

THE

## LIVING

CHURCH  
NEWS

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## Is It Wrong to GROW in Knowledge?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong set all of us a fine example, as many of you older brethren remember. He always tried to move forward, to grow and to improve. Many, many times he told us, in meetings and in sermons, that we should “grow”—not only individually, but as a Church. God Himself indicates that true Christians should grow. For the very last words of Scripture that the Apostle Peter wrote were exhortations that we should “**grow** in the **grace** and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

Sadly, some “Armstrong worshipers” become upset if God’s Church shows even the slightest signs of “growth.” There are a few misguided people who, when they see others growing, accuse them—or the entire Church—of departing from the guidance of God’s Apostle, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Yet even these misguided critics, whether or not they even realize it, are “changing” what Mr. Armstrong taught in order to hold on to their imaginary idea of what he would or would not have done had he been in our present circumstances.

Frankly, brethren, as one who knew Mr. Armstrong *extremely well* for 36 years, I know that Mr. Armstrong would be absolutely **horrified** to find that people are using *his name*—26 years after his death—to stifle our opportunity to **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Savior!

I tell you, brethren, before God the Father and Jesus Christ, that Mr. Armstrong himself would **want us** to “grow” as long as we are careful never to depart from any basic biblical

Truth! And, as any honest observer can understand, we in the Living Church of God have **never** contemplated changing the Sabbath, the Holy Days, the Ten Commandments, the Holy Spirit as the impersonal power of God (not a person)—or *anything else* that is fundamental to the Truth of God!

We do “**honor**” Mr. Armstrong—as we should—but we do **not** “worship” him in the sense of putting what *we think* were his ideas ahead of God’s word or God Himself! That would be **idolatry**! Mr. Armstrong himself would **not want this**.

Brethren, Mr. Armstrong—again, as many of you older brethren remember—**did change** regarding our practice of women wearing makeup (he let the Church go back and forth on this *three times*!), on the way to count Pentecost, on the administration of

*how we deal* with divorce and remarriage, and on **many** other points. In fact, I remember going to him in a respectful yet firm way about an **error** he made in explaining 1 Corinthians 10:27–29. Some of you older brethren will recall that Mr. Armstrong carried over many ideas from the Sardis Church in his early ministry. That was natural. He was sincere in doing so. Yet, as he changed on some of these ideas, he told us older evangelists a number of times, “Fellows, I had to come to the Truth of some of these things *one doctrine at a time*. It took me a while to get it all sorted out.”

So, when I heard Mr. Armstrong say it was okay to eat unclean meats at a dinner in an unbeliever’s home, I pointed out to him—since I had been *diligently studying this* and teaching the Epistles of Paul class—that this was **not** Paul’s



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intention, nor was it the correct understanding of these verses (1 Corinthians 10:27–29). I pointed out to him that Paul was discussing whether or not Christians should ask their hosts if their food had been offered to idols. This passage had **nothing** to do with whether they were being offered unclean food. You would not have to “ask” about unclean meats being placed in front of you—since you would normally see if it was pork, lobster, shrimp or whatever.

After going over this point thoroughly with him, he immediately agreed, and realized that this was one of a few small errors he had carried over from his previous association with the Sardis Church. I, and several others, brought up quite a number of points like this to Mr. Armstrong through the years.

Also, some of you older brethren will remember how I did show Mr. Armstrong the need to change our previous prophetic emphasis on the years 1972 and 1975. He had proposed that this was **probably**—some of the other leaders made it even stronger—the time when the Great Tribulation would begin and then Christ would return to earth.

As those dates began to close in on us, however, I realized that *quite a number* of prophetic events would need to occur *before* the awesome prophesied events could happen. I went to Mr. Armstrong and explained to him that there was still—in 1969, just three years ahead of time—no Beast Power in Europe, no militant Catholic church and no King of the South. I reminded him that America was still **very powerful**, with no particular indication that this would change in the immediate months or years ahead. Considering all this, Mr. Armstrong allowed me to send out to *the entire ministry* of the Worldwide Church of God a letter explaining **five reasons** why we would “probably” have much more time beyond 1972 and 1975 for these events to occur. This was *very helpful* to our ministry, since the letter encouraged our ministers to preach on these points and to **warn** our brethren ahead of time so they did not develop a “fixation” on these exact dates. So, in retrospect, this proved *very helpful*—considering that, otherwise, some would probably have wanted to “set in stone” the former ideas, presuming that “God’s apostle could not be wrong”!

Brethren, do you “get it”?

Mr. Armstrong himself **never** claimed to be infallible! Yet, since we understand that he was used as an apostle of Jesus

Christ, some few seem to get the idea into their heads that he could never, ever, be wrong on anything. But, ask yourself, was the Apostle Peter—the obvious **leading** Apostle of his time—“infallible”? If so, **why** did the Apostle Paul strongly **correct** him, as we read in Galatians 2:11–16? And **why**, dear brethren, did God inspire this correction to be included in Scripture so that all of us would come to **understand** that neither Peter, nor Paul nor Mr. Armstrong were **infallible**?

Even now, brethren, our Council of Elders is discussing a few “technical” points that Mr. Armstrong could not have humanly anticipated, considering that he died in 1986, before certain prophecies had begun to be fulfilled. For instance, some of you have already heard Mr. Ames and me refer to the sequence of events leading up to the Wedding Supper. We all agree, as Scripture teaches and as Mr. Armstrong plainly taught, that our reward as Christians is **not** in heaven. After the resurrection, we are to be kings and priests on this earth for a thousand years, before God the Father comes to the earth with the New Jerusalem. But does this mean that we cannot go **wherever** Jesus takes us? Of course not! Revelation 14:4 shows that the 144,000 “go where He goes.” So, when we look at all the biblical evidence, can we say that it is wrong to understand that the Wedding Supper may take place in heaven before we rule under Christ on the earth? Of course not! When the Apostle Paul had his awe-inspiring vision, described in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, his reaction shows that he did **not** consider it impossible for God to bring a man to **visit** heaven. Now, some may fear that this could be a “change.” But this would not contradict our previous understanding—it would simply clarify a point that we had not understood before.

Brethren, we do need to be careful about “new understandings.” Consider some popular ideas among God’s people regarding the “Great Apostasy” of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10. Mr. Armstrong understood that this rebellion involved the whole world. Indeed, the Greek word *apostasia* is more accurately translated into English as “rebellion” rather than “apostasy,” and Mr. Armstrong rightly understood that it connotes an uprising far broader than the consequences of doctrinal heresy within God’s little flock, involving a man

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# EDITORIAL

## CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

By Roderick C. Meredith

Most of you reading this understand that it is vital to read the Bible regularly and drink in deeply of its great Truth. But there is more to it than that. To really profit from Bible reading, or even from diligent Bible study, we must deeply understand how to apply the Bible's words *to ourselves personally, in our own lives*. We must make it part of us. We can only *truly* do this by harnessing the power of meditation.

We have been taught to examine ourselves before the Passover, to be sure that we are “in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). But what does it mean to examine ourselves? What does it mean to reflect with true depth on the teachings in God's word? Many of us only think very superficially about these matters, and do not understand meditation's great benefits. That is one reason why many of us lack depth and stability in our Christian lives.

Societal demands today restrict us from giving deep thought to God, His purpose, and what this means in our own lives. Television, for instance, is always there, waiting and tempting, with programming that can be absolutely damnable—murder, violence, implicit (and sometimes explicit) fornication, filth and rottenness of every possible description. Most people cannot or do not control it. It *runs* our minds and it *ruins* our minds. Of course, movies can do the same thing, as can video games and the Internet.

Even the telephone, a seemingly harmless apparatus, seems to ring every time we are about to do something important. It rings so much at our home that I remember praying one time with my family around the dinner table. I had been so distracted all day that as I bowed my head I said, “Hello.”

In spite of these modern distractions, we need greater concentration and spiritual depth in order to be like King David, whom God called a man after



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His own heart. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful,” David said. “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1–2).

### DAVID MEDITATED

David took time to meditate on the law of the Great God. He thought about it deeply, in great detail, over and over. Under the stars at night as a shepherd, on the royal balcony as a king, or out on the battlefield as a soldier—and at many other times—David thought on God's law.

“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger [showing how God uses those who, of themselves, might be weak]. When I consider Your

heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man...?” (Psalm 8:1–4).

I have sat quietly at the top of Mt. Whitney, which rises 14,496 feet from its base—the tallest mountain in the continental United States. From there I could see way out across the Sierras, clear to Death Valley. Up there, with no one else around, you feel kind of small. It is easier to realize, in that vast expanse of mountains and valleys and canyons and whistling winds, just how tiny we are.

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (vv. 4–6).

Eventually, the entire universe could be placed in our power. If our attitudes are right—if we are meditating on God's law, asking Him sincerely from our heart to fashion us and mold us and work with us and make us like He is—we will have that power. God wants it that way.

Why is it so important to meditate on God's laws? David again gives us the answer: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7–9).

David knew that God's judgments were more desirable than fine gold. We need to fix our minds on those



laws in order to really become zealous in serving and obeying the Great God. To understand those laws as David did, and as Jesus did, we need to learn the art of real meditation.

### GODLY VS. UNGODLY MEDITATION

This world under the influence of Satan has many childish concepts about meditation. “Transcendental Meditation” and other Eastern-type meditation techniques, simply letting the mind go blank or conjuring up a certain feeling or mood where Satan or a demon can grab the mind, are not godly meditation at all. That kind of meditation is dangerous.

The right kind of meditation is described in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,

whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Can we appreciate what this means? *Think* on these things! Turn them over and over in your mind. Examine their various facets. Paul continued: “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, *and the God of peace will be with you*” (v. 9).

