

Living Church News

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Prepare NOW For Financial Woes Ahead!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

It is my responsibility to warn all of you to begin to prepare now for rough financial times ahead. This world is in great turmoil. The recent capture of Saddam Hussein is certainly encouraging—as far as it goes. But that fact alone will do *very little* to bail out most of our Israelitish nations from a *coming financial disaster!*

As a people, we—particularly in the United States—are spending far beyond our means. In our consumer oriented, credit card society, we are continually buying things we do not need with money we do not have. But the day of reckoning is fast approaching. For, even as I write, the United States dollar has fallen to another all time low against the euro. Only months ago, the euro was only worth 82 cents compared to the dollar. Now it has risen to \$1.25—a gain of more than 40 percent in less than two years!

Meanwhile, as the dollar continues to slide, the massive amount of imported goods that Americans buy—to satisfy their insatiable appetite for more and *more* cars, clothes, toys, televisions, computers and other consumer goods—will of course continue to cost us more and *more* in terms of our own devalued currency. This will soon become like an added “tax” on the American consumer. Then, within a few more years, we will see either *massive inflation* if we continue to print more dollars—or a crippling *deflation* or even *depression*.

The Apostle Paul was inspired to tell us: “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:6–8).

Brethren, as the people of God, we must be careful not to become caught up in the materialism of this world! We need to be careful **not** to become over-indebted, **not** to buy things we do not need. We need to prudently set aside at least a portion of our income to guard against a “rainy day”—a day when a coming *financial disaster* may strike many of our friends and neighbors who are not prepared.

Just yesterday, our local paper here in Charlotte, North Carolina ran this headline: “Deficit still climbing despite rise in exports” (*Charlotte Observer*, December 13, 2003). Then, the article by Martin Crutsinger of the *Associated Press*, stated: “The U.S. trade deficit climbed to \$41.77 billion in October as Americans’ appetite for imports hit a record high, offsetting a sizable gain in exports, including the best showing for sales of farm products

in seven years. The politically sensitive deficit with China hit an all-time high. For the year, the U.S. trade deficit in goods and services is running at an annual rate of \$490.8 billion, far worse than last year's record deficit of \$418.04 billion."

This record deficit is going to give a "headache" not only to President Bush, *but also to you*. For each of us will be deeply affected not only by the political and religious persecution that is coming, but also by the *financial excesses* of our peoples—**unless** we start taking steps to set aside at least a moderate "emergency fund" for each of our families, and also cut back on unnecessary expenses and purchases.

Many of you have probably read about Warren Buffett, the world's second richest man, after Bill Gates. Buffet made his money over a long period of time by carefully *investing* and then *saving* the money he made. He is regarded as an absolute financial "guru" and is paid huge sums for his financial advice. In a November 10, 2003 interview with *Fortune* magazine, Buffett ominously warned: "America's growing trade deficit is selling the nation out from under us... As head of Berkshire Hathaway, I am in charge of investing its money in ways that make sense. And my reason for finally putting my money where my mouth is, is that our **trade deficit** has greatly worsened, to the point that our country's 'net worth,' so to speak, is now being transferred abroad at an alarming rate. A perpetuation will lead to **major trouble**" (Emphasis ours).

Not understanding the principle behind Buffett's advice, our personal and corporate bankruptcies here in America continue to soar. Millions are unemployed. Jobs continue to be exported overseas. U.S. business investment in equipment continues to drop. The U.S. dollar continues to plunge, and the U.S. trade and budget deficits are certainly exploding.

Another top financial advisor, Richard Russell, commented on November 12, 2003 about the U.S. budget deficit: "The Bush administration says that next year's federal budget deficit will be \$500 billion, better known as half a trillion dollars. Then add the \$87 billion that Congress just approved to partly cover the cost of Afghanistan and Iraq. OK, that puts the deficit at \$587 billion. But this doesn't count the \$217 billion that the government is borrowing from the Social Security trust fund. That takes the deficit to \$804 billion. Then there's the added cost of the tax cuts, prescription drugs and other special expenses and times, and you're talking about an actual deficit of probably over \$1 trillion dollars." Also, the London-based *Economist* magazine recently wrote: "As baby boomers retire, the pressure from entitlement spending will be more acute. Set against this background, the path back to a sustainable fiscal policy will be extremely painful, even without any dramatic fiscal crisis. Long after Dubya is back on his ranch, Americans will be trying to recover from the mess he created" (November 8, 2003).

