy Spirit, he could overcome his natural personality. He understood that he could overcome fear and could grow to deeply love the Church, fellow man and—most importantly—God. He understood that to truly love God is to keep His commandments and to do His will. He understood that God's will is to preach the Gospel and he gave his entire life to this purpose.

We in God's Church will have the opportunity to meet the Apostle John in not too many years. If you live to see Christ's return, you will meet John then (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). If you die in the faith before Christ's return, you will be resurrected along with John (Revelation 20:6). *God speed that day!* And, God help each of us to learn from John's excellent example! ■

We Must Appreciate Christ's Sacrifice!

(Continued from page 2)

when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (vv. 31–32).

Please go back and **study** those prophetic verses in Isaiah 53:4–5 which clearly indicate what Christ's “scourging” was all about! In verse 4, it states, “He has borne our griefs” or, as the Hebrew is often translated, “sicknesses”! In verse 5 it shows that He was bruised for our iniquities and “by His **stripes** we are **healed**.” Clearly, this has *directly* to do with the scourging Jesus suffered just before He was crucified, and with the meaning of the bread we take at the Passover—just *before* we take the wine symbolizing Christ's death for our spiritual sins.

Remember, the Gospel of Matthew clearly points out that when Jesus came and “*healed* all who were sick,” it was done “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘He Himself took our infirmities and **bore our sicknesses**’” (Matthew 8:16–17).

A number of passages in the New Testament clearly indicate that spiritual forgiveness and physical healing are inexorably tied together! For when Jesus healed the paralytic, He told the doubting Pharisees, “For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Arise and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house’” (Matthew 9:5–6). Whenever Jesus went out preaching, He not only taught the forgiveness of sins but He also **healed** the people of sickness and disease: “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35).

When He sent out His twelve apostles—still unconverted, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given—He “gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to **heal** all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Matthew 10:1). He instructed, “And as you go, preach,

saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:7–8). So the preaching of *physical healing* and the *forgiveness* of spiritual sins were **tied together** when Jesus and the apostles preached the Gospel! This was a **vital part** of the “Gospel message.” In Luke 10, we find that even the “70 others” who were sent out by Jesus apart from the apostles were given the same power and the **same commission** to *preach* and to *heal*! For Jesus told them, “Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:8–9).

After His resurrection, Jesus sent out the apostles and told them: “And these **signs** will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17–18).

Many of us ministers have participated in **healing** the sick and in *casting out demons*. But these events are not experienced nearly as often as they should be!

Why?

Because, as Jesus asked, “when the Son of man comes, will He really find **faith** on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Brethren, *many* scriptures indicate that God’s people—at the **end** of this age—will be greatly lacking in faith. We need to realize that *this has affected all of us*! And God Almighty generally **does not heal** nearly as often unless there is an “atmosphere of **faith**”! Please remember that even Jesus Christ Himself—when He came back to His own hometown and relatives, “**could do no mighty work there**, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (Mark 6:5). It was obviously not because He lacked faith, but “He marveled because of *their unbelief*” (v. 6)!

So, we must do everything in our power to **restore this aspect** of apostolic Christianity. We must begin, collectively, to **cry out** to God to restore the depth of *understanding* and the depth of **faith** regarding healing and God’s divine intervention in other ways that the original apostles had. We must *pray* about this. We must *fast* about this. We must go on a “campaign,” dear brethren, so that God will begin to supernaturally **heal** more of our friends and loved ones in God’s Church at this time of the end! We know that terrible *disease epidemics* are coming. Because of this, it is *even more imperative* than ever that God’s people learn to have genuine **faith** that God can **heal** us if we turn to Him with all our hearts!

As an aside, let me remind you that the Church has *always* taught that God does not heal people in every case in *this life*—and that He does allow people to die at some

point. God heals in *His* way and in *His* time. So, although we were *very hurt* to experience the deaths of Mr. David Burson, Mr. Randy Gregory, Mr. Carl McNair, Mr. John Ogwyn, Mr. Carl Ponder, Dr. Lynn Torrance, Mr. Keith Walden and others in recent years, we realize that these men had proven themselves as faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Some died well into their 60s or 70s, and several were older than I am today. In my case, brethren, I want all of you to *know* and **understand** that God does not “have” to heal me, although I certainly hope that He will. For God has already given me 78½ wonderful years of life, with two beautiful wives, six wonderful children, nine-grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, trips around the world and many, many other blessings and opportunities. I have *already* lived about eight years longer than King David of Israel did 3,000, years ago when God allowed him to die “old and full of days.” I will certainly *deeply appreciate* your prayers that God will grant me several more years to help *finish the Work*! This is my passion and my desire. But you *must not* be shocked, turned aside or in any way lose heart if God allows a 78-year-old man to die. Your *faith* must **always** be in God’s Word, and in what God says He will do. Unless there are *special reasons*, God does heal us in this lifetime—and many of us have experienced that over and over again. But we *do* need to go **all out** in a genuine crusade—as a Church—to ask God for increased faith and zeal so that our Father in heaven will begin to grant us the **gifts** of the Holy Spirit and begin to pour out these gifts—including *divine healing*—much more than ever, as we cooperate with Christ in creating an “atmosphere of faith” within the Church of God.