### A DEFINITION

Some people like a definition, so here it is: Meditation is the private devotion to deep, continuous, purposeful reflection of the mind on a single theme. In other words, when we meditate, our minds become focused on one theme or problem, examining and analyzing its causes and effects. *Why was this good? Why*

*was that part of it bad? How can it be better next time?*

Through Moses, God spoke about meditation to ancient Israel: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:4–7). Yes, we should *continually* talk about the words of God.

Most of you reading this realize that in the previous chapter (Deuteronomy 5), we also find the Deuteronomy version of the Ten Commandments. “You shall bind them as a sign on your

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## Five Ways to Meditate

*“Examine yourselves [that is, meditate] 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).*

1. Think through all the applications of God’s law and teachings as they apply to your life and to today’s society. Remember Deuteronomy 6:6–7: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”
2. When things go wrong, ponder on what laws or principles of God were violated by you or by others, but start with yourself. We know that whatever we ask of Him we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things or follow those ways that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:22; 5:14)—not just the Ten Commandments, but all the ways of God, involving the kind of food we eat, the way we dance, the kind of music we listen to, the way we present ourselves to others and the kind of companionship we seek. In all those areas we ought to meditate on God’s ways and on how to practice them.
3. As you read of Abraham’s obedience to God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac, or to leave Ur of the Chaldees, or of Israel’s going out into a desert place not knowing what they were going to eat and how God was going to take care of them, or as you read of David’s loyalty to Saul, even under difficult circumstances, think through how you can learn from these lessons and apply them to your life. Think about what you would do, and then what you ought to do through the mind of Christ. As you meditate, literally plan steps right then to improve your future performance.
4. When a big decision looms or long-range planning is needed in your life, meditate. Younger people especially need this in planning for their future—career, marriage and everything. Carefully think through the spiritual pros and cons, in the light of the instruction of the Bible. Do not act without sufficient reason, just on the basis of an untried thought or idea, or on impulse.
5. Weekly—perhaps, best of all, on the weekly Sabbath—take spiritual inventory of the growth that you have experienced. How have you used your time? What problems have you experienced? Why did you have the problems? How can you overcome the problems? How can you do better next week?

# TWO POINTS ABOUT CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

By Dexter B. Wakefield

Back in 1969, New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath wrote an autobiography titled, *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow... 'Cause I Get Better-Looking Every Day*. Apparently, “Broadway Joe” liked what he saw in the mirror each morning. Do you?

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:23–25).

As we prepare for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, we look into the “mirror” of God’s word to examine ourselves in a spirit of true repentance. As a reminder of that process, we also deleaven our homes.

*God intends this to be a constructive process of deep personal evaluation and change.* So, when we look with spiritual eyes at the state of our righteousness, what do we see? No doubt, there **will** be “spots” and “blemishes.” Such recognition *should* give us strong motivation for personal change.

## MEASURING UP?

Some of God’s people endure constant trials and struggle with multiple temptations. Even baptized Christians may occasionally slip and fall back into old ways, then climb back out and fight discouragement. Sometimes, they may feel that they are not “measuring up.” Do you ever feel that way? It is a common problem faced by those in God’s Church, especially in this season of self-examination.

Or perhaps you know, *intellectually*, that you have repented and are forgiven for your sins, but your knowledge is not accompanied by a deep **feeling** that you were forgiven. When you see yourself in God’s mirror, you may see the need for personal change so clearly that you are not fully confident in believing you are actually forgiven for your past sins.

Others, despite baptism, doubt that they truly **can change in the future**. Although they may feel great motivation to change, they struggle with the fear that they may not be able to change. This can produce feelings of discouragement.

Brethren, God is aware of this problem. We need to put out sin, *but we need to put out discouragement as well*. “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. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, *lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*” (Hebrews 12:1–3).

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

For baptized Christians, two vital points should be helpful in preventing and dispelling discouragement:

- Having repented of our past sins, **we are forgiven** of them, and are free of guilt.
- Through the Holy Spirit within us, **we can change** for the future.

Scripture reminds us that we were baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). As people who have been cleansed of the guilt of our past sins, “we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). A baptized Christian is—and will continue to be—a new person, one who continues to change and grow. If we examine ourselves spiritually without keeping these two points in mind, we can become discouraged. If we sometimes feel that we are not “measuring up,” these points should be a source of great encouragement.

## CHRIST’S SACRIFICE MATTERS

*The sacrifice Jesus Christ made for you is a weighty matter.* Nearly every one of us will say, “I know that”—but does that knowledge translate into a deep feeling about how His sacrifice affects our lives personally?

Think for a moment about Jesus’ identity. He is the Word by whom all things were created. He was the Husband of Israel, and now is the betrothed Husband of the Church. He was born of a virgin, was made flesh, lived as a man and triumphed over Satan. He was reviled, beaten, crucified and killed. He was buried, resurrected after three days and three nights, appeared to many and then ascended to heaven. He sits on the throne with our Father, where He acts as our High Priest and Intercessor. He promises to return to the earth as our King and Elder Brother, to rule the world with a government whose increase will never end.

Each of these aspects of the Savior’s identity means something important. Each is a weighty matter. But do these



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aspects of Christ's life, death, identity and mission seem weighty to each of us as individuals? They should!

### MERCY MATTERS

Everything Christ did, He did for a reason. Notice, then, what He taught about mercy. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23).

Do we tithe faithfully, as we should, but forget about God's mercy? If so, how can we be merciful to others?

Consider what Scripture tells us about God's mercy. For one thing, it endures. Psalm 136 mentions the endurance of God's mercy 43 times!

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!

For His mercy endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!

For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1–2).

Scripture also tells us that God's mercy is *abundant*—He has lots of it. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

We also learn that God's mercy is *tender*. "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful [compassionate], and of tender mercy" (James 5:11).

### GRACE MATTERS

The Apostle Paul wrote about "the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The gospel of the grace of God is good news indeed. It is not a separate, second gospel. Rather, it is *an integral part* of Christ's message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Grace is essential for our salvation, and the gospel of the Kingdom of God is inclusive of it. "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures..." (1 Corinthians 15:1–3).

Paul tells us that by the works of the law no man will be justified in God's sight, because by the law is only the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). But it is by the law that we know what sin is. We do not have the privilege of deciding for ourselves what is good and evil (Genesis 3:3). Nevertheless, mankind has been trying to do exactly that, ever since Adam and Eve.

We cannot repent of sin and break God's commandments at the same time, and the Bible plainly states that we are to come

to Christ in true repentance (Acts 2:37–38). Remorse looks to the past, but repentance looks to the future. True repentance means that we have resolved as to what we **will do**. It changes our future. For instance, if you have been taking God's name in vain all your life, and you repent of doing so, your repentance changes what you will say in the future.

Still, all the repentance in the world cannot save us from what we did in the past, and from the guilt of our past sins. We are profaned by the guilt of what we already did, and our future obedience to God's commandments cannot change the guilt and the death sentence we have already earned. What, then, can change that guilty past? Nothing less than the grace of God—His unmerited pardon. Through His grace, through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God—our Passover, Jesus Christ—the guilt of our past sins is removed.

After we are cleansed of past guilt, God expects us to live repentant lives, overcoming sin. Christ living in us makes that possible. Without repentance, if we break God's commandments willfully, there remains no more sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 10:26), and we will die profaned by our guilt, having earned the wages of sin—death—instead of being resurrected to immortality in the Family of God.

So, we can understand the importance of leading a repentant life. As we go on with our lives, as we repent and ask God for forgiveness, He is faithful to forgive us. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The self-examination that we do each Passover season—putting the spiritual leaven out of our lives—is part of that process.

Can you see the importance of God's grace in your life? "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men" (Titus 3:5–8).

Because God's grace cannot be earned, our faith is counted for our righteousness. "What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:1–5).

God knows our hearts. He knows the depth of our belief in Him, and He assists us in our obedience. Our lives of continuing repentance and obedience are evidence of this. Christ's sacrifice allows us to be reconciled to the Father. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away;



behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17–19).

Sometimes, when God’s people are struggling with their trials, they may feel discouraged and even unworthy. But by considering what Christ’s sacrifice means to us—*mercy, grace, unmerited pardon, justification before God, and reconciliation with our Father*—we can overcome discouragement and come to feel more deeply thankful than ever for our Savior.

Where do feelings of discouragement ultimately come from? It is Satan who tempts us with feelings of discouragement. He wants to attack our faith, so when we feel spiritual discouragement we should quickly recognize it as Satan’s temptation. Satan is a loser, and he is the most discouraged being in the universe! So, if you are fighting feelings of guilt and discouragement, particularly as you prepare for the Passover, take time to meditate and pray about your faith, belief, and acceptance of what our Lord did for you. And, just as we are forgiven, we must forgive others (Matthew 6:12).

### WE CAN CHANGE

As noted above, God’s Holy Spirit has the power to change us. When we accept Christ’s sacrifice, His blood washes away the guilt of our past sins—those we have already committed. But God continuously forgives us, as we repent of new sins we commit (Matthew 18:21–22). Just as we are told to forgive others, God will forgive us if we repent and ask for that forgiveness. This is one of the great lessons of our annual observance of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Forgiveness of our past sins is vital. But people in God’s Church sometimes forget that not only does God forgive our sins, He gives us through the Holy Spirit the means to stop sinning in the future! Those who become discouraged may sometimes forget, or not deeply believe, that God’s Holy Spirit really has the power to change them—to convert them and change their very way of thinking, feeling and acting! If we deeply understand and believe this, we can be greatly *encouraged*!

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you; but you were washed,* but you were sanctified, but

you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). No doubt, some members of God’s Church in Corinth had very “lively” past lives, but God justified them and changed them.

