

Living Church News

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Let Us Examine Ourselves!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

As the Passover season approaches, *all* of us in God’s Church must truly “*examine ourselves*” as God commands us to do. For the Apostle Paul was inspired to write, “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Indeed, if Christ is not genuinely *living* within each of us, we are, in fact, “disqualified” from being part of the Kingdom of God. We are, in fact, *disqualified* from being taken to a Place of Safety before the Tribulation begins. We are, in fact, *disqualified* from becoming those kings and priests who will assist Jesus Christ in *ruling* this entire earth and bringing genuine peace and joy to a war-torn, starving and sick world.

So, we must each do our part to go “all out” in genuinely examining ourselves, overcoming our carnal human nature and *growing* toward the fullness of Christ.

Somewhere on this earth, a *true* Church of God exists where Christ is not merely present, but where His Spirit is *energizing* the members—where they are actually *growing* in grace and in knowledge while powerfully *doing* His Work! Surely, most of you who are reading this are part of that Church right now. You are part of it in a physical sense, obviously, but have you really examined yourself to be sure that you are part of the “inner core” that is truly *growing* toward the fullness of Christ, and is *qualifying* to receive the ultimate reward God has promised?

God inspired Peter to give us this warning, “For the time has come for *judgment* to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’” (1 Peter 4:17–18). As this present age of human society comes to a close, God will certainly be *judging* each of us to see if we are genuinely prepared and “qualified”—through *Christ in us*—to be full members of His coming Government. Do we really *appreciate* how wonderful—and how important—membership in the very *Family* of God actually is? Do we really go “all out” in preparation for our part in Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom?

The Apostle Peter described one of the many tests we will all be required to pass: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed,

you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12–13). Brethren, as this Work grows in power and impact, the world will certainly “come down on us” with a vengeance! Satan will be *furious* at what God is doing through us—so he will inspire blinded and confused men to *persecute us terribly!* Are we shallow Christians who will quickly give up under these trials and tests that are surely coming? Or will we be *so dedicated* and so close to Christ that we will overcome and truly *hold fast* the Truth and continue to *do* the Work with all of our hearts?

The early Christians had many such tests—as will we. We should all remember the inspired account about how “great persecution arose against the Church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1). For Saul—later the Apostle Paul—had led in the persecution of the Church in his early years, before Christ struck him down. Notice as the inspired account continues, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (vv. 3–4).

Think!

Dear brethren, if some of us were beaten and “dragged off” and put into prison, how many of you would become afraid or confused—or even decide that maybe God was not with us after all—and *turn aside* to the world? Each of us needs to *think through* what we might do in the above scenario, or other similar situations that no doubt will come to pass within the next several years!

Is God truly *real* to you? Can you honestly say that you are “walking with God” and are *daily* committing yourself to genuine Bible *study, meditation, prayer* and regular *fasting* in order to “seek God” and draw close to your Creator? Are you genuinely *preparing yourself*, by walking with God, to be a real king and priest in Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom?

God inspired John to tell us that He has “made us *kings* and *priests* to our God; and we shall *reign* on the earth” (Revelation 5:9–10). As Christ stated directly, “And he who *overcomes*, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father” (Revelation 2:26–27).

Remember, brethren, being an “overcomer” does **not** mean merely attending Church regularly and being part of the “physical” body of Christ. It means truly *conquering* your human nature, the world around you and Satan the Devil through your constant contact with God, and your deliberate and fervent yielding to Christ to *live His life within you*. To “overcome” is **not** to merely “hold your own.” It involves *changing* and *growing* unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—therefore qualifying in that way to be a **ruler** over entire cities and nations. This process is *real*, and it is leading to a genuine

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Christ Works Through Inspired Human Leaders

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

Around us, we again and again see many “Church of God” groups “splitting” or coming apart in various ways. Often this is because they do not have the right kind of leadership—a leadership truly guided and inspired by Jesus Christ, the true **Head** of God’s Church. We in the Living Church of God understand that to be an effective “team” to do Christ’s Work in this hectic world—and to prepare to be *totally loyal* kings and priests in Christ’s coming Kingdom—there *must be* right leadership and genuine unity.

As true Christians, we are called to be totally “at-one” with God the Father, and with Jesus Christ (John 17:20–23). Jesus prayed for all true Christians “that they may be **one** just as *We are one*” (v. 22). God inspired the Apostle Paul to exhort us to endeavor to “keep the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:3–6). Later in the same chapter, Paul describes how Christ gave the ministry to edify the Body of Christ, “till we *all* come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (vv. 13–14).

Most of you reading this have “endured” through much strife and division by misguided or deceptive leaders among God’s people. Truly, as God’s word—and much experience—has shown us, where there is a lack of *true Christian leadership* in the ministry, countless brethren have been and will be “carried about with every wind of doctrine.” We must **never** allow this to happen in the Living Church of God—the Church that the living Christ is primarily using to *do His Work* at this time!

Sadly, from time to time, we may see newer members—or even self-willed or confused older brethren—come up with “different” ways to observe the Passover, and Pentecost, *different* ways to observe the weekly Sabbath, *different* ideas about the need to use the so-called “sacred names” and other such topics. So, what does God’s inspired word tell us about how to handle these disagreements—which are potentially *divisive* for the whole Church? Is it “every man for himself”? Joe Blow may say, “Here is the way *I* look at it!” Then John Doe testily replies, “But here is the way *I* look at it!”

What to do?

The genuine answer, of course, is that from the beginning Christ has put *leadership* in His Church. In the Old Testament Church—the “Church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV)—Christ placed Moses as the primary human leader. Although Moses obviously made a few mistakes, *Christ* took care of Moses—and *made sure* that Moses’ occasional mistakes did **not** do serious or permanent damage to the “congregation of Israel” or prevent them from fulfilling God’s purpose at that time. Guided by God’s

Holy Spirit in the New Testament Church of God, we today should be *far more willing* to follow Christ’s proven human leadership than were those carnal Israelites. For we should deeply realize that our primary message to this confused world is the “good news”—the Gospel of the coming Kingdom (or *Government!*) of God. Obviously, we are here in this life to *learn* and to *practice* the **same** kind of government we will be administering over the entire world in a few years!

A VITAL Teaching and Practice

So it is absolutely **vital** that we grow in *unity* and *loyalty*, and that we develop a spirit of humble cooperation and submission to Christ’s government through His Church today!

Of course, if we in the Living Church of God leadership someday completely *turn aside* from God’s laws and His ways, God’s people may need to do what we all did when He raised up this Work! If the Council of Elders were to fail to put apostate leadership out of the Living Church of God, brethren might need to break off and *start an entirely new physical organization*, whose leadership God had visibly selected by “fruits”—and whose leaders and members would all be fully willing to **surrender** to God, to teach His Truth, to do the Work and to learn and practice God’s government fully in preparation for becoming kings and priests in His Kingdom.

However, brethren, as long as we in the LCG leadership today teach and practice the basic principles about the key doctrines as mentioned above, there is really *no excuse* for

people to break off in a self-willed manner—thereby causing **division** in the Body of Christ and in the Work which God is using—and thereby actually *undermining the ability* of the Church to grow and more powerfully reach out to this confused world *while there is time!* Just look at the sad fruits of those who have tried—even with the best of intentions at first—to humanly “fix” problems they thought were more important than the unity of God’s people to do the Work!

Yet many confused and often self-willed men who simply want to be “important” or “in charge”—many who are not “servant leaders” and have had *no training* and virtually *no experience* at higher-level leadership—still continue from time to time to break off in order to be the “head” of *their own group*. In nearly every case—without naming specific names—their work begins to diminish rather quickly after a few months or years—and usually ends up coming to **nothing!** All they have done is cause confusion, hurt God’s people, and in fact *damaged* the very *Work of God!* Obviously, Jesus Christ and God the Father are **not** pleased with that kind of attitude and approach. For Christ is now developing a loyal “team” of ministers and brethren and is *trying* and *testing* them to make sure that they can become a *unified body* under His leadership, and that they are **loyal** to Him and to one another in carrying out His Work both now and in Tomorrow’s World!

Please do **not** underestimate the importance of proper *loyalty* to Christ and to His human leadership! For the Bible is **full** of examples of how God looks on those who *cause division*, and who in various ways “water down” the degree of support and loyalty they ought to give to Him and to His true servants.

Witness how even Moses’ brother and sister rose up against him—say-

ing, in effect, by their actions: “We don’t need you! *We* can decide these things for ourselves.” Yet Jesus Christ severely *rebuked* Aaron—even though he was God’s High Priest—and Miriam was stricken with *leprosy* to deeply humble her and make her see what a *grievous error* she had made in turning against her brother Moses as the human leader whom *Christ* had installed (Numbers 12:1–16)!

What if 250 top “leaders”—men of “renown”—were to turn against me personally, or against the overall human leadership of the Church, today? That is *exactly*, in type, what happened when Korah, Dathan and Abiram took it upon themselves to challenge Moses’ leadership! Brethren, please read carefully the account in Numbers 16. They were given a number of opportunities to *repent*. But they did not. So, God created a “new thing” and “the earth opened its mouth and **swallowed them up.**” Then “a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense” (vv. 28–35)!

It is very clear—from *dozens* of examples in your Bible—that God **hates** the act of rebellion against His human leadership! And He *rejects* those causing *division* among His people! It all started back when Lucifer began to “feel his oats” and decided to rebel against God. He stated, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God” (Isaiah 14:12–14)!