In Jesus’ name, I ask all of you to *join me* in urgently *crying out* to our Father in heaven to restore this living faith into His Church! Please ask God to *teach us every lesson*, show us **everything** we need to change and **move** us, collectively, to draw closer to Him so that He will then be able to *bless* us, **empower** us and **use** us to finish the Work of God with the kind of zeal the original apostles had—and *also* be blessed with the “accompanying” signs!

Then, as we approach the Passover, we can more sincerely get down on our knees and ask God—with renewed understanding and zeal—to help us *profoundly* appreciate what Jesus Christ our Savior did when He not only **shed His blood** for our spiritual sins, but gave His body to be broken that we might be **healed**. We must **not** leave out or neglect this vital part of God’s **purpose** for our lives, and for the *full meaning* of the Passover service!



Local Church News

Upcoming *Tomorrow's World* Telecasts

BET: Thursday, 6:00 AM ET & PT

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 5:30 PM ET; Monday–Friday, 3:00 AM ET

WORD: Sunday, 7:30 PM ET

AIR DATE	BROADCAST TITLE
March 1	Principles for Effective Bible Study
March 8	What Is the Kingdom of God?
March 15	The Power of Prophecy
March 22	Armageddon and Beyond
March 29	What Caused the Economic Crisis?
April 5	Why Must Christ Come Again?
April 12	The Superpower "Beast" of Revelation
April 19	Get God's Attention!
April 26	The Antichrist is Coming Soon!

For additional stations and times, check the Television Log on page 31 of your *Tomorrow's World* magazine.

In Loving Memory

Todd Walker Crockett, age 39, of Little Rock, Arkansas, died on November 22, 2008 after a long illness. His race is run; his journey is done. A faithful member of the Little Rock congregation, he was a gifted, well-known artist who loved adventure and travel. He is survived by his mother and father, Barbara Crockett and J. Davy Crockett, III of Matthews, North Carolina; four sisters, two brothers, four nieces and six nephews; his grandfather, and many beloved aunts and uncles. Mr. Charles Ogwyn conducted his funeral.

Willie Elden Gilbert, 73, of Horseshoe Bend, Arkansas, died on August 6, 2008. He was 73 years old. He is survived by his wife of 55 years, June, with whom he was baptized in 1964. He is also survived by daughter Judy Thomas, four grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He will be very much missed by family and friends.

Saw Khin Maung Gyi, a deacon serving the brethren in Sakhan Gyi, Myanmar, died on December 9, 2008. He was 68 years old. He is survived by his wife, Naw Kapawsay. He is also survived by sons Saw Bluhch, Bulerpew and Sakemoe, daughters Naw Saydo, Bwesay and Bwe Htoo, and eight grandchildren. Baptized in 1975 and ordained as a deacon in 2007, he was kind, humble, faithful and loved by all, and will be greatly missed. Mr. Thomas Tial Hoe conducted his funeral on December 12.

Jeffrey Michael Hooser, age 54, recently of Chattanooga, Tennessee, died on November 16, 2008. He loved and trusted God to the end. Jeff was best known for his friendly, communicative and outgoing personality. He loved people and had a good sense of humor. He is survived by his three older brothers, Don, Randall and James, as well as nieces and nephews. His friends and family miss him very much.

Ordinations

Mrs. Janice Coady was ordained as a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Mr. Karl Beyersdorfer and elder Mr. Gene Hilgenberg. She serves the brethren in Joplin, Missouri.

Mr. Vincent Larde and *Mr. Roland Lecocq* were ordained as elders on the first day of the Feast of Taber-

nacles by evangelist and Director of the French Work, Mr. Dibar Apartian. They serve the French-speaking brethren in Europe, particularly in Belgium, France and Switzerland.