All around us, we can see a common miracle in God’s Church. People are changed. You can change, too. You have accepted Christ’s sacrifice, so your past sins are covered. But you must also believe that the Spirit of Christ in you has the power to change you. You need to be confident that there is genuine hope for your future. You need to accept that God has given you access to a tremendous power—one that He uses to rule, guide and sustain the universe. Do you believe that a power that can sustain the universe can also enable you to overcome your personal problems? Of course it can!

We all know from personal experience that “The spirit

indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38). Yet Paul offers us some encouragement: “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear,

but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit... bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us... Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit... makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered... *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:9–18, 26, 38–39).

Jesus Christ has the power to *make you stand* through your trials. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his

ALL AROUND US, WE CAN  
SEE A COMMON MIRACLE  
IN GOD’S CHURCH.  
PEOPLE ARE CHANGED.  
YOU CAN CHANGE, TOO.  
YOU HAVE ACCEPTED CHRIST’S  
SACRIFICE, SO YOUR PAST  
SINS ARE COVERED. BUT YOU  
MUST ALSO BELIEVE THAT THE  
SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN YOU HAS  
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YOU NEED TO BE CONFIDENT  
THAT THERE IS GENUINE HOPE  
FOR YOUR FUTURE.

# Spiritual “Cap and Trade”?

By Gerald Weston

## CAP AND TRADE

Over the last decade, the theory of anthropogenic (“caused by human beings”) global warming has become big business. In Canada, the government of the province of Ontario has mandated that, by a certain date, people may no longer purchase ordinary incandescent light bulbs. Instead, they must buy expensive compact fluorescent bulbs. This has angered many people, but others feel good about the mandate, thinking that they are doing something “to save the planet.”

It is a bit like the “Earth Hour” event each year, when environmentalists from the World Wildlife Fund urge everyone to turn off all their lights for an hour in order to display their commitment to the cause of protecting the planet. On March 31, 2012, millions may go along with the idea and at 8:30 p.m. turn off their lights for an hour. But how much good it will do is questionable. If people were really serious, why not turn off their lights and all their appliances for a month or more? No question about it—**that** would make a difference! It would remind us of what it was like to live in the Dark Ages, literally and figuratively.

Another “feel-good” action is for air travelers to donate their frequent flyer miles to some “green” cause. This is a way for people on the one hand to admit that their use of airplanes is doing damage to the environment, but on the other hand to help the environment a bit, as if planting a few trees can reduce one’s environmental “footprint.”

Each of these approaches can be seen as a kind of “green penance.” You can pollute the planet, but at the same time assuage your guilt for doing so. You can feel good about what seems to be a simple solution to a very complex problem.

On a larger scale, you may be aware of a pollution-management strategy that has come into prominence in recent years. It is called “cap and trade.” Governments set an arbitrary limit—a “cap”—on the amount of carbon a particular factory may emit. By setting this limit on all factories in



its jurisdiction, the government can control the overall level of pollution being released into the environment. However, it is inevitable that some factories will find it much easier than others to achieve the goals. Cap and trade allows a very efficient company to trade (usually to sell) its unused pollution credits to a less-efficient polluter.

This is an interesting management principle. But is it something we apply in our own lives, even unconsciously? Is it an approach God condones?

Consider: What would it be like if God did not completely outlaw our consumption of leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but only put a cap on it? What if He gave us two “leaven credits” each day? If you only ate one piece of leavened bread, but I ate two, I could purchase from you

a leaven credit so I could enjoy that glazed donut I saw in the coffee shop window.

Have you considered that people sometimes unwittingly approach sin this way? Could you be guilty of this? Might you be committing spiritual cap and trade? Scripture provides some examples of how others have done so—probably not realizing what they were doing, but doing it nevertheless. In examining their actions, we can come to understand that God’s cap on sin is zero, and that He does not tolerate trading in “sin credits.”

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were commanded to leave the leaven behind (Exodus 12:15–20). The Apostle Paul explained the meaning of this seven-day festival: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8). The Days of Unleavened Bread teach us how we should respond to Christ’s sacrifice—by repentance from sin! For the duration of this seven-day Festival, we see leaven as a symbol of sin.

Leaven is an ideal symbol—or representation, or “type”—for sin. Just as leaven can be found everywhere, so can sin. Leaven is difficult—even impossible—to remove completely from our homes. So, too, is sin difficult—impossible by our own human efforts—to remove completely from the recesses of our minds and hearts. Just as we sometimes catch ourselves, half-way through eating a piece of leavened cake a co-worker has offered us, so we also catch ourselves dwelling on a wrong thought two minutes too late. The parallels are many, which is why God commands us to put leaven out for seven days.



Doing so teaches us powerful lessons regarding sin.

Paul tells us that sin is deceitful. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3: 13). He also informs us that there is often temporary, short-lived and short-sighted pleasure in sin. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:24–26, KJV).

### BEWARE OF THE LEAVEN

Jesus told His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). The disciples did not understand, and thought He was commenting on their failure to bring bread for their lunch. Jesus had to explain Himself more directly: “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (v. 11). Only after this explanation did they understand “that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (v. 12).

So, how did the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ doctrine relate to leaven? In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we are familiar with how puffed up the Pharisee was. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess’” (Luke 18:11–12). But, does this fully explain the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?

A study of Matthew 23 indicates there was more to it. The Pharisees, for example, were neck-deep in

spiritual cap and trade. Notice: “For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers” (v. 14). Also: “For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (v. 23).

How did Jesus describe these people? “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (v. 24). They focused on outward appearances, such as adorning a tomb, when they were guilty of killing the person placed in it. They cleaned the outside of the cup, but left it dirty inside. Outwardly they appeared righteous, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy (vv. 25–30).

Mark 7 illustrates a prime example of Pharisaical cap and trade, recounting the occasion when the Pharisees criticized Jesus’ disciples for not washing their hands before eating when they came from the market. “For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.... And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches” (Mark 7:3–4).

So, what was Jesus’ response? “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (v. 9). Christ then illustrated His point by showing how the Pharisees had used false reasoning to concoct an excuse for not keeping the Fifth Commandment. Their idea was that if they gave a gift to the temple, they were excused from taking care of their elderly parents’ financial needs. They traded a tradition for the commandment of God! Talk about cap and trade—they were experts at it!

### ANIMALS FOR OBEDIENCE

The Pharisees were far from the only ones to excel at the art of spiritual cap and trade. Through His servant Samuel, God commanded King Saul to utterly destroy Amalek—including not only the fighting men, but women and children and livestock of the Amalekites. However, instead of being

faithful to God’s instructions, Saul and the people saved Agag—the Amalekite king—and “the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them” (1 Samuel 15:8–9).

This act of rebellion against the word of God cost Saul his dynasty. He could have had an everlasting dynasty, as was given to David, but his heart was not wholly with God.

But see how Saul deceived himself. There is a powerful lesson in this for you and for me. Saul declared to Samuel, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD” (v. 13). Samuel, of course, was unimpressed: “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” (v. 14). Remarkably, even though Saul had not obeyed God, he rationalized that he had done so! Or, is it so remarkable? Is it possible that we are sometimes guilty of the same?

Notice carefully verse 15, as there is a lesson here in human “cap and trade” reasoning: “And Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, **to sacrifice to the LORD your God**; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.’” Saul assumed he could disobey God’s command (the “cap”) as long as he did some other good thing in its place (the “trade” for a spiritual credit). Saul disobeyed God’s command by trading a few sacrificial animals (“sin credits”).

Saul pressed the case for accepting his trade (vv. 20–21), but Samuel laid the matter bare: “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:22–23).

None of us will be called upon in this life to go out and kill the

Amalekites, but we should not miss the lesson. Have we engaged in our own forms of spiritual cap and trade? Maybe we worked on the Sabbath (just a little), but rationalized that we could make up for it by donating our Sabbath-day earnings to God? Or can we recognize that to do this is just like what the Pharisees did, trading money in order to break a commandment—in this case, the Fourth Commandment? God was not impressed with the Pharisees' trade, or with Saul's. Will He be any more impressed with ours?

Another example involves how we treat other people. If we spread hurtful gossip about someone, we may try to deny that we are sinning, but deep down we usually recognize our sin. So, how do we handle it when we realize that we have “crossed the line”? Do we apologize immediately, and in prayer confess our sin to God? Or do we attempt a “trade” by saying something good about the person, as if this undoes the destruction we have already caused—another example of cap and trade?

### **“SIN CREDITS”?**

We may be fairly certain that Isaiah never heard the term *cap and trade*, but we can see that he understood the principle. In the first chapter of the book of Isaiah, the word of the LORD came to him—addressing the leaders of Judah as rulers of Sodom, and the people of Judah as the people of Gomorrah. The fifth chapter of Isaiah gives adequate evidence as to why He addresses Judah in such unflattering terms. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man!... they have rejected the law of the LORD

of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (vv. 20–24).

Despite the reality of Isaiah's description, the people of Judah thought they were okay with God. Why? They had an abundance of “sin credits”! But this did not buy favor with God, who asked them: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood

**GOD WAS LOOKING NOT FOR “SIN CREDITS,” BUT RATHER FOR REPENTANCE AND OBEDIENCE: “WASH YOURSELVES, MAKE YOURSELVES CLEAN; PUT AWAY THE EVIL OF YOUR DOINGS FROM BEFORE MY EYES. CEASE TO DO EVIL, LEARN TO DO GOOD; SEEK JUSTICE, REPROVE THE OPPRESSOR; DEFEND THE FATHERLESS, PLEAD FOR THE WIDOW” (ISAIAH 1:16–17).**

of bulls, or of lambs or goats” (Isaiah 1:11).

God was looking not for “sin credits,” but rather for repentance and obedience: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (vv. 16–17).