So, Lucifer was “brought down”! For his rebellious thoughts and actions, he and his demons will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41)! Dear brethren, the book of Proverbs is literally *filled* with teachings and exhortations about the importance of each one of us **humbling** ourselves! Notice: “A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor”

(Proverbs 29:23). And, as we should all remember, Jesus Christ Himself gave very similar instructions again and again in the New Testament. He said, “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

God Hates “Division”

The living Christ inspired the Apostle Paul to tell us, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all *speak the same thing*, and that there be **no divisions** among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

It is *vital* that we all learn to “*speak the same thing*,” and that we learn to follow the teaching and godly example of the inspired leadership Christ has put in His Church—**unless**, as I have stated, you find the Church going *totally contrary* to God, **not** preaching His word and **not** doing His Work. Short of that, it is **not** right for each one to start promoting differing ideas on all kinds of basic teachings and practices that in many cases were discussed and settled by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and Church leaders many **decades** ago—and, in other cases, have been settled by the Living Church of God Council of Elders after much prayerful, heartfelt discussion!

Brethren, God’s word is *very clear* on this basic principle! “For God is **not** the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). So, it should be obvious to all of us that God will be *very displeased* if every Tom, Dick or Harry tries to come up with *different* ideas and approaches as to how to keep the Sabbath, how and when to keep the Holy Days, whether to use the so-called “sacred names” and other such matters. For people who like

to follow their “own ideas” usually forget completely one vital fact: Jesus Christ is right now the living, *active* Head of His true Church! His inspired word tells us that God has seated Christ at His right hand in the heavenly places, “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:21–23).

Remember, God’s word tells us that Christ is the Head over “**all things**” to the Church! Even though we might have disagreements—from time to time—about when and where to have Sabbath services, how the Youth Program ought to be administered and any number of practical details, we have to realize that **Christ Himself** will guide and orchestrate matters, overall, so that His Work is carried out and His will is done through His true Church which keeps His commandments. When the apostate leaders of our former association *turned away* from God, of course, Christ’s blessing and direct guidance were discontinued. That is obvious. But, again, now that we have truly “revived” the Church and the Work of God for some 17 years—with *balanced* and *loving servant* leadership, overall—it should be obvious by the “fruits” that we are being led by the living Christ. As we approach the end of this age, we must **fully** realize this, and must grow in our ability to **work together** in unity and harmony and love—so God’s will and His Work can be carried out with deep *faith*, cooperative teamwork, love and *zeal*.

Christ “Guides” His True Servants

Most of us understand that the very “mind of God” is revealed—often in great detail—throughout the entire Bible. Notice how God describes Jehoshaphat, a righteous king of Judah. Jehoshaphat made some mistakes—as all human beings do—but overall God’s word speaks very well of him. And so we read: “Then

It is vital that we all learn to “speak the same thing,” and that we learn to follow the teaching and godly example of the inspired leadership Christ has put in His Church—unless, as I have stated, you find the Church going totally contrary to God, not preaching His word and not doing His Work.

he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, ‘Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment’” (2 Chronicles 19:5–6).

Today—in the *Spirit-led* Church of God, with deeply converted ministers leading—it should be obvious that Christ will also be with us “in the judgment” as His true ministers prayerfully direct the Work, and endeavor to make sound and godly decisions based upon His word.

This is a vitally important “key” issue! If any of us fail to fully realize

this, we will simply multiply *confusion* and *division* in the very Church and Work of God. Such confusion and division will *greatly hinder* the completion of God’s Work being done through His human instruments in the Church at this time! Please *study*, meditate and earnestly pray about this and *strive to understand this fully*, brethren! For your eternal life may depend on it!

As you know, God’s word tells us, “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 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 6:1–3). It should be obvious from this scripture that true Christians are now “in training” to become kings and priests—assisting Jesus Christ in His Kingdom in *ruling* over cities and nations *on this earth* (Revelation 5:9–10). God’s people—especially those of us in the *Living Church of God*—do understand this and are conscientiously trying to follow the form of government God has *revealed in*

the Bible—better preparing us to assume those positions of rulership in Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom. So, we should all try to be more sensitive to this **vital** part of our training and preparation for the Kingdom. We should *welcome* the knowledge that Christ is the living Head of His Church—and that He will guide and orchestrate things through His human instruments today, despite our occasional human mistakes.

One basic scripture that should help us better understand Christ’s government is in Colossians 2:13–17. Paul describes how Jesus Christ wiped out the “handwriting” or “**note**

of guilt”—the *record* of our sins “that was against us, which was contrary to us”—and “nailed it to the cross” (v. 14). Then he goes on to explain that we should not let another human being “judge” us regarding how we keep God’s festivals or Sabbaths “which are a shadow of things to come.” Then Paul finishes the sentence by saying that it is not another man that should judge us, but the **body** of Christ (v. 17).

Those of you following along with your Bibles will notice that many English-language translations of verse 17 use the word “substance” instead of “body.” However, as you can verify by looking at the Greek text or any “interlinear” Bible, the original God-inspired word used here is *soma*—which always means “body” and is the *exact Greek word* Paul also used in Colossians 1:18 to describe Jesus Christ as the living **Head** of the *soma* (the “Body,” meaning the Church).

So, although we must not let outsiders—or even confused fellow brethren—“judge” us regarding how to keep the Sabbaths or Holy Days, it is the responsibility of the leadership Christ has appointed in His Church to make those decisions *under His leadership!* For, as we have seen, Jesus Christ has committed Himself to **guide** His faithful servants in making such decisions.

Yes, it would be correct to observe that human leaders *even in the true Church* do make mistakes from time to time. But the mistakes they make are **nothing** compared to the chaos and confusion a church without true Christian leadership will continue to cause—even to the *destruction* of the brethren! As Mr. Herbert Armstrong said a number of times, “God has allowed me to make *hundreds* of mistakes, brethren! But He has **never** allowed me to make any really **serious mistakes** that would destroy the brethren or destroy the

Work!” And that is certainly true today!

Therefore, all of those who are *deeply converted* and have **surrendered** to Christ’s leadership will submit to the decisions of God’s true ministers—especially in administrative details of *how* to keep the Sabbath or Holy Days, *whether* to use the so-called “sacred names” and other specific details that do **not** involve whether or not we keep God’s basic laws such as the Ten Commandments or the weekly and annual Sabbaths. If we see by the “fruits” that Christ has established truly converted leadership in the Church—however imperfect, *since all humans are imperfect*—we should joyfully accept this leadership, praying that **God** will lead and guide and orchestrate all the decisions for good for *His own name’s sake!* *This* is the attitude Christ is seeking in *every one of us!*

Realizing that the Bible reveals the “mind of God,” we should note carefully God’s mind regarding individual judgments or decisions within His Church. God inspired Moses to write, “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. *And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you*” (Deuteronomy 17:8–10).

God then told His people that they were **not** to “turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon

you. Now the man who acts *presumptuously* and will **not** heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the **judge**, [today’s faithful ministers], that man shall die. So you shall put away the *evil* from Israel” (vv. 11–12). Certainly, God’s Church today does not invoke a physical death penalty on anyone as did ancient Israel. But the *principle* of having a profound *respect* for those whom Christ has placed in authority is something substantiated *throughout the Bible* and, frankly, **must** be heeded by those who are truly converted in God’s Church!

Dear brethren, *any one of us* who defies or turns away from this basic principle of how God directs His Church will likely **not** make it into the Kingdom—the *Government*—of God. At most, if we **do** make it, we will have a *greatly diminished* reward because of our weakness and confusion and selfishness in not having been willing to submit, in faith, to Christ’s leadership in His Church today! *Please think this through!*

Truly, brethren, God is preparing a family of *deeply converted* men and women who will respond to the direction of Jesus Christ. For He is preparing a “team” of kings and priests to be dedicated, *loyal* leaders under Christ’s direction who can be “counted on” **always** to follow Christ’s leadership—whether directly or through those whom He has appointed as leaders under Him—in His Church today and later in His Kingdom. The attitude of Satan the Devil, in wanting to turn aside and *exalt himself*, is in **total contradistinction** to this basic principle of submitting to Christ and His leadership. Each one of us who is sensitive to Christ’s will and His direction in our lives should *study, meditate* and ask God to guide us in this and sincerely want to be “on Christ’s team” now and forever! ■

Whose Fault Is It?

By Dibar Apartian

“**W**hose fault is it?” we often ask, when we face a serious problem or a real challenge.

Whose fault is it, indeed, when we have an accident or become ill? Whose fault is it when we feel lonely or depressed, when we have financial problems or are out of work? Life is full of surprises and seemingly unexplainable events that can prompt us to exclaim, “Whose fault is it?”

Adam and Eve

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit it—we often tend to blame others when we find ourselves in serious difficulties. It is usually someone else’s fault, not our own. This human weakness started with the first couple. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. But before being expelled, they blamed someone else for their disobedience—and, ultimately, they blamed God, their Creator (Genesis 3:12–13). Their first son, Cain, also sought to justify himself after killing his younger brother Abel (Genesis 4:9).

Human nature has not changed since. Not only do we make excuses, we seek reasons to shift the blame to others. We do not find it difficult to invent explanations to clear ourselves of guilt, rather than admit culpability, because the carnal mind is selfish and egotistic (cf. Romans 8:7). We defend our positions and justify our feelings, which we consider to be more righteous than those of others. Most of us have this propensity.