It is important that you and I realize that much of the financial community around the world is beginning to recognize that America is in financial trouble. We are only staying afloat by virtue of out-of-control consumer borrowing and spending, and the creation of *trillions* of dollars in currency out of "thin air" to paper over the cracks in our financial system. In the second quarter, U.S. corporations and

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Editor in Chief Roderick C. Meredith
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Business Manager Rodger Bardo

Regional Offices

UNITED STATES:
P.O. Box 3810
Charlotte, NC 28227
 Phone: (704) 844-1970
<http://www.lcg.org>

AUSTRALASIA:
GPO Box 772
Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia
 Phone: (07) 5546 0472; Fax: (07) 5546 0768

CANADA:
P.O. Box 27202
Toronto, Ontario M9W 6S8, Canada
 Phone: (905) 814-1094; Fax: (905) 814-7659

NEW ZEALAND:
P.O. Box 2767
Auckland, New Zealand
 Phone/Fax: (09) 268 8985

PHILIPPINES:
MCPO Box 1774
Makati City 1257, Philippines
 Phone: 63-2-813-6538; Fax: 63-2-867-1569

SOUTH AFRICA:
P.O. Box 4271
Luipaardsvlei, 1743 Republic of South Africa
 Phone: (27) 11-664-6036

UNITED KINGDOM:
P.O. Box 9092
Motherwell, ML1 2YD Scotland
 Phone/Fax: 44-1698-263-977

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How To Avoid Being a Laodicean

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

The vast majority of God's people are evidently "Laodicean" at the end of this age. When we truly understand Revelation 3, this is the clear indication. And those who are Laodicean will have to be **chastened** during the "fire" of the coming Great Tribulation (Revelation 3:18–19). How can *you*, personally, avoid this fate, and be among those whom God will protect from this approaching "hour of trial" (v. 10)?

Remember, the Laodiceans are **not** "Satan's people." They are *God's* people, living at the very end of an utterly materialistic and hedonistic age—an age in which the emphasis is on "self," on "comfort" and on "compromising" instead of "boldness" in true Christianity. It is extremely easy for people in this age—even *many of God's people*—to want to continue to keep God's Sabbaths, and also keep the Ten Commandments overall, and observe most of the outward signs of being true Christians, but without the "fire in the belly" that characterized Peter, Paul, Moses, David and virtually *every* outstanding servant of God described in the Bible.

The "heart" seems to have gone out of the Laodiceans' religion, and their relationship with God. For, though they are "nice people" and mean well, God says to them: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because

you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16). This "lukewarmness" affects their zeal to do *exactly* what God says in His word. Therefore, these people will tend to "water down" many of God's doctrines and teachings. They and their leaders will compromise a little here and there in *how* they live their lives, *how* they observe God's Sabbath and Holy Days, *how* they observe God's commanded tithes, *how* they follow the clear examples of hierarchal government so clearly described in the Bible, *how zealously* they preach the gospel to the world and *how fervently* they proclaim the Ezekiel warning to the Israelite peoples—*before it is too late!*

Comparatively speaking, the Laodiceans tend to be rather well off. God tells them: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (vv. 17–18). Having, perhaps, more material *things*—living comfortable lives and being more "socially acceptable" than many of God's other people—these Laodiceans can easily let down their guard and become smug and self-satisfied. They can feel that they are spiritually, intellectually or socially "superior." Yet the heartfelt

zeal to serve, to *sacrifice* and to "do the Work" will **not** be there. The spirit of self-sacrifice and *passion* to proclaim the Ezekiel warning will be absent. And the "tone" of self-surrender and heartfelt obedience to live by every word of God will not exist as it once did in the Philadelphia era.

What To Do?

The Apostle Paul was inspired to exhort us in 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." So we are constantly to be alert as to whether Jesus Christ is **really** living His life within us. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, KJV). This is a vital **key**. Is the true Christ of the Bible **really** living within you? Do you have the same **zeal** and spirit of service exemplified by Christ, the Apostle Paul and others?

Learn to meditate often on Jesus' teaching in John 4:34–36: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up

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What Do You See?

By John H. Ogwyn

What do you see when you look around? In Psalm 73, the psalmist described seeing some things that greatly disturbed him. He saw that many people around him appeared to be getting away with much that was not right. The psalmist was discouraged, and even felt a twinge of envy.

What about you? What do *you* see when you look around? How do you maintain faith, and continue to do what is right, when what you see around you can appear discouraging and overwhelming?

Many of the prophets of old lived during very difficult times. Isaiah saw northern Israel go into Assyrian captivity, and later saw the Assyrians invade his own nation of Judah. Jeremiah saw Judah suffer successive invasions from Babylon, then finally go completely into captivity. Ezekiel the priest actually went into captivity, then a decade later received word that the magnificent temple in Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed. Very little during the lives of these servants of God would have indicated a bright and promising future for God's people. Yet when you read the books that these men wrote, it is clear that they saw things that their contemporaries could not see. They saw and described events that others, looking at what was going on in their world, would have considered impossible.

Do you see despair, or hope? Until her encounter with Jesus, a young woman who was labeled a "sinner" had no hope that the promises of the Kingdom of God could apply to her. Then something happened that changed her life. What did she suddenly see?

What you see makes all the difference in the world. It can produce discouragement or faith. It can result in either despair or hope. When you look around, and look to the future, what do *you* see?