The book of Isaiah ends where it began. The evidence is clear: the people were trading what they considered good for what God tells us is good. “He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so will I choose

their delusions, and bring their fears on them; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight” (Isaiah 66:3–4).

Jeremiah was also familiar with cap and trade. He was dealing with a people who had an ungodly tolerance for sin. “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know...?” (Jeremiah 7:9). With such a list as this, so far below God's standard, what “sin credits” could the people possibly claim to justify such actions? They took great pride in coming regularly to “warm a seat” in God's temple. God, however, was not impressed. “Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.’... and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations?’” (vv. 4, 10). Despite all this, the people looked in vain to their sacrificial “sin credits” (vv. 21–23).

What are we to learn from all this? The above examples make it clear that human nature does not easily accept God's “zero tolerance” for sin. Human nature finds this unacceptable, so people make a habit of creating their own standards—“caps”—for sin. Then, to harmonize our standards with God's, people often fall into the trap of trying to make deals with God. It can be easy to justify our sins by attempting to trade “sin credits” that come easy to us, in exchange for the sins we find hard to overcome.

### **TWO WRONG PERSPECTIVES**

Consider a hypothetical example of two mothers. One keeps her home immaculately clean, but has very little time and energy left over to care for her children. The other has a filthy home—

**Continued on page 19**

# DELEAVENING THE CORNERS OF OUR MINDS

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

In the days when our two sons were young, my wife and I found that preparing for the Days of Unleavened Bread was often quite an adventure. My wife would find bits of leavening in places you would not normally expect. There were remains of cookies in the bottom of the boys' toy box, and even the occasional petrified remnant of a peanut butter sandwich under a bottom shelf in a corner of their closet.

Most of us who have reared children in the Church have our own unusual de-leavening tales to tell. As the Days of Unleavened Bread approach, general house cleaning is on our priority list. We clean our homes and, in the process, search into various corners and cubbyholes looking for bits and pieces of leavening. Scripture enjoins us that for seven days no leavening is to be found in our dwellings (Exodus 12:19).

Leavening—an agent, such as yeast or baking soda, which causes bread to rise—is used in the Bible to symbolize sin during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul made this analogy plain in 1 Corinthians 5:8 when he compared leaven to malice and wickedness. He emphasized to the Corinthian Christians that just as they were unleavened in their homes, so were they to be unleavened in their lives. He went on to exhort them to keep the Feast, not only physically, but also spiritually.

As the spring festivals approach, God's people give a lot of thought to the subject of sin. We focus on the Passover and how Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins. We prepare for the Days of Unleavened Bread in which we picture putting out sin and replacing it with righteousness. At this time of year, it is especially appropriate that we stop to meditate on the question of sin and where it is hidden in our lives.

We all know what sin is, right? After all, 1 John 3:4 makes plain that sin is the transgression of God's law. While this is the most simple and succinct definition of sin found in the Bible, there is much more to be said on the subject. Just as we examine the hidden corners in our homes to find leavening, so we must examine the hidden corners of our lives to find sin that is still lurking. There is a lot more to the matter of sin than a mere superficial glance may reveal. Let us look more closely at what the Bible reveals about sin.

## SINS OF INDIFFERENCE

One of the best-known stories in the Bible is that of the Good Samaritan. The account is given in Luke 10. A lawyer was attempting to trip Christ up by asking certain questions.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he queried. “Well, you're a lawyer,” Christ responded, “what does the Torah say?”

The lawyer replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. The verse in Deuteronomy instructs us that we are to love God with our whole heart and soul while the verse quoted from Leviticus exhorts us to love our neighbor as ourself.

After the lawyer quoted the verses, Christ responded in the affirmative and told him that if he truly did that, he would live. That was not the end of the exchange, however. The lawyer, we are told, wanted to justify himself. In other words,

he had no desire to make real changes in his life; he simply wanted an excuse to remain the way that he was. “And just who is my neighbor?” he then inquired of Jesus.

Christ proceeded to tell him a story about a man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho and was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by the roadside. Three different travellers happened by. The first was a priest, the second was a Levite, and the third a Samaritan. The priest and the Levite looked but declined to become involved. The Samaritan, moved with compassion, stopped and rendered aid. “Who was a neighbor to the man who had been beaten and robbed?” Jesus demanded of the lawyer. The obvious answer, which the lawyer was forced to admit, was that the Samaritan who stopped and helped was the only one who showed himself a neighbor. Christ then told the lawyer to go and do likewise.

What was the sin of the priest and the Levite? Neither of them participated in the beating or the robbery. They did not harm the injured man. Yet clearly, according to Jesus Christ, their actions had not met the requirements of a holy, righteous God. Simply put, the priest and the Levite were guilty of the sin of indifference. They did not care!

In another well-known account, this one found in Matthew 25, Christ foretold His future coming in power and glory, the time when He will begin the process of judging the nations. This time of judgment will last throughout the Millennium and the White Throne Judgment. Christ likened His role to that of a shepherd dividing the sheep from the goats.

In this account, Christ placed the righteous on His right hand and invited them to enter into life. He told them that this was because when He was hungry they had fed Him, when He was thirsty they had given Him something to drink, and when He had been sick and in prison they had visited Him. He then turned to those on His left hand and told them to go into the





Lake of Fire because they had not fed Him when He had been hungry nor had given Him a drink when He had been thirsty, neither had they visited Him. Both groups had a common response to Christ's statements. "When did we respond to you that way?" they asked. "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me," Christ replied.

As does the parable of the Good Samaritan, this account illustrates the seriousness of the sin of indifference. It is not enough for us merely to refrain from robbing or killing our neighbor; we must actively show love and kindness to others. The spirit of God's law requires far more than merely the avoidance of actively harming someone else.

As we examine the closet corners of our lives, we must examine for sins of indifference. They violate, in principle, all of the commands that hang on the simple statement that we are to love our neighbor as ourself.

### SINS OF PRIDE

King Uzziah of Judah came to the throne when he was only 16 years old. He went on to become one of the most outwardly successful rulers of the southern kingdom.

From early in his reign, he pursued an aggressive policy that secured his own borders and brought traditional enemies to bay. He put together a sizeable, well-equipped army. He fortified Jerusalem, placed fortified garrison cities among the Philistines, and forced the Ammonites to pay annual tribute.

He expanded the economic prosperity of the nation by digging a series of wells that opened new opportunities of cattle-raising and agriculture. The entire nation had peace at home and respect abroad.

In 2 Chronicles 26 we find the story of King Uzziah. We read: "So his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong" (v. 15). Setting the stage for this prosperity and success was the fact that, from the beginning of his kingship, Uzziah had sought to serve the God of Israel.

That does not represent the end of the story, however. In 2 Chronicles 26:16, we read of the turning point in Uzziah's life. "But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense." One of the greatest dangers of success is pride.

At the pinnacle of blessings and success we are all quite vulnerable to this insidious destroyer, pride. Pride is what turned Lucifer into Satan. It has spiritually destroyed many who seemed on the road to great success.

In Uzziah's case, he took to himself the prerogatives of the priests. Israel's priesthood consisted only of those men who were

direct descendants of Aaron. The priests were the only ones permitted by God to enter the Holy Place of the Temple and to perform the rituals outlined in the Law. One of those rituals consisted of burning incense on the altar that stood in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

As one of Judah's most successful kings, Uzziah became focused on his greatness. He lost sight of the fact that he was subject to God's law just like everyone else. No one is so important as to be above the law!

The High Priest Azariah and 80 other faithful priests confronted the king in the temple. "You must leave immediately," the high priest demanded. "You're not a priest and it is not lawful for you to be here!" The king's response was to become enraged at the priest for addressing him that way. When his anger flared at the correction he had received, a remarkable thing suddenly happened. As the priests watched in horror, Uzziah's face became leprous. As the now-frightened king recognized what was occurring, he quickly withdrew from the temple. For the remainder of his life he was a leper and had to live apart from others. His son Jotham became regent in his stead. Uzziah's life ended in loneliness and obscurity because this great conquering king was himself conquered by pride.

Pride leads to presumptuous sins. It also serves as a roadblock to accepting correction. When any of us presume to set ourselves in a position that God has not chosen to give us, we are on very dangerous ground. We must all search the drawers and closet corners of our lives for hidden pride that could be the key to our undoing.

**PRIDE LEADS TO PRESUMPTUOUS SINS. IT ALSO SERVES AS A ROADBLOCK TO ACCEPTING CORRECTION. WHEN ANY OF US PRESUME TO SET OURSELVES IN A POSITION THAT GOD HAS NOT CHOSEN TO GIVE US, WE ARE ON VERY DANGEROUS GROUND. WE MUST ALL SEARCH THE DRAWERS AND CLOSET CORNERS OF OUR LIVES FOR HIDDEN PRIDE THAT COULD BE THE KEY TO OUR UNDOING.**

### COMPROMISE AND FAITHLESSNESS

When fear rather than faith rules our life, it leads us to compromise with what we know is right. "For whatsoever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Perhaps one of the most vivid illustrations of faithlessness and compromise is the account of Jeroboam, the first king of the House of Israel. From 1 Kings 11 we learn that Solomon displeased God in his later years. As a result, God allowed adversaries to rise up and trouble him.

In this context we are introduced to Jeroboam, a very industrious young Ephraimite who was the son of a widow. Solomon became so impressed with Jeroboam's ability that he made him governor of the tribe of Ephraim. One day, on his way out of Jerusalem, one of God's prophets accosted him. Ahijah the prophet came up to Jeroboam, asked to see his new coat and then proceeded to rip it into twelve pieces! "Take ten of these," he told the astounded Jeroboam. The prophet went on to explain that God was going to make Jeroboam king over

ten of the tribes of Israel after Solomon's death. Because of His previous promise of an everlasting dynasty to King David, God was going to preserve Solomon's dynasty over Judah. However, Jeroboam was told that if he would be faithful and obedient to God, God would also establish his dynasty forever.