Complaining about his wife, a man once told me, “She never understands me. She has her own ideas, her own way of doing things.” Most married couples understand those words of self-defense. We all have different personalities—different sensibilities. Yet we must all understand, tolerate and, above all, forgive one another. This is essential to happiness in marriage.

Some people have succeeded financially but, sadly, have failed miserably in their family relationships. Billionaire J. Paul Getty, for example, stated that he would gladly give away all his wealth for just one lasting marital success. Instead, he could have asked himself, “Whose fault is it?”

This haunting question is at the core of our problems. In a way, we often create for ourselves cir-

cumstances that prevent us from leading a successful life. We insist on doing things our own way, in spite of the counsel we receive. Afterwards, when trials overtake us, we tend to accuse others instead of examining ourselves.

The Unprofitable Servant

Comparing ourselves to others is not only wrong, it is also misleading. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). We have all been given different talents and abilities. God has called us to improve ourselves, to grow, to use the very talents He has given us—not to try to “fill the shoes” of another. You might dismiss your talents as “unimportant” and presume that if you had someone else’s talents you would be more successful. But such deduction is deceptive.

In the book of Luke, we read the parable of the ten minas, in which Christ reveals His plan to reward His servants in proportion to their yieldedness to His direction. But does Christ make things “easier” for some and “harder” for others? Not at all! In the book of Matthew, the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) reveals a fundamental and most encouraging truth that should help us endure our trials and setbacks. Christ explains to us that God is always good and fair, and that He never requires of us more than we are able to give—and that it is His will to see us enter His Kingdom.

In this parable, Christ is pictured as the “man traveling to a far country” (v. 14). He shows us the way to success and to eternal life. He also distributed to us His “goods.” He gave us His talents, “to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability” (v. 15). Notice this short but key phrase: “**to each according to his own ability.**” Each received according to his own ability, not according to the ability of another. Consequently, if you were someone else and not yourself, God would not require of you what He does. God has His specific plan for working with you.

The servant who received five talents strove to produce a good return (v. 16). We do not read that

he was expected to produce 20 or 50 talents—Christ was pleased that he doubled his five. This servant was diligent and worked hard; he appreciated the five talents he had received. He did not compare himself to others, nor did he look for excuses. He produced what he could produce, and he did what was expected of him.

Likewise, the servant who received two talents did his best (v. 17). He did not produce five more talents like the first man; rather, he only gained two. But like the other servant, he doubled what he had been given, as his master expected. His effort was sufficient to please Christ.

Fulfilled Expectations?

The first two servants fulfilled their master's expectations. When working with their talents, they did not pause to ask themselves, "Whose fault is it?" And notice: Christ gave them the same reward (vv. 21–23). He told them both, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." Do you understand what it means to enter into "the joy of your lord"? It concerns the gift of eternal life. Indeed, the joy of our Lord is the Kingdom of God in which we will enter, you and I, if we do our part, if we produce the fruits that Christ requires of us, if we grow daily in His grace and knowledge.

As for the third servant, who received one talent, he did not produce anything at all. He "went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money" (v. 18). Strange! What was his reasoning? When you examine his attitude, you understand the answer to the question, "Whose fault is it?" He sought arguments to excuse himself, to justify not making any efforts to produce results. This is the case with many people today, even with some in the Church of God. It is the case, too, with those who seek to rationalize their failure to act upon the Truth. They do not even realize that God wants to help them. The excuses they provide for their lack of action are baseless, as the unprofitable servant, who said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours" (vv. 24–25).

What senseless and unjustifiable reasoning! And yet, if this servant actually believed what he said, he should all the more have driven himself to work hard

and produce! He should have rejected his evil thoughts and labored industriously.

If you know the real God and His true love for you, you will never think or reason like this unprofitable servant, even during hard suffering, trials, setbacks or failures. You will never have to ask, "Whose fault is it?" On the other hand, if you have the mindset of an unprofitable servant, the question "Whose fault is it?" will constantly be on your lips. Ultimately, you will hear Christ's sentence, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 26–30).

By meditating on this parable, you will come to realize that your success depends on what you do with your talents. It depends on the decisions and efforts you yourself make. It does not depend on comparing yourself to others—but to Christ. If you were in someone else's shoes, you could not even enter God's Kingdom. Every time you feel tempted to ask, "Whose fault is it?," rather say to yourself, "What would Jesus do? What would He have done in my place?" That is what truly matters. So, do not look for excuses—and do not justify yourself!

Israel

God chose ancient Israel to be His people, and He taught them the way to lasting happiness. When they were under slavery in Egypt, they cried out to God for deliverance (Exodus 2:23–25). God answered them and made to them numerous promises of protection, prosperity, abundance and health, if they obeyed His laws. He also warned them against disobedience (Deuteronomy 8:1, 11, 14–17).

Nevertheless, as was the case with Adam and Eve, Israel turned away from God. When Moses delayed his return from the top of the mountain where he met with the One who became Christ, Israel quickly turned to pagan gods (Exodus 32:1–2, 4). The people did not trust God or His word. They did

not keep their promise. God had to intervene and tell Moses to descend from the mount to witness the people's abominations (vv. 7–8). Moses interceded for the Israelites (vv. 31–32). God heard Moses' intercession and forgave them. He repeated His promises, as well as His warnings to the people. On numerous occasions, He delivered them from their enemies and continually forgave them. God warned the Israelites against the consequences of asking for a king, but they dismissed those warnings (1 Samuel 8:5–7, 11–22). Despite their promises of obedience to God, they turned away from Him, time and again.

Once again, let us consider the question: Whose fault was it if they suffered? Whose fault was it if they turned away from their Creator, and reaped what they sowed? Whose fault is it if their descendants today continue to suffer?

A World Deceived

We live in a world that has been deceived by Satan the devil. We can attest to the effects and consequences of Satan's influence all around us. However, we understand that Satan cannot do anything without God's permission or knowledge. Our Creator, as part of His Master Plan, has allowed Satan to "blind" most people in our day. Does that absolve human beings and make it only Satan's fault? In fact, humanity has **willingly** drifted away from God—and is now reaping the consequences by choosing Satan's way instead of God's. The Apostle Paul wrote: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one... Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes... ' for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10–18, 23).

Even if some would want to blame Satan instead of self for the sin and problems in our world, we in God's Church cannot make that excuse for ourselves. We who have had our minds opened to the Truth—who have received the Holy Spirit and have been instructed to put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11–17)—should understand our personal responsibility. Is Christ to blame for

our suffering? Or are we to blame for His? Whose fault is it?

The fact that human beings are suffering because of sin can be seen by the naked eye. Look around. Reflect on human misery and the atrocities around us. Why our wars and holocausts? Whose fault are they? Once again, the Apostle Paul explains: "because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural

use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due" (Romans 1:21–22, 26–27).

This is the story of mankind. We are witnesses of the consequences of sin, of our turning away from God, of our rejecting His laws. And being witnesses to all these things, do we still dare ask, "Whose fault is it?"

Puzzlingly, people and nations throughout history have blamed God, directly or indirectly, for their problems and suffering. They blame God, though it is they who bear the responsibility for yielding to Satan's temptations. Once again, we need to ask ourselves, "Whose fault is it?"

Most human beings today have totally drifted away from God—yet continue to blame Him. Yet we in God's Church should know the Truth. Why not wake up? Why not open our eyes? Why not stop asking whose fault it is, when the answer is so plainly right before our eyes?

We human beings are to blame, not the Eternal God. We are the ones who should change our way of life, and not expect God to change His commandments that are good and righteous. We should be courageous. We should submit to God at all times. Do this, and you will see how your life will improve! Whatever our present circumstances, remember that God is always good. He will always provide us the way to find the right solution to our difficulties (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13). He gives us the help we need to solve our problems at all times. ■

Most human beings today have totally drifted away from God—yet continue to blame Him. Yet we in God's Church should know the Truth. Why not wake up? Why not open our eyes? Why not stop asking whose fault it is, when the answer is so plainly right before our eyes?

Seven Keys to Godly Success

By Richard F. Ames

We all know ambitious individuals who drive for success at all cost. We also know people who consider themselves failures, who constantly feel like giving up and are convinced they can never be successful. But what is true success? There is a standard of godly success given in Scripture—and there are proven principles that can help us achieve success. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong outlined these principles through what he called the “Seven Laws of Success.” Applied properly, these vital principles can help Christians find true success in life. Yes, you *can* have the success God wants you to have!

The Bible gives valuable insights into mankind’s desire for money and wealth. King Solomon, a man to whom God gave great wisdom, had everything a human being could wish for, yet he gave this warning: “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:4–5, RSV).

King Solomon was striving to experience “life to the full.” Yet he retained his wisdom in examining the consequences of what he had done. What was the result? “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun”

(Ecclesiastes 2:10–11). In other words, all his possessions and pleasure amounted to nothing—because they produced nothing of lasting value!

Some look for success in status, power and position, rather than in wealth. Are *those* the true measures of success? The mother of Jesus’ disciples James and John came to Him with a request: “She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask’” (Matthew 20:21–22). He then told them that those positions were for those chosen and “prepared by My Father.”