Looking Around Us

Have you ever thought that many in our world seem to be "getting away" with what they should not? In Psalm 73:2–3, the psalmist made quite a confession: "But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (NAS). He went on to observe: "They are not in trouble as other men; nor are they plagued like mankind" (v. 5). How unfair it seemed. Notice his thoughts: "Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in

vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning" (vv. 12–14).

If this is how life works, it appears most unfair. If this were all you could see, it would hardly seem worth the effort to try. However, the psalmist went on to write: "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end" (vv. 16–17). It was while meditating in God's temple that the psalmist began to realize how *shortsighted* he had been—and this realization changed his *whole perspective*.

If you are shortsighted, you will have a very distorted view of things. It is vital to have a long-range view. When all we can see is the present, we will come to some very faulty conclusions.

Esau's example comes quickly to mind. One day, returning from a hunting trip, Esau came upon his brother Jacob cooking a big pot of savory stew. Tired and hungry, Esau asked his brother for something to eat. Jacob, always looking for a chance to wheel and deal, offered to share some soup *if* Esau would sell his birthright to him. Amazingly, Esau agreed. "And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. **Thus Esau despised his birthright**" (Genesis 25:34). Esau was *extremely* shortsighted. Paul commented that Esau was a profane person—one who clearly had no sense of the sacred (Hebrews 12:16). All Esau could see was the need and comfort of the moment; he was willing to throw away his future in order to be gratified now!

How is it possible to see beyond the present moment? One of the primary ways is to use God's Word to illuminate the path we are to travel. God's Word, after all, is meant to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). It can help us see beyond our present situation, and understand where the road we are on actually leads. Proverbs 2 exhorts us to value wisdom deeply. Real wisdom and understanding come only from God, and will show us "every good path" (v. 9). True wisdom is based upon God's law. It will help us avoid the evil schemes and immoral proposals of carnal people around us. People who fall into unethical, illegal, and immoral behavior are very shortsighted. If we only see our present circumstances, we may become entangled in many destructive practices and situations. God's Word gives us vision and perspective on life. It enables us to see where our choices will ultimately lead.

Seeing the Future

We all want to know what the future holds. But if we only base our future expectations on projections of present trends, the landscape can look awfully bleak. Today, as has always been the case, much of what goes on around us holds out little hope for the future. Even so, God often chose the most hopeless moments in ancient Israel's history to give His prophets a vision of the future.

In the year that old King Uzziah of Judah died, a young man named Isaiah was shown a remarkable vision. He saw the glory of the God of Israel fill the Temple, and he was given a commission to declare God's message (Isaiah 6). In the years that followed, Judah's geopolitical position looked bleak. Assyrian power was on the rise, and Judah was threatened by Syria and Israel to the north. Judah's moral and spiritual tone was every bit as discouraging, because religious services at the temple in Jerusalem were mostly an empty formality (Isaiah 1:11–15). There was corruption from top to bottom throughout society. Speaking of Jerusalem, the capital city of David's kingly line and the location of Solomon's temple, Isaiah wrote: "How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers" (Isaiah 1:21). All in all, it was a pretty bleak picture.

But it was *in that context* that Isaiah saw and wrote about the future! Notice Isaiah 2:1–3: "The word that Isaiah the son Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." What Isaiah saw ahead was far different from what his immediate circumstances would indicate. He saw the future through the lens of faith!

Jeremiah's prophetic career began more than a century after Isaiah's. Jeremiah warned his nation of impending Babylonian captivity, even while other religious leaders assured the people that God would certainly never allow such a thing. Notice Jeremiah 14:13–14: "Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, the prophets say to them, "You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" And the LORD said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.'" These false

prophets were very angry with Jeremiah because of his message, and actually wanted to have him killed (Jeremiah 26:11)! But Jeremiah refused to be intimidated, and continued to give the warning that God had shown him. He told his people that the only way to avert God's impending wrath was to amend their ways, and begin to obey the Creator (v. 13).

Jeremiah saw impending judgment for his people, when others around him were denying that judgment would come. But he also saw *beyond* the judgment, to the good news of redemption and restoration. In Jeremiah 31:31, he described a time beyond the terrible calamity of Jacob's trouble. "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Even as the world around him grew ever more dangerous, and the people grew less and less responsive, Jeremiah saw with faith the future opportunity his people would have—to re-enter a relationship with God and to receive His blessings.

Notice also the example of Ezekiel, a young priest who had gone into Babylonian captivity at the same time as King Jehoiachin. Most of Ezekiel's prophetic message was actually for the House of Israel, which had gone into Assyrian captivity more than a century before he wrote. Nevertheless, Ezekiel recorded his message, and it has come down to us today. We can *know* what the future holds for the end-time descendants of Israel, if we are willing to examine and believe what Ezekiel saw.