Evidently Solomon must have heard about some of this, for he became suspicious of Jeroboam. As a result, Jeroboam had to flee to Egypt to preserve his life. Only after Solomon's death was he free to return to Israel.

Upon King Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam succeeded to the throne. A delegation from all of the tribes came to him and demanded a reduction in the high taxes that Solomon had levied. Rehoboam, ignoring the counsel of the older, wiser men, refused to heed the people's request and decided to show that he was "in charge." The result was that the ten northern tribes refused to acknowledge him as king and chose the newly returned Jeroboam as their king. This event produced a split between Israel and Judah that has endured to this day.

So far, half of what God had promised Jeroboam through the prophet had come to pass. Now he was king over the ten tribes. However, as he thought of the people travelling to Jerusalem year after year to attend God's festivals, he was troubled. "In time, they'll become nostalgic for 'the good old days,'" he mused. "They'll think back longingly to the time when everyone was together as one nation. Some day they will simply get rid of me so that they can reunite with Judah." The more he thought about this possible scenario, the more persuaded of it he was—and the more he worried.

After talking it over with his advisors, Jeroboam came up with a plan to prevent this from happening. We read in 1 Kings 12 that he called the people together and proposed some changes. "It's too hard for you folks to have to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship God," he told the Israelites. Jeroboam then told them that there would now be two centers of worship for the ten tribes. One would be in the northern part of his kingdom at Dan and the other in the southern part at Bethel. Additionally, he told them, there would be a golden calf set up at each location. He appointed new priests who were not from the sons of Aaron, but included every class of people (v. 31). They were men willing to preach whatever Jeroboam paid them to preach. In addition, he changed the date of the Feast of Tabernacles from the seventh month to the eighth month, undoubtedly under the guise of offering greater convenience.

Jeroboam's compromises with the truth of God were motivated by fear. They were self-protective strategies based upon his apprehension about what the future might hold. While his concerns were certainly understandable from a human standpoint, they left God entirely out of the picture. The same God who had made him king could certainly have preserved his dynasty.

When we follow our fears and try to protect ourselves rather than rely upon God, we inevitably embark upon the path of compromise. The truth is that we cannot protect and preserve

ourselves, but God is faithful and His promises stand sure! Jeroboam thought that his actions would enable his dynasty to hang onto power. In reality they were its death knell! His dynasty proved to be extremely short-lived, only surviving his death by a mere two years (1 Kings 15:25–29). He had left God out of the picture and had acted from fear rather than from faith.

When we search the hidden crevices of the inner man for the crumbs of leavening, we must be on the lookout for our human fears and the compromises they produce. "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

## SINS OF UNFORGIVENESS

Ahithophel was one of King David's very closest friends. Most commentaries agree that David's Psalm 55:13 reference to the man he called "my comrade, my own dear friend" (NEB) was a reference to Ahithophel. David further describes this friendship: "We were together in sweet fellowship, and went to God's house with the festal throng" (Psalm 55:14). Yet, both Psalm 55:13–15 and Psalm 41:9 tell of David's betrayal by this man whom he trusted. As the *Jerusalem Bible* renders Psalm 41:9, "Even my closest and most trusted friend, who shared my table, rebels against me." Jesus Christ at His final Passover quoted this verse as applying to the actions of Judas Iscariot (John 13:18).

Ahithophel, David's friend and most trusted advisor, joined with Absalom in his revolt. He was part of the conspiracy to overthrow David as king (2 Samuel 15:12, 31). Why, after years of trusted friendship, would he do such a thing?

The answer is found in a careful comparison of two verses. In 2 Samuel 11:3 we read that Bathsheba, the woman with whom David committed adultery, was the daughter of Eliam. From 2 Samuel 23:34 we learn that Eliam was one of David's "mighty men" and that he was the son of Ahithophel. In other words, Bathsheba was the granddaughter of David's closest advisor, Ahithophel!

Simply put, **Ahithophel never forgave David** for what he had done to his granddaughter and her husband, Uriah. He must have felt deeply hurt by David's actions. That hurt, however, turned to bitter resentment and festered on the inside for years. He could never seem to turn it loose!

It is easy to understand the depth of Ahithophel's hurt, but what did his lack of forgiveness do for him? It fed a resentment that turned him into a traitor to God's anointed king! He died as a hopeless suicide (2 Samuel 17:23).

How many unforgiven hurts do we have lurking deep within us? If we do not rid ourselves of them, they will destroy us!

This year, let us make sure that we do more than delevener the corners of our closets. Most importantly, let us search out and remove the crumbs of leavening in the corners of our hearts and minds.

We cannot do this spiritual delevenering on our own strength. But, then, we do not need to! God's power is available to us, if we will reach out to Him and truly seek His help. ■

# Seven Traits of Good Students

By Bob G. League

Today's Christians have been called to become teachers in tomorrow's world. But in order to be a good teacher, one must first become a good student. To teach God's word, we must be well versed in God's word.

During Christ's three-and-a-half-year ministry on the earth, the Apostles sought Him diligently, desiring to be taught. He was their Lord and their Master—and He was their Teacher. They recognized their need for what only He could give them. “Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!’” (John 6:67–69).

Christ was bringing to His disciples the truth He had received from God the Father, as He expressed in His impassioned prayer, concerning His disciples: “For I have given to them the words which you have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that you sent Me” (John 17:8).

Jesus Christ—the Son of God, the Logos—came with the truth of God to teach His Apostles, disciples and followers. He continues to teach His people today. God is the perfect Teacher, but what can we do to be sure we are the best students possible? Let us consider seven key traits of good students.

## **GOOD STUDENTS HAVE THE FEAR OF GOD:**

Even before the lessons begin, there is a foundational trait without which our attempts at learning will be futile. We read: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). To “fear” God does not mean to live in terror of Him. Rather, it means to understand His awesome power and majesty, and to recognize

our place in relationship to Him. It means to have such deep reverence, respect and awe of Him that we are willing to surrender ourselves totally in submission, obedience and worship.

How important is this attitude? God Himself explains. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:2). Do we tremble at God's word? Do we understand the



benefits of fearing God? “My son, If you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1–5).

The fear of God is intimately connected to the knowledge of God. Every year, we travel to the Feast of Tabernacles, where one of the main lessons is to grow in the fear of God as we rejoice (Deuteronomy 14:23–26). Sometimes, events around us do not go exactly as we had hoped or planned. However, if we have the fear of God, nothing can shake us from our commitment to Him.

**GOOD STUDENTS LOVE THE TRUTH:** The scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day were men of great education. Yet Christ sliced right through their hypocrisy

and man-made teachings, openly ripping their falsehoods to shreds (Matthew 23:1–23). Christ's rebuke demonstrated plainly the difference between the truth of God and the error of the scribes and Pharisees. Their teachings were upside down, and He was turning things right side up! It is no wonder that they so hated Him! They did not love God's truth. Christ's message was not popular among the “educated” classes. “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42–43).

The Apostle Paul explained graphically that condemnation and death would come to those who would not receive the love of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12). However, he gave hope to those who do value truth. “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 13–14).

Our Christian ideal should be that of the Bereans. Notice how Scripture describes them: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

## **GOOD STUDENTS HAVE A TEACHABLE**

**ATTITUDE:** Ancient King David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). He wanted to be filled with the knowledge of God and His ways (Psalm 119:33–36). He was not satisfied with just a little. He was humble and teachable before his God. He had the attitude Christ described in the Beatitudes when



He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:3, 6).

We often encounter people who are proud of their scholarship and great knowledge. Is that the attitude Christ expects of His students? Consider how He responded when His disciples began to argue over who was greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. “Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 18:2–4).

**GOOD STUDENTS STUDY DILIGENTLY:** Have you ever “crammed” for an exam—tried to fit what should have been an entire semester of study into just a few days, or even hours, right before your test? If so, you probably noticed that you did not retain the knowledge for very long. Good students study regularly and diligently, knowing that consistent study helps us to internalize knowledge and gain greater understanding.

Paul counseled the same to young Timothy. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). This is an ongoing process, as Paul explained. “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:14). Also: “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).

**GOOD STUDENTS RESPOND TO THEIR TEACHERS:** What good is instruction if it is not followed? Scripture teaches us to “take firm hold of instruction, do not let go: keep her, for she is your life” (Proverbs 4:13). Do we take instruction that seriously? Do we recognize its value?

Paul reminded the Romans that, “for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Romans 2:13). Similarly, the Apostle James told the scattered tribes of Israel to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul admonishes the brethren: “Obey those who rule over you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17). Do you grieve your teachers? Or are you a responsive student, imitating them as they imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)?

Good teachers should not only be obeyed; they should be appreciated. Paul told the Thessalonians, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

**GOOD STUDENTS DISCUSS THE MATERIAL WITH OTHER STUDENTS:** As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). Good students deepen their knowledge by sharing with others what they have learned.

Scripture describes Apollos as “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). “Fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately” of what he knew (v. 25). However, despite these excellent qualities, Apollos had only received John’s baptism, and his knowledge was incomplete.

As a result, when Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos’ preaching, “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (v. 26). How did Apollos react? Did he reject what Christ’s students were sharing with him? Did he pridefully assume that he “knew it all”? No! He listened to his fellow students, and became a powerful preacher of the truth of Christ (v. 28).

God encourages His students to share their knowledge with one another. “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him’” (Malachi 3:16–17).

**GOOD STUDENTS PASS THE TESTS:** After the lessons are completed, students know that it is time to be tested. Tests are not something to be feared; they allow us to demonstrate to the teacher—and to ourselves—that we have grown, and have internalized what we have learned. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2–4).