Success Through Service

Jesus then shared a great key to true success, an approach in stark contrast to the arrogance and vanity of rulers who delight in lording over others. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

The greatest is one who is a *true servant*—one who truly cares for and helps others! Notice that the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, took little children up in His arms. He stooped over to wash the feet of His disciples. As you reflect on the upcoming

Passover service, reflect on that foot-washing service, described in John 13. Ultimately, of course, it was Jesus who gave up His life for us all, as our Passover sacrifice! As the Apostle Paul wrote: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Jesus’ constant example was one of service, sacrifice and love. “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10).

Whatever positions we may hold in this life, we must use those positions to serve others. One of the measures of true success is the degree of godly service we are willing to give to those around us. False success depends on the *get* principle, the standard carnal condition—or “default characteristic”—of human nature. By contrast, true success depends on the *give* principle.

Success Through Knowledge?

Can we find success through the pursuit of knowledge? Certainly, God wants us to use our minds to learn godly values and true knowledge. But unless we practice genuine humility, material knowledge may lead to intellectual vanity—to feelings of superiority and even arrogance. Knowledge puffs up, as the Apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 8:1). Without God, education and learning are little more than vanity. As Paul wrote: “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he

may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’; and again, ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile’” (1 Corinthians 3:18–20).

Ask yourself: how many times have you seen so-called history or theology “experts” on television, using their “expertise” to twist or pervert the plain truth of Scripture? How often have you seen the “entertainment” industry demean God’s law and Jesus Christ’s sacrifice? Truly, “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

Can we find success through the pursuit of physical pleasure? King Solomon, who “had it all,” had this to say: “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity” (Ecclesiastes 2:1).

Today’s society promises pleasure through sexual licentiousness, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and almost every imaginable form of stimulation. The Apostle John summed it up: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the *lust* of the flesh, the *lust* of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17).

Billions have been deceived by sexual temptations. They are sowing to the flesh, and of the flesh they will reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). But God intends human beings to enjoy sexual pleasure in marriage; He wants us to enjoy life to the full within His laws and His precepts.

King Solomon, after all his experimentation, came to a final conclusion: “And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and

much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:12–14).

The NRSV states it a little differently, reminding us that we should “fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.”

Seven Laws of Success

Once we understand what success is—and what it is not—we still need to devise a plan to achieve it. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong did exactly this, by pioneering what he called the “Seven Laws of Success”—a series of steps, or guidelines, for achieving success in a Scripture-based and Christian framework. As we review these laws, consider how you can apply them in your own life.

Law 1: Set the Right Goal

Successful people know that to accomplish anything of value, we need to set goals. Unless we know where we are going, we will never arrive there!

Perhaps you are about to finish school, and you have a specific career in mind? Or perhaps you are thinking about changing careers? Learn all you can about the career you may be considering. And ask God to guide you. Remember Jesus Christ’s wonderful promise: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8).

Remember, no matter what our short-term goals, we must always pursue them in the context of the

right ultimate goal. Jesus told His followers that they should not become anxious about food and clothing; He said that just as God provides food for the birds of the air, surely He will much more provide for His children. His point was that all the necessities of life, about which we so often worry, are secondary to the most important goal of all. As Jesus said: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

In order to be successful, we must set the right goal. A Christian’s ultimate goal is the Kingdom of God. Our smaller goals along the way must be preparing us for that ultimate goal, if we are to achieve true success—in this life and for eternity!

Law 2: Educate (or Prepare) Yourself

What knowledge do you need to gain in order to achieve your goal? What preparations must you make? If you are choosing a career as a craftsman, you will need to work as an apprentice before you can be a journeyman. Many professions today require at least a college education, if not an advanced degree. More than ever, we human beings need to increase our knowledge just to keep up with our goals. As God told the prophet Daniel, concerning the end-time: “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4).

We should never stop learning. But we need to be sure that we are acquiring *true* knowledge, rather than false education. Scripture teaches us that true education begins with an attitude of awe and reverence toward God, and with the acknowledgement that He is the source of wisdom and truth. “The fear of the LORD is the be-

ginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

We find a similar instruction in Proverbs 9:10. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

True Christians apply the second law of success by preparing for the coming Kingdom of God. Are you preparing? Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? To reach the goal you have set, you need to educate yourself and prepare to achieve that goal, both physically and spiritually.

Law 3: Maintain Good Health

How healthy are you? Do you have the energy and vigor to sustain hard work? Do you have the well-being to achieve and to reach your goal? Nowadays, even our very environment may be detrimental to our health. We have come to expect pollution in our 21st century. We have polluted our air, water and food. It may be difficult to obtain unpolluted food and pure drinking water, but we should do the best we can. You might consider starting your own vegetable garden. A steady fast-food, high-fat, high-sugar diet is *not* the diet God intended for human beings.

In addition to a good diet, regular exercise is important. The Apostle Paul told the evangelist Timothy: “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). Of course, the Bible emphasizes the spiritual dimension in our lives as priority—but we have a responsibility to honor God in our body as well as in our spirit (1 Corinthians 6:20). Other principles of good health include maintaining a positive and tranquil mind and avoid-

ing accidents. You will be able to produce more effectively and efficiently if you maintain good physical fitness.

Yet we also need to understand our limitations, and to do the best we can within them. Because of our physical limitations, we may need to accept that others—with different strengths and weaknesses—can serve in ways we cannot. But we can be confident that, no matter what our personal circumstances, God will provide ways in which we can effectively and meaningfully serve Him, and serve our neighbors.

Law 4: Drive Yourself

Mr. Herbert Armstrong called this an “all-important” law. He wrote: “You will always find that the executive *head* of any growing, successful organization employs *drive*. He puts a constant *prod* on himself. He not only drives himself, he drives those under him, else they might lag, let down and stagnate” (*The Seven Laws of Success*, 1974, p. 40).

Yes, we need to put a prod on ourselves to move. Scripture provides a graphic illustration. “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6–11).

Proper rest is essential, but God warns against being lazy and slothful! The ant, in this case, keeps moving one tiny grain of food or grain of sand at a time, and by this consistent effort accomplishes much over a long period of time. We all need focus, drive and purpose. We need to discipline ourselves to work effectively.

Law 5: Apply Resourcefulness

Mr. Armstrong called this the “emergency law.” Perhaps the road ahead to your planned career or goal looks clear and smooth. But life often brings us unexpected obstacles. You may suddenly face a financial problem, or a health emergency. How would you respond?

Whatever you are doing, always be sure to investigate alternatives and options. What resources are available? What agencies or individuals might be able to assist you? Of course, the first step to take in any serious emergency is to ask for God’s help. Consider the time when Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples. The Apostle Peter wanted to walk out on the water to meet Jesus. So, Jesus told Peter: “‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:29–30).

When we are in trouble, we sometimes panic, and we often overlook the obvious. In this case, Peter quickly cried out for help. So, what did Jesus do? “And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Matthew 14:31).

Ask God to deliver you from your predicament. But be sure to do your part and search out all the resources available. Never just give up without trying. Ask for wise counsel. “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Proverbs 15:22).

Law 6: Persevere Toward Your Goal

Always have perseverance—stick-to-it-iveness. During World War II, when the future looked gloomy for

Great Britain, Prime Minister Winston Churchill inspired his audiences to persevere. Here is what he told students at Harrow School on October 29, 1941: “Surely from this period of ten months this is the lesson: *never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy. We stood all alone a year ago, and to many countries it seemed that our account was closed, we were finished.*”

Those who respond to God’s calling are in a spiritual race to persevere. Hebrews 11 is often called the “faith chapter.” It mentions successful men and women of faith. Chapter 12 encourages us to remember their example, and to look forward to the final goal. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Apply the sixth law of success. Run the race with endurance, or “patience” as the *KJV* has it, or “perseverance” as the *NRSV* translates it. Never give up! Run the race of life with perseverance.

Law 7: Seek God’s Continual Guidance

In order to practice the first six laws successfully, we need the vital seventh law. We need to seek God’s continual guidance. Billions of men and women may carnally be practicing some of the first six laws. But unless they seek God’s continual

guidance, their efforts are just vanity—striving without value.

You may wonder: “How can I have God’s *continual* guidance?” The answer is that if God is calling you to understand His truth, you need to respond to that calling and *seek* Him. When you read your Bible, you will find many priceless promises. Isaiah urges us: “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6–7).

As you draw closer to God in prayer—as you begin to change your whole way of life more and more to follow God’s way of true success—He will sustain you through the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. God has promised that He will have continual mercy on you—and will pardon you, *if* you repent and seek Him.

God gives us many promises of His continuing and loving guidance. For example: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). Yes, God promises that He will direct our paths, and that He will guide us through life to fulfill our human potential and ultimate destiny. When you come to a crossroads, and are faced with a decision, pray and ask for God’s will to be done in your life. Jesus promised each of us: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Can You Really Succeed?

As we previously saw, the ultimate goal of a successful Christian is the Kingdom of God! As Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: “Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to

you.” Any success a Christian desires in this life must be in harmony with that ultimate goal.

True success comes at a price—but not the kind of “price” many might expect. As Mr. Armstrong wrote: “You can’t buy it with money. It comes to you *FREE*—without money and without price. There is a price, of course—your own application of these definite *laws*. It is not guaranteed to be *the easy way*—but it is guaranteed to be *the only way to real success!*” (*The Seven Laws of Success*, 1974, p. 10).