Ezekiel was shown the future of Jerusalem, and described being transported in vision to the Temple (see Ezekiel 8–11), where he saw the glory of the God of Israel depart. He saw God's glory—which had filled the House when it was dedicated in the days of King Solomon—rise up from the threshold of the Temple and move to the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10:18–19; 11:22–23). This set the stage for Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the city, and of the Temple. However, Ezekiel saw more than removal, destruction and wrath! Ezekiel 43 was a vision of the distant future, when the God of Israel would return and enter a re-created Temple from the east (the direction of the Mount of Olives). God's glory would fill this future House, and it would be the place of His throne when He would dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever (vv. 3–7). In a time of destruction, captivity and despair, Ezekiel saw restoration and hope.

These prophets, and many others, looked beyond their day and recorded what they saw. They saw and proclaimed judgment while others around them were "making happy sounds" and entering into political alliances to protect themselves. These prophets saw beyond the judgment, and described the good news of God's

redemption of His people. Do *you* see what the prophets saw? Do *you* have the faith to look beyond the events of our present world, to see both impending judgment and the *really good news* that awaits us beyond that judgment?

Hope Rekindled

Jesus Christ was a widely sought-after dinner guest. Even many of His critics were intrigued by this teacher from Galilee, and sought opportunities to see and hear Him up close. Luke 7:36–50 describes one such occasion. Simon the Pharisee and some of his friends wanted to evaluate Jesus Christ. Those attending Simon's dinner had undoubtedly seen Jesus, and heard His message on various occasions. They had all heard of the miracles He had performed, and most probably had direct knowledge of someone whom He had healed. Furthermore, they had all heard His message about the Kingdom of God, and how it was actually possible to inherit that Kingdom.

While Simon wanted a chance to observe and hear Jesus, and undoubtedly to question Him on certain points, he was not a disciple. In fact, though Jesus was his dinner guest, Simon preserved a certain distance and reserve. He had not, for instance, provided Jesus with water to wash His feet upon His arrival, nor had he given Him fragrant oil with which to anoint His head. In fact, he had even omitted the customary kiss of hospitality. Simon was willing to invite Jesus for dinner, but did not want his friends to get the idea that he was an admirer, much less a disciple, of this Galilean rabbi!

Shortly after all of the guests were seated for dinner, Simon and his friends were embarrassed and angered by an interruption that took them all by surprise. A woman who was known in the community as “a sinner” had heard where Jesus would be dining, and she had slipped into the room unobserved. Before anyone could stop her, she had knelt at Jesus' feet. Breaking into tears, she began to pour an expensive container of perfumed oil on Jesus' feet. While Simon and his guests watched in horrified astonishment, this sobbing woman kissed Jesus' bare feet, and wiped them with her hair.

“Well that settles it,” thought Simon. “If that man were *really* a prophet, he would know what sort of woman this was, and certainly would never have permitted her to touch him.” Jesus, of course, knew what Simon and his friends were thinking. As the woman wiped and kissed Jesus' feet, He looked over at Simon and said that He wished to ask him a question. He told Simon a story of two debtors who each owed debts that

they were unable to pay; one owed a large amount of money, while the other's debt was much smaller. Their creditor cancelled both debts. “Which debtor,” Jesus asked, “do you think would love the creditor the most?” Simon answered that he supposed the debtor to whom the creditor had forgiven the most would be the most appreciative.


Jesus told Simon that his answer was correct, then pointed to the woman at His feet. He contrasted her sense of genuine love, overwhelming gratitude and worship toward Him with Simon's attitude of cool indifference. Jesus further shocked Simon and his friends by telling the woman that her sins were forgiven, and that her faith had saved her.

What had this poor woman seen that Simon and his friends were unable to see? They had all heard and seen Jesus, but their reactions were profoundly different.

Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God kindled hope in this woman, and with it a sense of profound gratitude and love. Growing up in the Jewish community, she was undoubtedly aware of the scriptural promise that one day God would set up a Kingdom that would supersede all others. However—*until she heard Jesus*—she had no hope of being there herself. Such a Kingdom, she had assumed, might be for people like Simon and his friends, but it certainly did not include “losers” like her. She had “blown it” a long time ago, and had no hope of an inheritance in any Kingdom that God would establish.

Then she heard Jesus of Nazareth! For the first time, she could actually *see herself* in that Kingdom! Her hope was rekindled, and her sense of gratitude was deep and profound. She saw her profound need for Jesus' message and what He offered, and she believed what He said. This new hope overwhelmed her, and it changed her life.

Simon, on the other hand, heard the same message but had no similar response. He and his friends had illusions of spiritual self-sufficiency. By their own estimation, they did not “owe” much, and therefore did not need much from Christ. They were not overwhelmed with a sense of deep love, worship and gratitude when they saw Jesus. The woman was!

When you look at the world around you, do you see the long-term perspective that the psalmist saw? When you look at the future, do you see what the prophets saw? When you look at Jesus Christ of Nazareth, do you see what the woman saw? Those who use the light of God's Word to illuminate what they see, and who examine it through the lens of faith, are able to see what all of God's true servants down through the ages have seen. 