Jesus Christ Himself was tested, and He passed His tests with perfect scores (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 22:39–44; Hebrews 4:15–16). As Christ’s followers, we too are tested. “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). These tests are not popularity contests; Jesus warned His students, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). As Christ’s students, let us all accept this great challenge, holding fast to His teachings in obedience to Him at all costs! A great reward is promised to those who endure to the end. The patriarchs of old, the prophets, the Apostles and the faithful saints of God have endured and passed their final tests before us. Will we develop the traits of good students and pass our own final exams? ■

# Taking and Giving Correction

**P**ractically none of us like to be corrected. It is hard to receive correction from a loved one, and it is harder still when correction comes from someone we feel has no right to offer it, or from one with obvious problems of his or her own.

How do we respond to correction? Do we receive it with thanks? Or do we tend to become defensive, tensing up and immediately thinking of our corrector's problems—as if they made the correction less valuable. Do we let correction help us, or do we stew with resentment and even offer counter-accusations that can damage or destroy our relationships with those who are correcting us?

“He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray” (Proverbs 10:17). Clearly, the matter of receiving—and giving—correction is important to us as Christians. What, then, is our Christian responsibility regarding correction?

## CORRECTION EVERYWHERE

If we think back to our childhood days, we may remember how it seemed that correction was coming from everywhere. Parents and guardians exercised their responsibility to train us, to help us avoid hurting ourselves and to grow out of youthful selfishness. If we had older siblings, they were not shy about telling us when we had said or done something wrong. At school, teachers imposed discipline and tried their best to help us grow as students. And our peers were perhaps the most merciless of all in demanding that we live up to their code of behavior.

What were the consequences of resisting or refusing correction? Our parents might spank or “ground” us for misbehavior. Our teachers could “flunk” us for failing to learn our lessons. Peers could shun us, and schoolyard enemies might even beat us up.

Looking back, it is interesting to consider how we reacted differently to the various sources of correction. Some of us gave in almost entirely to peer pressure, while others were mocked as “teacher’s pet” or “mama’s boy” when they tried their best to internalize adults’ correction. Some of us struck out in anger—physical or emotional—against those trying to correct us, while others retreated into a “whipped dog” posture or learned to conform outwardly to correction, while privately nursing the hope that a day would come when they would be in a position to unleash correction on others.

As we grew, we gained responsibility. At work, or in our families, we increasingly found ourselves in a position

to correct others. How did we handle that duty? And how do we handle correction today, whether we are giving it or receiving it?

## PARENTAL CORRECTION

God commands us: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Parents have a responsibility to correct their children, and wise children can gain great value from following the guidance of dutiful parents.

Children are a blessing from God. “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3–5). The parents’ job is not to bully or browbeat these gifts from God, but rather to train the young people in their care in the ways of God. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Parents should strive to provide their children with a godly example to follow, to the best of their ability. Those who are themselves failing to live God’s way—who demand their offspring’s obedience with a “do as I say, not as I do” attitude, can expect to reap a whirlwind of rebellion as their children grow older. Even though adolescents rarely detect hypocrisy in themselves, they are expert at spotting it in adults.

This does not mean that parents who have faults should excuse those faults in their children. Certainly, a parent struggling to overcome a particular problem should be especially able to show mercy and understanding when finding that same problem in a child. And when parents who are seeking God nevertheless feel themselves unable to provide a positive example (e.g. the parents are tobacco smokers, and have been unable to kick the ingrained habit), they can still help their children understand the seriousness of the problem and motivate their children to avoid it themselves.

However, even when parents have done their very best to instill godly values and good behavior in their children, some will fail to heed their parents’ wise guidance, and will rebel.



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However, parents in God's Church should not despair if, for a while, a son or daughter goes into the world. If parents did their part in teaching them God's way of life, there is yet hope for their children. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). The foundation laid by parental correction can prepare a wayward child to learn lessons "the hard way"—from "real world" experience.

### **CORRECTION BY EXPERIENCE**

Consider the parable of the prodigal son. We can draw several lessons from Christ's parable about a young man who squandered his inheritance. "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:11–16).

When we separate ourselves from God, He does not stop loving us and caring for us—it simply cuts us off from receiving the protection and blessings He wants to give those who are willing to obey Him. As long as we do not commit the unpardonable sin—willfully and knowingly reject His gift of the Holy Spirit—nature can take its course, buffeting us with the evil ways of Satan's world until we recognize our folly and come to appreciate all the good things God has provided, just as the prodigal son came to understand about his father. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father...' But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son'" (vv. 17–21).

The prodigal son was corrected by experience. Humbled by what he had faced while away from his father's protection, he returned home with gratitude he had not previously felt. We, too, as Christians, have that opportunity. If we will not accept correction from parents, or from teachers, or from loved ones, or from Scripture, God will allow us to have life experiences that should motivate us to again seek His protection.

### **WHAT IS CORRECTION?**

It is important to recognize the difference between correction and mere criticism. If someone tells you, "George, everyone knows you are selfish and greedy," it is

a criticism—a value judgment. But if your critic cannot give you an example of your wrong behavior, or cannot give you tangible steps you can take to improve, then criticism is all it is—it is not proper correction. If you perceive that your neighbor George displays selfishness and greed, you serve him best when you help him see his behavior so he can change. For example: "George, I do not want people to think of you as selfish and greedy. But, when you take three donuts and everyone else takes one, and when you cut to the head of the line, people may perceive you as selfish and greedy. Since there are enough donuts for everyone, maybe you can wait in line and take just one, like everyone else."

But what if George cut in line because he had to rush to an emergency appointment with his wife and daughter, and he took an extra donut to bring to each of them? Perhaps he still should have waited in line, or should have foregone the donuts entirely. But maybe the situation is more complex than his corrector realized. Before you correct someone, be sure you know the facts as much as possible, and be sure you are correcting with an attitude of love and service.

### **ARE YOU A CORRECTOR?**

We have all met people who seem to feel it is their duty to correct everyone they meet. But are you or I one of those people? Those with the greatest personal guilt are often the ones who are most prone to finding fault with others, especially if they feel immune from criticism. Such hypercritical people deceive themselves in their self-righteousness, and the pits they dig for others will end up capturing them instead. "For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, which they have dug without cause for my life. Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall" (Psalm 35:7–8).

There are some circumstances in which we have a clear responsibility to offer correction to those around us. Parents must not shirk that duty to their children. Teachers must be willing to guide their students. Ministers must be able to care for their flocks. However, even if we have been placed in a position where correction is clearly our responsibility, we should examine ourselves deeply before presuming to offer correction to others. No matter what our position, correction must be offered in love and humility, and after first examining our motives. Too often, correction is given in an attitude of condemnation, rather than as a prayerful and well-thought-out attempt to offer loving help. "Judge [condemn] not, that you be not judged [condemned]. For with what judgment [condemnation] you judge [condemn], you will be judged [condemned]; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in



your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1–5).

We must be careful to walk as did our Lord, before we can presume to correct others. If we want to be effective in correcting others, we must be diligent in correcting our own misconduct. That way, Christ can use us to correct others—not simply by our words of rebuke, but by our positive example. We should try to live up to Paul's exhortation to be "sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Titus 2:6–8).

As the Passover approaches, we must diligently examine ourselves in the matter of offering criticism and correction to others. We need to first practice what we preach and be sure it is our place and responsibility to instruct another in righteousness. When it is appropriate for us to give correction, it must always be in a way that will be beneficial to the recipient. "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. Hatred stirs up strife, but love [outgoing concern for the welfare of the one being corrected] covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:11–12).

### INCORRECTLY CORRECTED?

How should we respond if we are certain, after much prayer and introspection, that we have been corrected incorrectly or unjustly? If correction is given to us unjustly, should we automatically reject it? No! We can often learn valuable lessons even from our enemies. It is hard to see ourselves as others see us. Even by understanding others' misperceptions of us, we can learn and grow and become better understood by those who would criticize us.

Scripture explains that, even though the corrector may face God's judgment for a wrong correction, we as the recipients of that correction can still benefit—if we take it in the right attitude. The Apostle Peter gave this important instruction: "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you

were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:18–25).

Jesus Christ was murdered by His enemies. Compared to that, our receiving an ill-motivated or inaccurate correction is a tiny matter. After all, Christ was not guilty of any sin. If you or I are wrongly corrected for a fault that is not ours, we can look to any number of our faults for which we have not received the deserved correction. And to whatever extent we have been subjected to an unjust correction, we can gain some degree of appreciation for what Christ Himself went through when He was unjustly persecuted. So, those who are given correction need to consider it carefully, even if it is not perfectly delivered.

### SELF-CORRECTION

Even if we do not have trusted Christian friends and counselors to help us see our own faults and failings, God has given us a powerful tool that we can use to correct ourselves. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

When we study the Bible, are we studying in order to feel "superior" to those around us, or to understand prophecy so as to "save our skin" from troubled times ahead? Or are we taking in God's word so that it can help us become the people Christ wants us to be? The example of Job reminds us that, no matter how righteous we may consider ourselves, we will not be able to grow further until we learn to examine ourselves honestly, willing to accept correction. God has given us Scripture for that purpose.

Are we perhaps afraid to act on what we know, considering it too difficult? Consider this admonition by the Apostle James: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). If we know better, God holds us accountable for what we know. But He also assures us that He will never give us a trial more difficult than we can handle. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Even if a trial appears to be beyond our human ability to overcome, God has given Christians the Holy Spirit, the power on which we can draw to implement the needed corrections in our lives.

God gives us correction in this life so we can prepare ourselves to be born as full sons of God at the resurrection. It is vital that we learn to give correction responsibly, and accept it with humility, so that we may be ready for what He has in store for us. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6–7).