Can you really achieve success? As the Apostle Paul stated in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The Bible reveals the unseen, immutable laws of life. When we are in harmony with those principles and instructions, we are blessed. In fact, from the beginning of the Bible to the end, you will find that obedience to God’s way of life brings blessings, and disobedience to God’s way of life brings curses. The world’s criteria for success: possessions, power, position and pleasure—only bring pain, suffering, failure and death. Those who define success as “getting ahead” of others, and engaging in selfish indulgence, will not only harm others—they will ultimately harm themselves. True success comes only through the Savior of the world, who taught us to love our enemies, lay down our lives for one another and live by every word of God. When we do this through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live truly happy, productive and successful lives, because we will be helping others into the family of God, and into the Kingdom of God.

So, apply all seven laws of success. If you do, you will come to find the true abundant life Jesus promised: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). ■

Lessons from Four Passovers

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

Our celebration of God's annual festivals plays a major part in helping us really understand His great plan. That plan begins with the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, which come in the early spring. While the importance of the final Passover season of Christ's life is easily recognized, few focus on how significant were *each* of the four Passovers during His ministry. Did you know, for instance, that Jesus' public ministry both began and ended in Jerusalem during Passover seasons three years apart?

During His lifetime, Jesus Christ observed all of God's Festivals, and often traveled to Jerusalem to keep them. His words and actions at various Festival seasons are recorded throughout the Gospels, particularly in John. However, of all the Festivals, it is *only* the Passover season for which the Bible records all four that occurred during Jesus' ministry.

This record of the four Passovers during Christ's ministry serves several purposes. It provides a time frame for His ministry, and helps us harmonize the four Gospel accounts. But, even more importantly, it records Jesus Christ's *words* and *actions* at each of these Passover seasons! Have you ever wondered what sermon Jesus would give if He were speaking on a particular Holy Day? Thanks to Scripture, we *can* actually know some of what He *did* preach during each of the four Passover seasons of His ministry! It is vitally important that we understand what Jesus Christ was teaching!

In this article, we will examine each of the four Passovers of Jesus' ministry, and will see the lessons that He taught during the Passover.

Identifying Four Passovers

How do we know that there were four Passovers during Christ's ministry? No single Gospel writer records all four.

From the prophecy in Daniel 9:25, we know that there would be exactly 483 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearance of the Messiah. We arrive at this figure by using the day-for-a-year principle (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), after we have calculated the number of prophetic "days" that comprise the 69 "weeks" ($69 \times 7 = 483$). Ezra 7:7–26 locates the issuing of the decree in 457BC, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. Shortly before the fall festivals of 457BC, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem

and read the decree. During the fall of 27AD—483 years later—Jesus came to where John the Baptist was baptizing. John, who had begun preaching and baptizing six months earlier, proclaimed Jesus as the promised Messiah (John 1:29). At Jesus' baptism, God the Father supernaturally confirmed Jesus' Messiahship when a dove descended upon Jesus and a voice spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16–17).

Jesus' ministry lasted three-and-a-half years, from His baptism in the fall of 27AD until His crucifixion in the spring of 31AD. He was "cut off" in the midst of a prophetic "week," as we learn from Daniel 9:26–27. During His ministry, there were four Passovers. Soon after His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and prayer, during which He resisted Satan's temptation. After returning from the wilderness, Jesus began working with His disciples. In Galilee, while attending the wedding feast at Cana, He performed His first miraculous sign (John 2:11). Soon afterward, He and His disciples traveled to Jerusalem for the first Passover of His public ministry—in 28AD.

Fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 that the Lord would appear as "Messenger of the Covenant" and would come "suddenly" to His temple, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem shortly before the Passover celebration. Seeing how a corrupt and venal priesthood had commercialized God's House, He wove leather cords into a whip, and strode boldly into the outer courtyard of the temple complex. Quickly, He opened the gates of the corrals and pens, and drove out the cattle and sheep that were destined to be sold at inflated prices to Passover pilgrims seeking temple sacrifices. In the process, He threw over the tables of the moneychangers, and told them to leave!

Needless to say, this provoked quite a stir among the priests and religious leaders. Even so, the miraculous signs that He performed in the temple, as He taught the crowds that gathered around Him, were enough to convince these religious leaders that He was not some self-appointed prophet, but was indeed sent from God (John 3:1–2). This Passover season of 28AD marked the dramatic opening of Christ's ministry.

What took place during the second Passover season of Jesus' ministry? Mark 2:23–28 (there are parallel accounts in Matthew 12 and Luke 6) tells the story of Jesus and His disciples walking through the grain fields, and the disciples plucking heads of grain to eat. From the arrangement

of the story, especially in Mark's and Luke's accounts, it is clear that this occurred very early in Jesus' ministry. Luke, alone, makes clear the *exact* timing of this event, telling us that it occurred on "the second Sabbath after the first" (Luke 6:1). What does that mean? The Greek term is *sabbato deuteroproto*. This refers to the second Sabbath of first rank; in other words, the last Holy Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Luke, therefore, places this event in the second Passover season of Jesus' ministry, 29AD.

What do we know about the Passover season of 30AD—one year before Jesus' crucifixion? Matthew 14:13–33 recounts Jesus' miraculously feeding five thousand men and their families, and His walking across the water that night to join His disciples in the boat during a storm. There are parallel accounts in Mark 6, Luke 9 and John 6, but only from John's account do we learn that the feeding of the 5,000 took place immediately before the Passover (John 6:4). John is also the only Gospel writer to record what Jesus taught the people whom He had miraculously fed. He records the sermon that Jesus gave just a short while later, in a synagogue in Capernaum, to many of these same people (John 6:24–59).

Scripture describes Jesus' final Passover season—31AD, when He was crucified—in great detail. All four Gospel accounts describe the time from Jesus' arrival in Bethany (a small suburb of Jerusalem) about a week before the Passover, up through His crucifixion and resurrection. Almost one-third of the Gospel text is devoted to the events surrounding Jesus' final Passover.

Now, we will look at each of these Passover seasons in more detail.

Passover 28AD: For God So Loved the World

Thousands of people from Judea and the surrounding area had gone out to the wilderness near the Jordan River to hear John the Baptist. From the time that John had begun preaching a message of repentance, his reputation had spread. He baptized many, and great crowds hung on his every word. When John's reputation was at its height, Jesus of Nazareth came to see him and requested baptism. After the baptism, John acknowledged Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and as the Son of God (v. 34). Soon afterward, Jesus left for the Judean desert, and disappeared from public view for several months.

When He walked into the temple complex on a bright spring day just before Passover in 28AD, Jesus very quickly became the talk of Jerusalem. He challenged the religious establishment by cleansing the temple and driving out the moneychangers, and by doing miracles in open view of

temple crowds (John 2:23). Even many religious leaders acknowledged privately that this teacher from Galilee must be someone sent by God (John 3:1–2). On one evening during the Days of Unleavened Bread that year, Nicodemus (a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin) came privately to Jesus, who gave him an important message about salvation—explaining much of the real meaning of the Passover ceremony God had instituted more than 14 centuries earlier.

Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to inherit the Kingdom of God, he would have to be "born again." This new birth could only come from above—from God—not from below, as in physical birth. It would be a birth of the Spirit—an actual entrance into the spiritual realm. Further, Jesus went on to explain that He—the Son of Man—would have to be lifted up, as had been prefigured many centuries before when Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness to stop a plague (John 3:14).

However, the *real* meaning of the Passover is summarized in one of the best-known verses in the entire Bible: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The message of the Passover is, first and foremost, a message about God's love—and about the redemption He offers us because of His great love. This was a major theme of Jesus' message during the first Passover season of His ministry.

Passover 29AD: Mercy Rather Than Sacrifice

The Pharisees became outraged when they saw Jesus and His disciples emerge from the footpath and come into town. The disciples were chewing on kernels of fresh grain they had plucked from barley stalks that bordered the path where they had walked. Although the Torah explicitly allows travelers to pluck fruit or grain to satisfy their hunger as they pass by a field (Deuteronomy 23:24–25), the Pharisees objected to the disciples doing so on the Sabbath. Though Matthew and Mark also recount the incident, only Luke records that it occurred during the Passover season—on the last Holy Day of Unleavened Bread (Luke 6:1).

Jesus undoubtedly knew what the Pharisees' reaction would be, so He purposely allowed His disciples to do something that would provide a setting for a very important lesson. During the Days of Unleavened Bread, we focus on righteousness and putting away sin. The Pharisees' approach was to think themselves more righteous by adding human rules to God's law. In fact, in their quest to achieve righteousness, they became "more 'righteous' than God"—and actually lost sight of what God *really* sought. Jesus defended His disciples' behavior by quoting exam-

ples from Scripture, and by asking the Pharisees to explain the meaning of those examples. On the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, through those illustrations from Scripture, Jesus explained what God truly wants of us.

One of Jesus' main examples was from 1 Samuel 21, where David and his men came to the Tabernacle at Nob. They were tired and hungry, and David asked Ahimelech the priest for something to eat. The priest explained that they had no ordinary food to give him, only showbread—the holy bread that had just been removed from the table in the Holy Place. According to the law, this bread, once it had been presented to God as an offering, was not to be used for ordinary secular use. Since the bread was consecrated, it was to be treated with respect even after removal from the table of the Lord. As such, it was to be eaten only by the priests who were serving the Tabernacle (Leviticus 24:5–9). Yet Ahimelech understood something that the Pharisees simply did not grasp; he understood the spirit of the law, and how to apply the principles of God's word in making a judgment with which God would be pleased. Since God allowed the priests to consume the bread as food, Ahimelech realized that God would not be displeased if the bread were shared with the hungry David.