Child Rearing: “In God’s Image”

By Jeffrey Fall

“Of making many books there is no end,” said Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Certainly there seems almost no end to the number of books that so-called “experts” have written on child rearing. From a wide variety of backgrounds and philosophies, experts contradict each other and leave a cloud of confusion in many parents’ minds.

What, then, is the *real purpose* of child rearing, beyond the obvious need to take care of the little ones we bring into the world? Is there anything more important than simply to rear them to become independent and competent adults who will, in turn, bring more children into the world?

For millennia, the cycle of human life has continued. Children are born, they grow up, and most eventually produce children of their own. One generation dies, and is replaced by the next. Yet few have understood the answer to the age-old question: “What is the *purpose* of this repeating cycle of life?” To those steeped in the mistaken belief system of evolution, their only conclusion is that this cycle of human life exists solely to reproduce the species. Life has no meaning, they believe; it just exists.

To those of us who have proved, for ourselves, the existence of the Creator God, it logically follows that our Creator made us for a purpose. The Word of God very clearly reveals that incredible purpose: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). Human beings were created in the *likeness of the God*

Family. If we are willing to be trained by the Family of God (God the Father and Jesus Christ), and to develop in ourselves the very character and mindset of God Himself, at Christ’s return we can literally be fully born into the Family of God, in which Jesus Christ was “the first-born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

In the meantime, “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.... The Spirit... bears witness with our spirit that we are the *children of God*” (Romans 8:14, 16). *What an awesome privilege!* If we are *willing* to be led and trained by our spiritual parent (God the Father) and our “elder brother” (Jesus Christ), we can eventually fulfill God’s stated purpose for us: to be fully created in His image. God’s intent is to rear godly children, in His image, who will reign under Him as kings and priests with Jesus Christ on this earth for a thousand years. “And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10).

For those who are truly converted, the ultimate purpose and desire in rearing children of our own is to lay a foundation in their young impressionable years, so they will desire to fully seek God as *their* Father. That is our goal, though we cannot *force* our children to make the right decisions. Even God, our Father, does not force us to make right decisions. He will *lead* us and *direct* us, but He will not *force* us. The goal of godly parenting is to rear children who *want* to walk in the footsteps of their parents who

are living God’s way of life, and who are walking in the footsteps of *their* spiritual Father. As parents, we want to develop our children’s desire to follow God, not just emphasize *our* desire for them to follow God.

Our personal example is a crucial necessity! Children must see the real God through their parents’ eyes. Young children’s perception of God is primarily developed by their parents’ example. We cannot hope to rear godly children if we, as parents, are not genuine godly examples. If children see intolerance, hypocrisy, self-centeredness and frequent anger, they will probably not be attracted to their parents’ belief system. Instead, the authority figure in their youth will provoke a negative attitude toward God’s authority later in life.

Parents need to have fully proven, in their present life experience, that God’s way of life is of very high value and *works* for them! If we have not clearly demonstrated that God’s principles work for us, how will we ever convince others that God’s laws are worthwhile? The same applies to child rearing. If by our attitudes and actions we cannot effectively demonstrate, to our children, that God’s way works for us, *how* will we ever be able to fully convince them that the principles of God we teach are good for them?

As important as our example is, however, it is only a part of the whole. Even if we could be the “perfect parent,” our perfection *would not* guarantee a perfect outcome. The Bible clearly speaks of

Adam as “the son of God.” (Luke 3:38), yet we know that God refused to *force* Adam and Eve to make the right decision. God *taught* Adam and Eve to live His way of life, yet the perfect Parent had children who chose to reject His example and teaching. Later, God’s child (Adam) reared a son (Cain) who became a murderer.

So, do we have any hope of rearing children who will commit their lives to God? We live in a world that is under the influence of the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). The entertainment world is saturated with the perverted mindset of Satan’s way of life. This world’s educational system is steeped with the satanic theory of evolution, as well as a continual erosion of any sense of morality or values.

One of the fundamental keys in child rearing is the evidence—actively demonstrated—that God’s way works for us! We demonstrate to our children, by our lives, that God’s principles will bring joy to their lives *far beyond* what Satan’s system has to offer. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). If you asked anyone on the street whether they would like to have a life full of love, joy and peace, universally they would say: “Absolutely!” The problem is that the average person on the street does not recognize the principles of God as the cause that will bring the effect of a very stable and joyous life. This occurs primarily because the world has not been called to *true* Christianity; rather, it is exposed to a false “so-called” Christianity. We as parents must expose our children to the Christianity of the Bible; not *just* in

the truth (doctrine) we teach, but also in the Christianity we *live*. If children experience a parent who gives unconditional love, has clear cut rules that are consistently reinforced and genuinely displays the fruits of God’s Spirit, it will not be difficult for them to develop respect and obedience to God as they grow up.