Mr. Gene Lathrop and *Mr. Don O'Daniel* were ordained as deacons on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pas-

tor Mr. Karl Beyersdorfer and elder Mr. Gene Hilgenberg. They serve the brethren in Joplin, Missouri.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles (Rita) Moore were ordained as deacon and deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets, by Area Pastor Mr. Michael Elertson. The Moores serve in the Ottawa, Ontario, Canada congregation.

Wedding

Desirée Emmanuelle Burdette and *Aaron Lavene Vorel* were united in marriage on August 17, 2008. The wedding ceremony was performed at the Clemson University Outdoor Lab, in Clemson, South Carolina, by Mr. Ronald Poole, area pastor of the Anderson, South Carolina congregation. The couple reside in Greenville, South Carolina.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Callari, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, are delighted to announce the birth of their daughter *Ella Callari*. She was born on December 24, 2008, weighing 7 pounds, 1 ounce. Mother and baby are doing well, and Dad is ecstatic!

Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Gretchen Jacques, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, are delighted to announce the birth of their first child, *Jonathan David Jacques*, on December 6, 2008. He weighed 7 pounds, 4 ounces and was 20 inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Steven and Kate McKenzie of the Perth, Western Australia congregation, are thrilled to announce the arrival of their daughter *Claire McKenzie* on November 20, 2008. She weighed 8 pounds 12 ounces and measured 20 inches long. Mr. and Mrs. Mal and Judy Jennings, paternal grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Barry McKenzie, and her big brother Harrison were very excited to welcome her into the world.

Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Sergio Carvajal, of Santiago de Chile, observed their 40th wedding anniversary on December 14, 2008.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Best observed their 50th wedding anniversary on December 19, 2008. Brethren of the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan congregation marked the joyous occasion on December 6 with a special meal, cake and gift for this most dedicated and delightful couple.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Frye observed their 50th wedding anniversary on November 14, 2008. On November 15, the Walterboro, South Carolina congregation surprised them with a special celebration after Sabbath services, presented them with a beautiful anniversary clock and yellow “golden” roses, and served a special meal in their honor, which was enjoyed by all.

Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Robas, of Nelson, New Zealand, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on November 1, 2008 at a small dinner party with family and friends. Mr. and Mrs. Robas have four children and nine grandchildren. They were baptized in 1968 in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and are recent immigrants to New Zealand.

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 lcg@lcn.org).

Commentary

The View from 30,000 Feet

By Wallace G. Smith

The business of living life is full of many, many details. There are project reports to write, looming deadlines to meet, and a coffee spill on your desk that demands your attention. There are school forms to fill out and permission slips to sign while finishing your children's lunches as you see their school bus pull around the corner. Our eyeglass prescriptions need to be updated, our garbage needs to be taken out, and our dog needs to be taken to the vet. Details, details, details.

But sometimes we need to step back and free ourselves from the tyranny of details to look at things from a different level.

As I type this, I am riding in a plane from Charlotte, North Carolina to Dallas, Texas, and the pilot is currently taking us over Little Rock, Arkansas. Having been there before, I know the details I am not seeing from my vantage point: street lights, restaurants, cars, people, houses, and busy people going to and fro, all with their own tasks to do and purposes to accomplish.

Yet from here—30,000 feet above all that—I see so much more than those very busy people do. Details on the ground are not currently visible to me, as they would be to someone on the corner of South Arch Street and West Capitol Avenue. I do not see people crossing the street, but I do see a much broader picture, with features not visible to people on the ground. I clearly see the river running through town. I see the full layout of the highways, and the patchwork of land and color that surrounds the area.

Each of these vantage points has its benefits, and each provides a needed perspective. This airborne meditation reminded me of a scripture: "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established" (Proverbs 4:26). While walking a path, it is natural to pay attention to the details around us—step over that log, duck under that branch. But it also makes sense to step back sometimes to see a larger picture: Where is this path leading? Is that where I want to go? Is this the best way to get there? Will the destination be worth this journey?

Like stepping back to consider a footpath, or surveying the countryside from the air, we must sometimes consider the bigger picture. Children produce a lot of "busy-ness" in our lives, but what will we accomplish with them in the long run if we keep on our current path? Marriage, too, often demands daily focus on details, but what would we notice staring out a plane window that we could not see from the ground? What do I see ahead for us in five, ten or 20 years? What do I *want* to see in our marriage in the years ahead? How can we achieve it?

Life is full of details, and there is nothing wrong with that. But every once in a while, we need to step back and consider the bigger picture, climbing above the daily hustle and bustle to get the view from 30,000 feet.

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.