Jesus then quoted Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Had they really understood what that verse means, Jesus told them, they "would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). The people of Hosea's day had substituted mere ritual formality in place of a genuine life of heartfelt obedience. Jesus knew that most of the Pharisees of His day had fallen into the same trap. They did not understand the true righteousness God seeks in our lives. Understanding this concept properly is a vital lesson for the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Passover 30AD: Feed on the Bread of Life

One notable miracle of Jesus' ministry was His feeding 5,000 men (and also the women and children present) with five barley loaves and two small fish. After the disciples had left by boat, Jesus dismissed the crowd and withdrew to the hills for a time of private prayer. Late that night, the disciples' boat was still at sea, caught in strong winds. Jesus came down to the now-empty shoreline, then began to walk on the water to cross the lake and catch up to His disciples! Though at first frightened as they saw Him approaching, the disciples were then overwhelmed with a sense of who He really was—the very Son of God (Matthew 14:25–33). John tells us that this occurred immediately before the Passover (John 6:4), and is the only writer to recount what happened on the following day (vv. 22–25).

Many whom Jesus had fed found Him in Capernaum, and He began to teach them.

John records the discourse that Jesus gave in the synagogue to many of those whom He had miraculously fed the day before. Taking advantage of their desire for physical food, He began to teach about the importance of seeking spiritual food. Jesus declared to them that He was indeed the "bread of life" that came down from heaven (vv. 33–35). He emphasized that He was the "living bread" and that the only way to receive eternal life is to believe in Him (v. 40). Believing in Christ involves truly "feeding" on Him—that is, seeking to live as He lived (v. 57).

His audience was thinking about bread. They had just eaten bread that had been miraculously provided, and they were entering the Days of Unleavened Bread, when they would be very conscious of avoiding leavened products and eating unleavened bread throughout the seven days of the festival. Jesus took advantage of their thoughts of physical bread, to teach them about the true bread. When you really study and meditate upon Jesus' message as recorded in John 6, you realize that the unleavened bread we eat throughout the festival points us toward Jesus Christ. Just as we sustain our physical lives by feeding on physical food, we sustain our spiritual lives by feeding on Jesus Christ. We are to be nourished and fed by Him, day by day.

Passover 31AD: In Remembrance of Me

Almost one-third of the Gospel text is devoted to the events surrounding Christ's final Passover. These events begin with His arrival in Bethany about a week before Passover (John 12:1), and a detailed account is given of Jesus' words and deeds over the days following. We read of His encounters with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We also have the account of His final Passover meal with the disciples, His subsequent arrest and crucifixion and, finally, His resurrection from the dead and appearance to the disciples. All the previous Passover celebrations pointed toward these events of Jesus' final Passover.

By dying on the Passover, Jesus Christ fulfilled His role as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. By being resurrected at the end of the Sabbath after three days and three nights in the tomb, then being presented to the Father the next morning, Jesus fulfilled His role as the wavesheaf offering, becoming the "firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20, *KJV*).

Continued on page 21

Let God Fight Your Battles

By Michael Elertson

In every job or trade, workers need certain qualifications in order to be effective and successful. Yet the qualifications vital for one job may be entirely unhelpful for another. For instance, an individual who is certified in all elements of welding may not fare too well as an accountant. This is no less true for the calling of a “Christian soldier” who never picks up a weapon for the armies of this world.

What are three characteristics that effective Christian soldiers must have? They must be willing to fight, they must use the right weapons, and they must have a good strategy.

Consider the account of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Goliath was almost ten feet tall and his armor weighed 125 pounds. He was a giant, especially compared to small David, the youngest son of Jesse. Goliath taunted the armies of Israel and defied any man to face him. It is no surprise that those who saw Goliath, including Saul, were afraid of him. Yet notice David’s response to the taunts of this great Philistine giant: “Then David said to Saul, ‘Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine’” (1 Samuel 17:32).

David pressed on with courage, *willing to fight*, because he knew he was not alone. “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (v. 37). David knew God would help him fight the battle. And in reading the rest of 1 Samuel 17 we see that David did indeed defeat Goliath with God’s help—setting an example for us today. “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abom-

nable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerors, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:7–8). Few of us will ever fight bears, lions or giants, but we can be encouraged by our faith that the God who helped David is the same God who will help each and every one of us today. No matter what the battle may be, God will help us if we are willing to fight!

Christians must also *use the right weapons*. David was fighting a physical battle against a carnal Philistine. He defeated Goliath with a simple sling and a stone, but Christians today fight with very different weapons. Christian soldiers fight a spiritual war! As the Apostle Paul explained, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

Satan, who is presently the “god” of this world, broadcasts negative images, thoughts and values through the air to all who will listen (Ephesians 2:2). Did you ever work with an old-fashioned television antenna? I remember one time when I was sitting on the couch while my wife adjusted the “rabbit ears.” When she held them, we had a great picture. But the moment she let go, the picture would again become fuzzy.

As human beings, we are like walking antennas, picking up whatever messages are being broadcast to us. To resist wrong messages, we must use the key Christian weapons of prayer, fasting, Bible study and

meditation, as God’s people have done through the ages. These are our weapons of spiritual warfare—and unless we use them well, we cannot expect to win our battles. As we draw closer to God, we will develop more of His mind and His character—and we will be able to more fully use His power.

We are engaged in a spiritual war, and we cannot afford to make excuses: “I’m too busy!” “It’s too late!” “I’m too tired!” No. We must use the weapons God has given us; they are our defense, and our very lives depend on how fervently we use them. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles [tactics] of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11). Though we may be weak in the flesh, we know we are not alone. The more we use God’s power, His strength, and the spiritual weapons He has given us, the more He will intervene to bring about victories in our lives.

Consider the millions of “New Year’s” resolutions people in the world make every January 1. How many of their firm promises or grand ideas last more than a few days or weeks? Consider the thousands of people each year who decide they want to be entrepreneurs. Fired up and “gung ho,” they start a new business—yet many soon find that they had not planned properly or counted the cost (Luke 14:28).

As Christian soldiers, we must count the cost, have determination—and have *the right strategy*. It is one thing to say, “I’ll let God fight my battles”—but unless we really understand how to do this, we cannot expect to succeed. What practical steps should we take? God’s word in 2

Chronicles 20 outlines an excellent seven-step battle strategy that was used thousands of years ago, and can still be effective for Christians today. It involved Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who was trying to restore Judah from the idolatrous apostasy into which it had fallen.

In the midst of setting his nation straight, Jehoshaphat faced imminent destruction. A great army, consisting of Moab, Ammon and others, gathered to do battle. These enemies of Judah greatly outnumbered the army of Jehoshaphat—at face value, the odds were greatly against him. What strategy did he use? A strategy that is still valid for Christians today who want God to fight their battles (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Step one (2 Chronicles 20:3) is to have a proper fear of God—standing in awe. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Most modern psychologists teach that fear is only negative, but the Bible teaches that a proper fear is healthy. A proper fear keeps us on the right track and reminds us of our place compared to God.

Step two (2 Chronicles 20:4) is to ask God for help. It seems obvious, but this step is all too often missed or assumed. Paul instructs, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)! All of the patriarchs in the Bible are noted as having a powerful prayer life—daily contact with God. The power of prayer can never be underestimated. It is through prayer that we build a genuine relationship with our Father. We can approach God’s throne boldly, for He is faithful to give, but we must always ask for His will to be done (1 John 5:14).

Step three (2 Chronicles 20:7–15) is to seek God’s counsel. “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Proverbs 15:22). This means

constant and fervent Bible study (Matthew 4:4). This means going to parents and ministers, depending on the circumstances. In any case, we are admonished not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

It is interesting to note that the Presiding Evangelist of the Living Church of God follows this principle by relying on the Church’s Council of Elders. The duty of the Council is to render advice on all issues concern-

What are three characteristics that effective Christian soldiers must have? They must be willing to fight, they must use the right weapons, and they must have a good strategy.

ing doctrine, Church organization and all major plans and programs. We all, whatever our duties, need to take heed and seek wise counsel.

Step four (2 Chronicles 20:12–13) is to wait on God. For most of us, this can be very difficult. However, patience truly is a virtue. King David was inspired to write, “Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him” (Psalm 37:7). One of the hardest challenges we will face in life is learning to wait on God. Quite often, our timetable is not God’s timetable. We have to learn to trust His judgment and set His will above our own.

Step five (2 Chronicles 20:20) is to do our part to accomplish what is needed. Yes, we need God to fight our battles. But make no mistake, we do have personal responsibility, contrary

to what is taught by many of the “mainstream” religions of our world. Note these words from the Apostle Paul: “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Paul clearly explains that the Holy Spirit *leads* us—it does not *force* us to do anything. It empowers our right decisions. We are free moral agents and we need to do our part (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Step six (2 Chronicles 20:21) is to give God thanks during the battle. Our lives are filled with many battles, and at any given time it is easy to become preoccupied. We can become so caught up, absorbed and involved with the “now” that we forget to recognize our Deliverer. King David, in his heartfelt way, admonishes us: “Give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples” (Psalm 105:1). Notice, too, the wonderful example of the angels at the throne of God, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever.