So many people have accepted the satanic lie that God’s way of life is a “real drag.” Their thinking is that God restricts us from every pleasure, resulting in a dull life of suffering and self-denial. If this is *our* image of God, our children will, in time, notice our approach—and it will become *their* image of God as well. If, on the other hand, parents are truly thankful for the great God, and grasp the tremendous blessing of understanding God’s way of life (which simply defines what is harmful for us and our loved ones and what will bring an abundant life, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually), our children will internalize this as well.

Years ago, some parents would occasionally wonder if God were calling the children of the Church. The thinking was that many children did not appear to be really seeking God in their youth, so perhaps God was not choosing to work with them.

We need to realize that to be “called by God” simply means that one has received an invitation from God. Sometimes invitations are sent to those invited to a wedding. Often, the invitation is sent with an R.S.V.P., which requests your response to the invitation. If you intend to come, you must let the host know your intentions so that a place will be saved for you.

Jesus Christ taught that the Kingdom of Heaven is like an invitation to a wedding: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who

arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come” (Matthew 22:2, 3). As with any invitation, some individuals accept, and some do not even bother to respond. The English words “call” and “invite,” found in verse 3, are translated from the same Greek word. To be “called” by God and to be “invited” by God are one and the same.

But the key question is: are *all* those who are reared by a converted parent invited (called) by God, or is the invitation given to only a select few of our young people? Peter answered this question on the very day of Pentecost when he stated: “For the promise is to *you* and to *your children*, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

The promise of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is offered as a conditional promise to three categories of people who are called:

- The “you” to whom Peter was speaking on Pentecost
- Those who are “your children”—the children of converted parents
- All who “are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”—all those whom God will call or invite down through the centuries

For all three categories of people, the promise of receiving God’s Spirit is conditional upon their seeking and experiencing genuine repentance and surrender in baptism (v. 38). Clearly, though all children of converted parents are called, and have potential access to God, not all will seek God in this age.

Some years after Peter gave his Pentecost sermon, Paul reminded the Corinthians that the children of even one converted parent are not

“unclean” or spiritually separated or cut off from God (1 Corinthians 7:14). In fact, they are “holy”—which means, in God’s sight, that they are unique to Him and have direct access to Him. In other words, they have an open invitation or calling from God. So the real question becomes: will our children respond to the invitation? Will they eagerly “R.S.V.P.” by aggressively seeking their true parent, or will they put it off to some future time?

Remember, Jesus Christ stated in the same parable of the wedding: “many are called, but few are chosen,” (Matthew 22:14). To be “chosen of God,” many other scriptures make clear, is to actually

other hand, those who are part of the “many [who] are called” in this life, but are not chosen, apparently “go their way,” not being a part of the wedding supper at Christ’s return. They lose the *opportunity* of being the *firstborn* in the Family of God, and the tremendous privilege of being part of the “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35). They also lose the immense blessing of experiencing God’s way of life *in this life*, losing the opportunity for stronger marriages, peace, joy and the “spirit [not] of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). This is a huge loss, but there is *no* indication that these individuals are “cast into

aggressively] seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, of those to whom He has extended an invitation, He chooses only those whom are *most likely to succeed* with His help in this difficult age. What a blessing it is, that our God is that caring!

Our goal then, in rearing children in the Church, is to do the best job that we can possibly do in turning their hearts to their true Father, the Supreme God. We want to mold them as best we can, *while we have the opportunity* in their early years to lay a foundation for their future. Not every child will *choose* to go God’s way fully in this life, but our teaching and training will not be wasted!

We as parents must expose our children to the Christianity of the Bible; not *just* in the truth (doctrine) we teach, but also in the Christianity we *live*. If children experience a parent who gives unconditional love, has clear cut rules that are consistently reinforced and genuinely displays the fruits of God’s Spirit, it will not be difficult for them to develop respect and obedience to God as they grow up.

be chosen to receive God’s Spirit in this life to become first-begotten potential members of God’s Family at Christ’s return. In actual fact, in Christ’s parable, those who were invited (called) but chose not to respond, simply “went their way” (v. 5).

Apparently nothing further happened to them at that time. But those who were invited (called) and chosen to be at the wedding but did not prepare with a wedding garment, were cast into “outer darkness” (vv. 11–14).

Some do respond in this life, when called of God, and are chosen to receive His Spirit (initial conversion), *but still do not take it seriously* and never put on a wedding garment (righteous character). The implication is that *these* will be the ones who are finally *rejected* and “cast into outer darkness.” On the

outer darkness.” They “go their way” in this life, and will have their minds fully opened in the millennium or in the White Throne Judgment.