—LCG Editorial Staff

## Two Points About Christ's Sacrifice

Continued from page 7

own master he stands or falls. Indeed, *he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand*" (Romans 14:4).

It is God's Spirit that works in us. "Hence I remind you to **rekindle the gift of God** that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but **a spirit of power and love and self-control**" (2 Timothy 1:6–7, RSV).

The trial of our faith is precious. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6–7).

God is actively developing in us the character He wants us to have for all eternity. Our trials are temporary, but holy, righteous character is forever. Our change is high on His list of priorities. Consider: "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding **as in a mirror** the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:17–18).

With each passing year—as we continue to look at ourselves in the mirror of God's word—we should, more and more, see a change as we take on more and more of the character of our Elder Brother. At the resurrection, if we endure to the end, we will be filled with His character and He will share His glory with us. So, it is vital that we believe that we can—

and will—change, and that God will complete what He has set out to do in each of us. "If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; **You shall desire the work of Your hands**" (Job 14:14–15).

As you examine yourself for the Passover, whenever you are tempted to feel discouragement at not "measuring up," remember these two vital points: **you have been forgiven, and you can change**. Jesus Christ's sacrifice is a weighty and important matter, and a big part of that weight is His mercy and grace. And the Holy Spirit that He has given you has the power to change you, to build in you the holy and righteous character of your Savior, Jesus Christ. Keeping these points in mind, we can go forward in confidence. ■

## Spiritual "Cap and Trade"

Continued from page 10

with dishes in the sink, clothes piled high in the basement and dust everywhere, but dotes on her children. It would be easy to imagine these women explaining themselves as follows. From the first woman: "I may not spend as much time with my children as I should, but at least I provide a safe and clean environment for them." From the second woman: "I may not have the cleanest home, but at least I give my children the love they deserve."

No, there is no tax collector here, but we can see the Pharisees' cap and trade approach in action. Each excuses her weakness by trading on her strength. The Apostle Paul reminds us that God does not approve of this approach. "But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Of course, this example is not meant to judge busy mothers, with or without dishes in the sink. But it does illustrate the human tendency to justify our actions. And justifying our actions in that manner is a sin.

During the Days of Unleavened Bread, God tells us to go on a "search and destroy" mission. We are to search out the sins in our lives, and we are to repent of them when we find them. That means we must actually **change**, rather than justify our thoughts and actions. Sadly, in too many cases, we in God's Church have traded a meticulous cleaning of our minds and hearts for a meticulous cleaning of our homes. Of course, we must put forth effort to remove the physical

leaven from our homes, but we must not use the physical exercise as an excuse for failing to deal with our hearts and minds.

How can we walk with God if we knowingly allow sin to remain within us? "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). Unless we search and put out the spiritual leaven, we have failed in the observance God has given us.

Some may consider cap and trade a good idea for managing man-made pollution. But when it comes to our relationship with God, it is a very bad idea. It is God who sets the cap at zero tolerance for sin—and He allows no room for trade. There is no bank account from which we can purchase "sin credits."

There is, however, a supreme sacrifice upon which we can call. It is a free gift that pays for our sins, but it is very different from man-made efforts to justify sin. Christ's sacrifice allows us to be forgiven of sin when we repent (Acts 2:38). The attitude of repentance is very different from that of human justification of sin. God does not want us to trade animals or "good works" for our sins. He wants us to have a repentant attitude, and a humble, teachable, contrite heart: "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). That repentant attitude—not a "cap and trade" approach—is what we should be striving to develop as we prepare for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. ■

## Christian Meditation

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hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8–9). Why? To help and encourage the Israelites to think about and meditate on God’s laws.

### MEDITATE ON GOD

We should constantly meditate on God, His laws and His ways. When people watch television or play a video game, their minds begin to pick up the attitude being displayed—often saucy, sassy carnality and rebellion, sexual lust, hate and violence. One who is absorbed in this then begins to meditate on those things. Television, movies, and video games are a kind of visual meditation, pouring their images and attitudes into the mind and the heart. And much, if not most, of what they pour is bad.

Paul wrote: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!” (1 Corinthians 6:15). And yet, as you know if you watch many of today’s television shows or movies, or play the latest video games, they try very hard to make illicit sex seem humorous and fun. It is a **horrible** thing.

“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall become one flesh’” (v. 16). God intended sex and marriage to picture the very relationship of love between Christ and the Church. He was willing to give His very life for the Church, and the Church is to give herself in total submission to Him. But, brethren, if you drag anything through a sewer, it is going to stink. And the vile display of sexual immorality splashed all over this world’s entertainment is a stench in the nostrils of God.

God says: “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (v. 18). One who commits sexual sin is sinning against his own body in that he is using his body, his emotions and his nervous reactions in a way for which they were not designed, as a vital instrument in sin.

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit...” (v. 20)—in the spirit in man and the very attitude and thoughts of your mind.

Proverbs 6:32 in the *New King James Version* is as follows: “Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding.” But what it really says in the original Hebrew is that the adulterer lacks *mind*. Because of a lack of the right kind of meditation, a man who commits adultery does not understand that his partner was not intended as just a sex object, but was intended to be a wife and the mother of a man’s children—a sweetheart and companion to share

a man’s plans, hopes and dreams—with their bond in this physical life a representation of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

It is vital that we meditate on right and good and clean things. This will “clean up” our minds, and prepare us for when a problem may arise. When it does, we will have already thought through in advance what we are going to do, and it will not be some strange situation that will catch us off guard.

### A RIGHT EXAMPLE

Let me give you a right example of meditation. Back in the early 1950s, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong began to say to us: “Fellows, I’ve begun to realize how the Creator God is and how God says that everything reproduces after its kind. And the physical was created as a type of the spiritual. We all reproduce after our kind, so wouldn’t God reproduce after His kind? And, if my sons are human like I’m human, why wouldn’t God’s sons be God like God is God?”

“But,” he said, “I don’t know. This concept comes into my mind. It’s almost like God put it there. But I’m sort of afraid of it because it sounds blasphemous. We’ve never believed that man is to become God. Let’s keep thinking about it and discussing it from time to time.”

So, that is how we came to understand that doctrine. Through a process of meditation, Mr. Armstrong simply fastened his mind on the subject, devoting himself to deep, private, continual, purposeful reflection on this single theme.

Meditating on God’s character, purpose and plan is a fantastic experience, considering all the ramifications of what it means to become God. It is something you could spend the rest of your life on—and, in one sense you probably *should*, because the whole topic is concerned with our goal as Christians and our future in the Kingdom of God.

### WHEN TO MEDITATE

One can meditate almost anytime. But there are times when it will be more beneficial and productive, such as while studying. For instance, as you are reading the story of Abraham, you might picture yourself and what you would do if God said to you: “Get up and get out of your home and your land, away from your family and all you’ve ever known, and go out into a strange distant place.” Live the story in your mind and your heart. Visualize it and think about it. Turn it over in your mind, and then apply it to your life today.

Prayer is another time for meditation. Ask God to help you to think things through as you are there on your knees, and talk over with Him all the phases and facets of a particular situation.

Another time to meditate could be walking in the woods or out under the stars at night.

One other valuable time is in the “night watches”—to use a biblical phrase—when you wake up and cannot go



back to sleep. Notice how King David did this: “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water [a world cut off from the knowledge of our Creator]. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You... When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalm 63:1–6). Like King David, we should learn to meditate at various times throughout the day.

Notice: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice [instruction] is not heard. Their line [rule or direction] has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1–4).

David meditated on all those matters. He took time to think calmly and deeply about God, His power and His laws.

I also suggest setting aside a particular time each weekend for meditation—preferably on God’s Sabbath day, because this is part of its purpose—so that it becomes a habit. Spend some time, on Friday evening or Sabbath morning, thinking through the events of the past week. Ask yourself: How far have I come this week? How have I grown? Have I prayed and studied as I should? What mistakes have I made? Where did I fall short? How can I do better next week? The Sabbath is a wonderful day to conduct a weekly reexamination and reorientation.

Make meditation a major, vital part of your life—as you prepare for the Passover, and throughout the rest of the year. And pray to God always, as David did: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). ■

## Is It Wrong to GROW in Knowledge?

Continued from page 2

of sin whose very visible and physical demonstrations of power will affect the whole world.

However, with the total apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God, some few ministers have tried to say that this entire prophecy was fulfilled when the Tkaches came into leadership of the Worldwide Church of God and took it into “mainstream” Protestantism. They claim that Mr. Tkach was the “great man of sin” sitting in the house of God, showing himself that he was God (v. 4). Then—when Mr. Tkach died—they transferred this to Joseph Tkach, Jr. So, now, is “Junior” the great man of sin?

**Think!**

The entire “falling away” of several thousand people in that apostasy—and it was an **apostasy**—was nevertheless not even noticed by about **six billion** human beings. When *the biblically prophesied event* occurs, it will deceive **billions** of people *all over this earth*. Other scriptures tying directly in with this, such as Revelation 13:11–18, clearly indicate that, when the final “man of sin” arises, he will deceive *hundreds of millions*—or even probably **billions**—

of human beings! He will be granted power to literally bring **fire** down from heaven (v. 13). “He *causes all*, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a **mark** on their right hand or in their foreheads” (v. 16). As all of you should know by now, **nothing** even remotely like this happened during the small, typical “apostasy” caused by the Tkaches taking Worldwide into “mainstream Christianity.”

Yes, what happened in Worldwide may certainly have been a “type” of the final apostasy. But it was **not** the major one described in 2 Thessalonians 2–3. It is *exciting and stirring* to realize how **massive** the coming apostasy is going to be!