Amen” (Revelation 7:12). God promises to help us, and we should give Him thanks all the while!

Step seven (2 Chronicles 20:27) is to give God credit for the victory. This may seem like an obvious point, but all too often people forget when they think their “need” for God’s help is past. It is a relief to emerge from a hard-fought battle, and we should never fail to give credit where credit is due!

True Christians will face many battles in this life. But if we are faithful, obedient and thankful to God, notice the conclusion of the matter: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). What a wonderful result we will have if we let God fight our battles! ■

As God Sees Us...

By Rod King

How much does God value each and every human being? Do you see others as God sees them—as God sees you?

We know that God's final work of creation, before He rested on the seventh day, was **man**. On the sixth day, "God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind [genus]: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind' and it was so" (Genesis 1:24).

God the Father and the Word proclaimed what was to be the pinnacle of their great plan of salvation, a creature that was to be made "in Our image, according to Our likeness" (v. 26). And so, the greatest project God had ever devised became a reality. As this new being rose from the dust of the ground, God breathed into his nostrils the "breath of life."

We learn that he became a living being [KJV "soul"] or, in the Hebrew, *nephesh*. Scripture reveals that there is a vital ingredient differentiating human beings from the animals. This potential son of God was to be given "a spirit in man." Job said, "But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding" (Job 32:8).

Only human beings have the destiny of entering the Family of God as full sons in His Kingdom. Only they can communicate spiritually with God because of possessing this precious gift—the spirit in man.

Who Else Watched?

Who else was watching this incredible act of latent greatness? The fallen archangel Lucifer (whose name had changed to Satan) was watching, along with his cohorts—the fallen angels, now the demonic host. And they did not like what they saw. They loathed man. They hated this new being. They would destroy him, if they could.

Within a few short years, Satan's evil spirit of murder had festered in the mind of Cain, and he rose up to kill his brother Abel, in spite of God's warning of "sin at the door" (Genesis 4:7). Within a few generations, violence and wickedness had become so widespread that God repented of creating mankind (Genesis 6:5–7).

Thankfully, Noah found favour in God's sight—and through his descendants the human race continued.

Contending with an Evil Spirit

For nearly six thousand years, human beings have been contending against Satan's evil spirit of hatred and disgust for all of us. We are all targets of the despising attitude he

broadcasts. We may even watch movies that portray in gory detail the shooting, stabbing and hacking of God's future sons. Sometimes, we may even find ourselves caught up in a spirit of vengeance where we silently cheer on the murderer!

Is God pleased by this? No, He is not!

As we consider our great calling, it behooves us to ask the question: "Do I see others as God does?" We all want to receive God's favour and forgiveness. We all hope for His grace and mercy, but do we extend it to others—especially those we do not like, or who do not like us?

This is a serious problem, and we need to face it squarely. We need to examine our perspective and our mind-set. If we retain this wrong attitude from Satan, we are in trouble.

"Raca" and Fools

When our Saviour began His ministry, He considered this problem to be so serious that He included it in His first sermon.

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded for us in Matthew 5. After outlining the basis for Christian living in the Beatitudes, Jesus Christ began to magnify the law of God by revealing the spirit that underpins each commandment.

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder' and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (vv. 21–22).

What does this mean? Here we see three derisive epithets. Each represents a decrease in the worth we perceive in the other person, culminating in an expression of great loathing even for the existence of the hated one, as if to imply that this is a person not even worthy of God's grace. By the third stage, the one uttering such despising words is in the spirit of Satan. Even within recent historical memory, we can recall examples of societies and cultures that harboured collective hatred against individuals they came to consider "sub-human."

God does not want us to be naïve regarding others who may want to hurt us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can discern the fruits of another person's words and deeds (Matthew 7:16–20). God pronounces "woe" on those who call evil good, and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). Yet even when we recognize the bad fruit that another's choices are producing, this does not exempt us from our Christian responsibility to love that person as a potential future son of God.

Toward the end of his life, the Apostle John penned his last thoughts in three epistles. In one of them, reflecting

on the lessons he had learned in his long life, we read, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother... Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:11–12, 15).

What is the solution to the problem of hatred? To overcome hatred, we must see ourselves for what we really are, and we must see others as God would have us see them.

Almost all deeply converted Christians will recognize the experience of finding a fault in someone else’s character—then realizing that this fault is in fact a part of our own human nature! It can be disarming to see in others’ words and deeds a mirror of our own impure motives and thoughts. We must not deceive ourselves—human nature, with all its capacity for self-deception, lies deep within each one of us.

But there is hope! God’s righteousness, and the life of Jesus Christ in us, can give us the eyes to see our failings and the ability to change them for the better! We really can become like our heavenly Father, but unless we see others as He does, we will remain in darkness.

Speaking Well of One Another

God recognizes that we cannot conceal our true feelings and deepest thoughts from others for long. Our words become a measure of our heart. Jesus Christ knew this when He addressed the Pharisees with these words, “Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). He continued, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (vv. 35–37).

You are the only one who can control your tongue. To control your tongue, you must control your thoughts. To control your thoughts, you must firmly determine in moments of meditation and prayer that you will only speak well of others. To do this is hard—and it takes a deep commitment.

“But if I am to stop speaking evil of my brother, does this mean I will sometimes have to be silent?” Yes, it does! But we should **not** be silent when we must calmly tell someone that we cannot continue in a conversation that involves accusing, degrading and even destroying the reputation of another person through slander and gossip. This does not mean we must be rude or self-righteous, but

sometimes we must wisely remove ourselves from such conversations.

Scripture tells us: “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Proverbs 26:20). My grandfather practiced a well-known old saying, “If you cannot speak well of someone, say nothing.” We would all do well to live by that motto.

Of What Spirit Are We?

As Christians, we understand where evil thoughts come from. They originate from that being who was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44)—Satan the devil—whose wiles are so great that we may sometimes think we are acting in a godly manner, doing God’s will, even though our motives are far from godly. Notice what happened to Jesus’ disciples John and James: “And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John [also known as ‘sons of thunder’] saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them’” (Luke 9:52–56).

Are you and I always sure what “manner of spirit” we are of? Perhaps you have noticed, at times, that you can be thinking kind thoughts toward one person, then in the very next moment be thinking or speaking ill of another? How fickle we are! How unlike God we are! How earthly are our thoughts, when His thoughts are higher than heaven above.

The Solution

So, what is the solution? It involves a frank awareness of our natural, carnal mind. It requires constant and vigilant prayer to pray for your enemies and do good to those who are against you. And be assured, if you pray for good things for those who despise you, your attitude will change. You will at the very least experience a calming change of mind toward them—and God may even cause your situation to change in ways you cannot now imagine!

Are you struggling with marital or family discord? Are you contending with a Church member—even a minister—whom you believe does not respect or value you? Are people persecuting you? Pray for them! Speak well of them, and notice what God will do in your mind. This is God’s solution, and will bring you peace of mind. ■

Lessons from Four Passovers*(Continued from page 16)*

In addition to fulfilling the Old Testament types that pointed to His role as our Savior, Christ also used His final Passover to teach His disciples many lessons. He taught them the importance of serving and helping others (Luke 22:24–27, John 13:1–17). Not only were they to serve one another; they were to *love* one another with the same kind of love with which Christ Himself loved (John 15:12–13). Jesus told them about the Father’s great love for them (John 16:26–27) and of the

promised Comforter—the Holy Spirit—that He and the Father would send them (John 14:16–17; 16:7).

In an upper room in Jerusalem, gathered together with His disciples after sunset at the start of Abib 14, Jesus celebrated the final Passover of His human life. On that night, a transition was made from the Old Testament observance to the New Testament Passover. At the close of the traditional meal of roasted lamb and bitter herbs, Jesus took some unleavened bread from the table, blessed it, broke it into small pieces, and told the disciples to eat it as a symbol of His body broken for us.

Then He took a cup of wine, blessed it, and told them to all drink of it, as a symbol of His blood, shed for us. “Do this in remembrance of Me,” He told them (Luke 22:19).

As you prepare for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, think about the lessons that Jesus Christ taught us by word and deed throughout His ministry. When you gather at the Passover service to share with other brethren in the symbols that “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26), be sure to realize deeply that this commemoration is being done in remembrance of Him. ■

Let Us Examine Ourselves!*(Continued from page 2)*

reward in Christ’s coming World Government to be set up on this earth.

We say this. But do we really **believe** it? Each of us has to answer that question, and **make sure** that we actually do.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy to let him, “know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the **pillar and ground** of the Truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Many scholars agree that the term “ground” here is better translated as “bulwark”—which gives a more specific picture of God’s Church being a *powerful barrier*—protecting the Truth from error and from Satan’s confusing devices.

Remember, *somewhere on this earth*, there is *one Church* that teaches not only about the commandments—as many “Church of God” groups do—but that powerfully emphasizes and explains how vital it is to understand *God’s loving Government* and to **practice** it in a balanced way!

Some groups have *wrongly* used the concept of government to *tyrannize* their members, employing a kind of human *dictatorship* in which they cow individuals into submission by various threats, and by disfellowshipping dozens and scores of people for any kind of disagreement or even for asking questions of the leadership. That is **not** God’s Government—as I trust all of us in the Living Church of God understand.