Obviously, as parents, we want to see our children as a part of the “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35) at Christ’s return. If not (if they do not have enough understanding to “R.S.V.P.” and they choose to go the way of the world) it would be much less traumatic to have them go their way for *now* and to be fully taught as physical human beings in God’s Kingdom, rather than be called and chosen in this life but not take their calling seriously enough to acquire a “wedding garment” of godly, righteous character. Thankfully, our merciful God knows what He is doing, and chooses only a few of those whom He has called in this life: “those whom diligently [or

Knowledge of God’s laws, at least to the extent that they are followed, will still benefit our children in this life. This is true with all the unconverted in the world. God’s laws operate on cause and effect, and to the extent that even the unconverted apply the spiritual laws of God, they *will* have a better life.

Those children who have been taught God’s way of life in their childhood, even if they venture out into the world, will have a foundation they can at least turn to when they *choose*, either in this life or in God’s Kingdom. Of course, we parents hope and pray that our children *will* turn to God now. But if they do not, we can at least know that every moment that we spend teaching them (Deuteronomy 6:4–7), every positive example and every loving concern for

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Spiritual Heart Disease: Will You Be a Victim?

By Douglas S. Winnail

Have you ever wondered if you had a fatal disease? How would you know? What would you do to help yourself if you recognized you had a serious health problem—especially with your heart?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the world today. Each year it claims the lives of millions of people. It is called “the silent killer” because it develops slowly and silently over decades in the human body without causing undue pain or concern. Often, a victim’s first warning of the problem is a sudden, fatal heart attack or stroke! However, for those concerned enough about their health to have regular checkups, the symptoms of heart disease are not difficult to spot. They include high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, partially occluded arteries, shortness of breath and even chest pains that sometimes radiate down the arms.

People who develop heart disease also have numerous and obvious risk factors—sedentary and stress-filled lifestyles, high fat diets, being overweight, drinking heavily or smoking. The more symptoms and risk factors we have, the more likely we are to be a victim of heart disease. Yet the good news is that these symptoms and risk factors can be reversed in many cases by *changing* our behavior—by getting regular exercise, eating less fat and more fiber, not smoking, using alcohol in moderation and learning to manage stress. It is possible to *avoid* becoming a victim of this fatal disease if we recognize the conditions that cause the problem, and take the appropriate actions.

However, there is a *more serious threat* to human life and health than heart disease. That threat can be termed *spiritual heart disease*. It, too, operates quietly, subtly and deceptively in the human mind, affecting our thoughts and influencing our actions. Unrecognized and left untreated, this dangerous condition will not only wreak havoc in and seriously damage our physical life, it can rob us of God’s gift of eternal life! The Bible reveals that spiritual heart disease is of even more concern to our Creator than is physical heart disease.

Could you be a victim of spiritual heart disease and not even know it? Can you recognize the *symptoms* of spiritual heart disease? Do you know how to *prevent* this potentially fatal disease from ruining your life? What steps can you take to develop a healthy spiritual heart?

The Divine Physician

Scripture indicates that God is deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of our hearts. Long ago, God told the prophet Samuel that “man looks at the outward appearance, *but the LORD looks at the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). God chooses whether to work with us, or to reject us, based on what is in our hearts—the thoughts and attitudes that influence our actions. In fact, God makes a deliberate effort to find out what is in our hearts. “The righteous God *tests* [examines, probes] the hearts and minds [the innermost thoughts]” of human beings He is working with—and rewards us according to what He finds (Psalm 7:9; 11:5–7; Proverbs 21:2; 24:12).

Just as physicians administer a *stress test* to determine if our heart will function normally under exercise, God allows us to undergo trials to determine if we are building spiritual strength and character that will enable us to be in the Kingdom of God (1 Peter 4:12–17). This is one of the reasons we encounter trials in this life. God wants to see how we will react under pressure—what we are really made of. If we respond to trials in an appropriate manner, God will see that our hearts are spiritually healthy. However, if we show symptoms of spiritual heart disease, we will experience consequences in this life that could prove fatal to our eternal life. But what does God look for? What are the signs of a spiritually healthy heart, and what are the symptoms of spiritual heart disease?

Do You Fear God?

While many Christians today *talk* of their desire to find out what God’s will is for their lives, the Bible provides the *answer* to that question. God reminded Moses and the ancient Israelites: “What does the LORD your God require of you, but to *fear* the LORD your God, to *walk* in all His ways and to *love* Him, to *serve* the LORD your God *with all your heart* and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 10:12–13). God spoke similarly to Isaiah: “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor [humble] and of a contrite spirit [repentant heart], and who trembles at My word [who fears to disobey]” (Isaiah 66:2). Jesus emphasized the very same point. He said that the greatest commandment

was to “love the LORD your God *with all your heart*, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Jesus also plainly taught: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). To do so will be our overriding desire, *if* our heart is spiritually healthy.

However, one symptom of spiritual heart disease is the tendency to look for ways to compromise, or reason around obeying the laws of God. The Apostle Paul describes this typically human approach, and reminds us that “the carnal mind is enmity against [resents] God; for it is not subject to the law of God nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Individuals with symptoms of spiritual heart disease simply do not want to be subject to the laws of God. They will look for any excuse, or follow any idea, that provides an excuse for not following God’s plain instructions. What are *your* tendencies? Do you really fear God? Do you fear to disobey His commandments, or have you been deceived by arguments that God’s laws are no longer applicable today?