Brethren, we should not “shrink” from growth in understanding. Mr. Armstrong would be **glad** to have us learn. He **always** was excited and enthusiastic when some new biblical Truth could be explained in a proper way. So I hope all of us can learn to have this *same kind* of positive attitude and approach to any new understandings we are able to come to within the Living Church of God. Remember, God’s Word indicates that He will not reveal some of these technical things about prophecy until the very **end** of the age (Daniel 12:4).

Sadly, Mr. Armstrong was not allowed to continue until the very end. But, we are—*so far*. So, if I am able to explain to him in the resurrection how we continued “growing” in grace and in knowledge, I **know** that he will chuckle and tell me, “**Of course**, Rod, that is exactly what I would have done if I were there at that time. *Good work!* I am glad that we both made it here into the Kingdom of God.”

Dear brethren, we certainly should “follow” Mr. Armstrong *as he followed Christ!* That is what he told us to do! That is what the Apostle Paul was **inspired** to tell us to do regarding himself or **any** apostle: “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Let us **continue** to grow in *grace* and in **knowledge** and know that we will be **blessed** if we do this—as long as we do not depart from fundamental truth and as long as we “**prove all things**” from the Bible in an honest and sincere way. God will greatly **bless us** if we do this—and if we are *positive* and *loyal* to Christ as He leads His Church in these very things!

With Christian love,



# LOCAL

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## CHURCH NEWS

### Births

Ali and Marie Bertan from Melbourne, Australia, are delighted to announce the arrival of their second child, *Aliyah Bertan*, born August 8, 2011. Aliyah weighed 3.2 kg and was 52 cm long. Big brother, Elijah, loves helping mom take care of his little sister.

John and Amber Whitfield of Three Forks, Montana, are pleased to announce the birth of their third son, *John (Jack) McClellan Whitfield* on the Day of Atonement, October 8, 2011. He weighed 7 pounds, 7 ounces and was 20½ inches long. Grandparents are Ben and Mary-Pat Whitfield of Rawlins, Wyoming, and Ron and Linda Colcord of Loyalton, California.

### WEDDING

*Mr. Dwayne Sheldon Wilks* of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation and *Miss Sarah Anne Messier* of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation were joined in marriage after the Sabbath on November 26, 2011. The ceremony was conducted by Mr. Stuart Wachowicz. The bride's mother, Mrs. Elisea Messier and the groom's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Wilks, along with other family and friends, shared in the joy of this event. The couple resides in Calgary.

### ANNIVERSARY

*Mr. and Mrs. Ernest (Heddy) Zaitoon*, long-time Church members, celebrated their 55th anniversary on August 19, 2011. The Zaitoons set a fine example of a wonderful marriage for the Asheville, North Carolina, congregation where they attend, and for all who know them.

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### Ordinations

*Mr. Lawrence Hartshorne* was ordained an elder on June 26, 2011 by Canadian Regional Pastor Gerald Weston. He and his wife, Katie, serve the congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, and assist in the outlying areas.

*Mr. Keith Wheelahan* was ordained an elder on Sabbath, August 27, 2011 by Evangelist Douglas S. Winnail and Area Pastors Rod Reynolds and Ed Breaux. He serves in the New Orleans, Louisiana, congregation.

*Mr. Steven Climer* was ordained an elder on Sabbath, October 1, 2011 by Area Pastor Ed Breaux and visiting elder Davy Crockett. Mr. Climer serves the Ocean Springs, Mississippi, congregation.

*Mr. David Mwanzia* of Nairobi, Kenya, was ordained an elder on the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles by Area Pastors Simon Muthama and Henry

Cooper. He serves the brethren in Nairobi.

*Mr. Melvin Johnson* was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Area Pastor James Sweat and elder Tex Malone. He serves in the Athens, Alabama, congregation.

*Mr. John Thrasher* was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, September 24, 2011 by Pastor Martin Fannin. Mr. Thrasher serves the Blairsville, Georgia, congregation.

*Mr. Phillip Dunham* was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Pastor Martin Fannin. He serves the Crossville, Tennessee, congregation.

*Mr. Jeff Foster* was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Pastor Paul Shumway. He serves the brethren in the Logan, West Virginia, congregation.

*Mr. and Mrs. Hugh (Maxine) Stewart* were ordained deacon and deaconess

on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Jack Lowe. Mr. and Mrs. Stewart serve in the Atlanta, Georgia, congregation.

*Messrs. Jonah Kisina Muthoka, Peter Ndengwa Mutula, Adonias Esanjo Kando, Ezekiel Mkama Tilunganilwa, and Joshua Muindi* were ordained deacons on the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles by Area Pastors Simon Muthama and Henry Cooper. These deacons serve the brethren in Kenya and Tanzania in Africa.

*Mr. John Bastiansz* was ordained a deacon during the Feast of Tabernacles by Area Pastor Zigurds Svalbe. Mr. Bastiansz serves the brethren in the Colombo, Sri Lanka, congregation.

*Messrs. Louis Crespo and Michael DeSimone* were ordained as deacons on December 24, 2011 by Presiding Evangelist Roderick C. Meredith and Evangelist Richard F. Ames. They serve the brethren in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

## In Loving Memory

**Mr. James Eugene Dunlap**, 81, a long-time Church member, died Friday, August 19, 2011, at his home following a long illness. Mr. Dunlap was born and reared in Ohio and married Shirley Barr on June 3, 1950. In 1960 they moved their family to Las Vegas, where he continued to work as a machinist and where they came into God's Church. They moved to Wyoming in 1994. Mr. Dunlap loved the Church and the Work of God, and will be sorely missed. He is survived by his wife Shirley, one son, two daughters, a brother and a sister, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

**Mrs. Grace Porter**, a long-time member of God's Church, died September 27, 2011 at the age of 83 years. Mr. Mal Jennings, Pastor of the Perth, Australia, congregation, conducted the funeral on October 25. Mrs. Porter was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and married her husband Jim in 1954. They were baptized in Glasgow in 1968. In 1982 they moved to Perth, Australia, where they raised three sons. Mrs. Porter is survived by her husband, three sons, and seven grandchildren.

**Dr. Stig Erlander** died on September 30, 2011 at the age of 83 years. Dr. Erlander and his wife, Leatrice, were baptized in 1958. He was a faculty member at Ambassador College for many years. Dr. Erlander is survived by his wife. A memorial service was held on November 12, 2011.

**Mrs. Anna Biller Beyersdorfer McCall** died October 30, 2011, at the age of 95 years. Anna Biller was born in

Zurich, Switzerland on March 21, 1916. She spent most of her childhood in Munich, Germany, before immigrating to the United States in her late teenage years. Anna and her husband, Eugene Beyersdorfer, were introduced to the truth of God in the late 1950s by friends in Chicago, Illinois. Anna was soon baptized and was faithful to God and to the truth until the day of her death. In her last years she attended the Ocala, Florida, congregation of the Living Church of God. Mrs. McCall is survived by five children, 15 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren. Her children are very thankful for her example of faithfulness and commitment. They want to thank all her friends and brethren in Ocala for the support and love they showed their mother and the family over these years.

**Mr. Ray C. Broomham**, a long-time faithful member of God's Church, died November 14, 2011 at the age of 73 years. Although a resident of New South Wales, Mr. Broomham lived in Adelaide, South Australia, with his daughter and son-in-law for his last few months. He often discussed his hope of the resurrection and his deep desire to be in the Kingdom of God. Mr. Broomham is survived by his wife, Jan; their two children, Robin and Wes; and three grandchildren. He will be greatly missed. His funeral was conducted by Mr. Michael Gill on November 22, 2011.

**Mrs. Helen Snider** of the Asheboro, North Carolina, congregation died on November 19, 2011. She was preceded in death by her husband, Stanley, earlier in the year. Mr. and Mrs. Snider were long-time faithful servants in God's Church and they will be missed by all who knew them.

## First French-Speaking LCG Spokesman Club in the Caribbean



© TW Image

The Fort-de-France congregation in Martinique held LCG's first Caribbean French-speaking Spokesman Club meeting on Sunday, December 25, 2011. Dr. Wilner Pierre, Area Pastor for Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, began making plans to start a new Spokesman Club after the 2011 Feast of Tabernacles. Thirteen men participated, including Mr. Jean-Yves Celeste, a leading member from the congregation in Guadeloupe. Club officers are: President, Mr. Etienne Duval; Vice President, Mr. Joel Theresine-Augustine; Secretary, Mr. Jean-Rudy Desrosiers; Treasurer, Mr. Simbert Hodebar; Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Laurent Hodebar. Club Directors are Area Pastor Wilner Pierre and elder Marcel Ginier.

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# COMMENTARY

## Why Worry?

The gushing torrent of bad news has become a flood. As each day unfolds, it seems that more disturbing developments occur on the world scene. Serious analysts and economists are predicting the collapse of major world currencies. All agree that impending disaster has been brought about by decades of profligate spending at every level of government. This lack of self-discipline, plus widespread corruption in government, has resulted in a sorry state of affairs.

Reactions to these serious problems range from apathy to radicalism. There are various movements protesting these conditions, on both sides of the issues, with violence in the streets erupting in many places. In the face of all this, there is severe drought in widespread areas of the globe while other areas are devastated by flooding. Can starvation and disease be far behind?

All of this can be overwhelming. But, what is a Christian to do? How should one who is seeking the Kingdom of God react to all these perplexing, seemingly intractable problems? There are answers to these important questions.

For example, Jesus said, in instructing His disciples about being focused on God's providence, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:26–34).

Jesus told us to consider the creation, and by its example to realize that the Creator can and will provide for us. Even the lowly ant is an example from which we can learn (Proverbs 6:6–7). We have our part to do, but reliance on God and His intervention is key.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6–7). With all the uncertainty and danger in the world, it is important for us to stay focused on God, and on His plan for mankind—which includes you!

—J. Davy Crockett, III