Yet some of the larger “splits” from the original Church under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong have virtually *done away* with the entire form of government the Bible describes, which Mr. Armstrong taught and *we must learn and practice* in order to be those kings and priests Jesus Christ

talked about! In some of these groups, instead of tyranny, we find a different *misunderstanding*—a great deal of laxity and neglect of the basic concept of the entire Kingdom of God, the **Government** for which we must be preparing.

By contrast, as most of you reading this certainly know, there is a Church of God somewhere that teaches the truth about the Government of God, that practices it throughout its congregations in a loving and balanced way overall, and that is trying wholeheartedly to prepare its members to become kings and priests in God’s Kingdom. Brethren, we ought to be—and to remain—that Church!

But, even in *that Church*, there are people who are very weak or Laodicean in their approach. Therefore, when God speaks to us throughout Revelation 12 in describing a Church of God that is taken to safety, this inspired passage describes some who are “left behind” and are obviously **not** protected: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (v. 17). So, even though many thousands of people in the various Church of God groups may, in general, “keep the Commandments,” they will **not** all be taken to safety! Though they are part of God’s Church, they obviously *do not* have Christ fully living within them and helping them live as the “overcomers” whom Christ is preparing to be **rulers** in His Kingdom.

In Revelation 3, God tells those who do not just “call themselves” Philadelphian, but *really are* Philadelphian, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (vv. 10–11). So Christ is pleased that the true Philadelphians

“persevere” in keeping the basic approach and training many of us had under God’s servant, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. This would obviously involve learning and practicing *God’s Government* as a *vital part* of true preparation for Christ’s Kingdom—as Mr. Armstrong emphasized again and again. Christ tells us, “**Hold fast** what you have, that no one may take your crown.” We must **not** be among those who turn aside from the basic training God has given us, which should have been preparing us for God’s Kingdom. We must **not** drift into the attitude of “watering down” true Christian practices and teachings, of falling into “politicking” and self-promotion, and “voting” for Church offices—which Mr. Armstrong so strongly condemned—and other practices that would certainly **corrupt** our entire approach to the Kingdom of God!

Brethren, *we must not be ashamed* to “hold fast” to the Truth we have been taught about the Kingdom of God—and the *vital importance* of learning and practicing right, balanced, loving Church Government! And we must not try to be so “understanding” that we allow—*without even warning them*—some of our separated brethren to be led into the *confusion* and *division* that this turning aside from God’s kind of Government will bring! For each of these organizations that fails to *properly practice* the Government of God *will suffer for it!*

The Eternal God says to all who are willing to learn and grow in Christ, “He who **overcomes**, I will make him a **pillar** in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:12–13). We in the Living Church of God must wholeheartedly “**examine**” ourselves in **every way**. We must make sure that we are overcoming our selfish, vain, lustful and foolish habits. We must literally **give** ourselves to Christ and “walk with God” in our daily way of life. We must be genuine “overcomers” and we must *persevere* so that we may have the wonderful reward of being **pillars** in Christ’s coming Government and, finally, even in the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven!

As we approach the sacred Passover season, brethren, we should truly **meditate** on all these things. We should humbly *examine* ourselves and determine to go “all out” to be true *overcomers* and eventually **pillars** in the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

With Christian love,



Upcoming *Tomorrow’s World* Telecasts

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

CW-PLUS: Sunday, 8:00 AM ET/PT

ION: Thursday, 12:30 AM ET/PT

<u>AIR DATE</u>	<u>BROADCAST TITLE</u>
March 7	Seven Signs of the Antichrist
March 14	Benchmarks of Prophecy
March 21	Hope for the Future
March 28	Is God Unfair?
April 4	Jerusalem: City of Peace?
April 11	Revelation: The Mystery Unveiled!
April 18	Christian Babylon

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

Schedule subject to change

Local Church News

In Loving Memory...

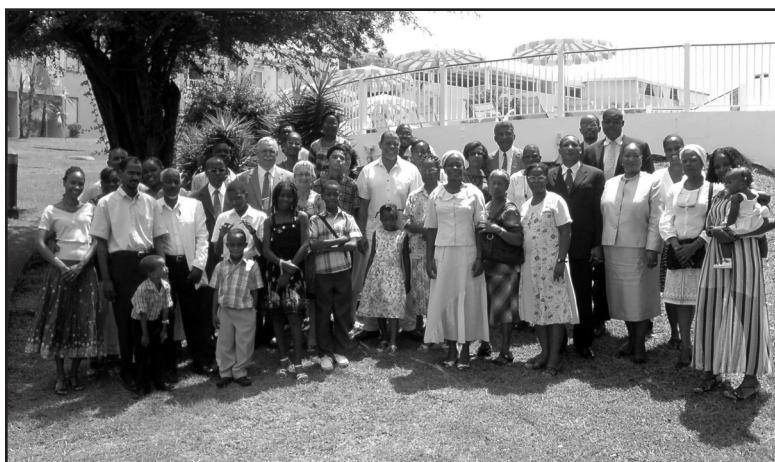
Mr. Robert Bruce Barnett died peacefully at Clare Holland House on October 27, 2009, after a long battle with cancer. He was 58 years old. His wife, Patricia, survives him. People came from all over Australia for his funeral

service, which was conducted by Mr. Bruce Tyler. Mr. Barnett was well respected in his field of form design and office management and organization. Many members will remember him from his visits to Sri Lanka and

Malaysia. He always served the Church willingly, especially with his musical talents. His example of endurance and conviction to serve God impressed those who knew him and he will be greatly missed.

Wedding

Mr. Aaron Lee Vice of the Monroe, Louisiana congregation, and *Miss Shelby Christine Watkins* of the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation, were joined in marriage on May 17, 2009. The ceremony was conducted by Mr. Davy Crockett, the grandfather of the bride, on the front steps of historic Trapnall Hall on a beautiful sunny day in Little Rock. The bride's parents are Phillip and Audrey Watkins and the groom's parents are Donna Vice and the late Wendell Vice. Many family and friends gathered to witness the ceremony and enjoy the reception afterward. The couple now resides in Monroe, Louisiana.



Forty Living Church of God brethren, including visitors from the United States and Canada, kept the 2009 Feast of Tabernacles in Martinique. On the Last Great Day, they gathered for a group photo on the grounds of the Les Amandiers hotel, where they met for services.

Births

Kate Michele Joffrion was born August 30, 2009 to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Joffrion (Krista) of the Birmingham, Alabama congregation. She weighed 6 pounds 7 ounces and was 19½ inches long. Big brother Brant is delighted to have a baby sister. Her grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Ray Joffrion of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Mr. and Mrs. Mark Elder, also of the Birmingham congregation. Kate is the first granddaughter on both sides of the family.

Ordination

Mr. Paul Niehoff was ordained an Elder on the Sabbath of November 7, 2009 by Australasian Regional Director Mr. Bruce Tyler and elders Mr. Michael Gill and Mr. Zig Svalbe. He serves the brethren in Melbourne, Australia.

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

Commentary

To Tend and Keep

By James Sweat

Whenever I visit my doctor—as reluctantly as that is—the nurse will inevitably take my vital signs, including my blood pressure. In an effort to skew the results in my favor, I typically close my eyes to envision a warm, white sandy beach, and the sounds of surf on a pristine emerald shoreline as I sit under a beach umbrella, savoring the bouquet of an ice cold beverage! Ahhhhh!

I do not know if there are any scientific trials that prove this actually works—but it seems to work for me. Well, not long ago I was privileged to experience that precise idyllic setting. My blood pressure must have been lower than ever as my family and I captured the perfect beauty and serenity of God’s wonderful creation.

As most things go in this life, nothing remains perfect for long. While peacefully sitting there in an almost dreamy state of tranquility, enjoying the aquatic warm breeze and deeply breathing in the glorious sea air, I inhaled a noxious puff of cigarette smoke from a neighbor predisposed to violate what should be a basic right of all individuals, to breathe fresh clean air—hence the resultant rise in my blood pressure.

So, to escape the nauseous cloud of toxic smolder and the ensuing cigarette butt flipped out onto the otherwise flawless water’s edge, I decided to take a dip in the azurite hue of sparkling sea water, when my eye was drawn toward something out of place just under the surf—a discarded beer bottle.

Almost anywhere you go, if man has been there he has left his destructive mark in one way or another. From casual littering to farming pesticides to industrial pollution, mankind is virtually swimming in his own disgusting debris of noxious wastes.

Yet in the beginning, God set His creation in order, created human beings and gave them dominion over the earth—thus, the ability for good or bad to influence their own environment. One of the first commands He gave Adam and Eve was to “tend and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15). To “tend” (or “dress,” *KJV*) means to take attentive and nurturing care, as one would a valuable possession. To “keep” involves preserving and maintaining what has been given. This means being involved in progress that improves and genuinely makes things better. It means leaving our surroundings in better condition than they were when we arrived—which requires a hands-on approach. It involves a fundamental principle all of us should have learned in kindergarten: if you make a mess—clean it up!

The Bible foretells of a time when all of God’s laws will become a natural part of man’s thinking (Hebrews 8:10–11). Nations and individuals will be instructed openly, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:20–21). Dodging responsibility to tend and keep the earth will no longer be tolerated by a loving Creator. An era of restoration is coming by the hand of the Creator Himself—a time, finally, when our environs will resemble their original pristine condition, as in the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 36:35–36). God speed that day!

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.