When God began to work with Abram, He instructed him to “walk before Me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). God then tested Abram on numerous occasions, even

What Are Your Priorities?

Our priorities reveal much about the spiritual condition of our heart. Jesus instructed His disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). He also stated that we are not fit for the Kingdom of God if we look back longingly or return to worldly ways, or become sidetracked by the cares of this world or become discouraged by trials (Matthew 13:18–22; Luke 9:57–62). These are *matters of the heart*. If our heart is spiritually healthy, our major priority will be to seek and prepare for the Kingdom of God in every aspect of our life. If we allow other secular or material interests and desires to become more important, we could become a victim of spiritual heart disease.

Our priorities determine what we are and what we will become. When was the last time you took time to honestly examine your priorities? What *are* your major interests and goals? What consumes the majority of your time? What is the major focus of your life—your job, your romantic interests, making money, having fun, acquiring things, being popular and fitting in with your friends, see-

Our priorities determine what we are and what we will become. When was the last time you took time to honestly examine your priorities? What *are* your major interests and goals? What consumes the majority of your time? What is the major focus of your life?

commanding him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. When God saw Abram’s willingness to follow the instructions He had given, God intervened, saying: “Do not lay your hand on the lad... *for now I know that you fear God*” (Genesis 22:12). God had to know if Abraham would be obedient (see Genesis 26:5), in order to make him the “Father of the Faithful.” David was chosen to replace Saul as king over Israel because God found David to be “*a man after My own heart, who will do all My will*” (Acts 13:22). King Solomon, however, who began his reign with a desire to serve God (1 Kings 3:1–9), later *ignored* God’s instructions and *drifted* into idolatry because “his [pagan] wives *turned away his heart* [to follow other gods] (11:3). The Bible reveals that Solomon’s “heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David” (v. 4).

Satan tempted Jesus Christ to see if He would remain faithful to God’s laws and instructions (Matthew 4:1–11). Because He remained obedient, and did not compromise, Jesus became the Savior of mankind (Hebrews 4:15). God will examine each of our hearts (1 Corinthians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:4) to see if we *really* fear Him. God will also help us recognize if we are developing any signs of spiritual heart disease, so that we can overcome these tendencies—*if* we ask for His help.

ing the latest movie or visiting the latest “cool” place? Or is your major goal to develop the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), walk in His footsteps, obey God and prepare to serve in the Kingdom of God? One set of priorities indicates a spiritually healthy heart; the other is a symptom of spiritual heart disease. Our priorities can tell us a lot about the condition of our heart—*if* we care to look!

A Penny For Your Thoughts!

There is an old saying that we are—or will become—what we think about. It is based on a biblical verse that states, “for as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). If our thoughts are focused on ourselves, our appearance, on material things, on physical pleasures instead of the things of God, our heart is not developing in a spiritually healthy manner that God desires and requires. We are exhibiting the symptoms of spiritual heart disease that will bring unpleasant consequences now, and will prove fatal in the long run. We need to monitor our thoughts because, “as in water face reflects face, so a man’s heart reveals the man” (Proverbs 27:19). Our thoughts reveal a lot about our character.

The Bible states that Satan is the god of this world, and is capable of influencing the thoughts of human

beings (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). God also warns us in His word: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8). This is why we must learn to *evaluate* where our thoughts are coming from, and discipline ourselves as to what we should and should not think about (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). We need to recognize and resist thoughts and ideas that come from Satan (James 4:7–8), and instead focus our thoughts on godly things (Philippians 4:8). If we become carried away with thoughts of vanity, jealousy, lust, selfishness, anger, hatred and offbeat religious ideas, we are showing signs of a spiritually diseased heart. When did you last examine what kind of thoughts dominate *your* mind? Are your thoughts the thoughts of one striving to be a person “after God’s own heart?”

What Do You Talk About?

Jesus said that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). We talk about things that are important to us. The topics of our daily conversations provide a mirror into what is on our mind and in our heart. When you listen to your own conversations, what do you hear yourself talking about? Do you talk about foolish, frivolous things? Do you share gossip? Do you spend hours talking about sports, or social, political or romantic issues? Do you find yourself flattering people or telling lies? The Bible links these subjects with spiritual heart disease. If you spend time conversing with like-minded individuals about the plan and purpose of God, the laws of God and preparing for the coming kingdom of God, you are developing a spiritually healthy heart. David wrote that “the mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart” (Psalm 37:30–31).

The Bible tells us that “the *lips* of the righteous [who follow God’s laws] know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked [know or talk about] what is perverse” (Proverbs 10:32). We are also reminded that “he who *guards his mouth* preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips [and talks about whatever comes to mind without thought of the consequences] shall have destruction” (Proverbs 13:3), and that “wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known” (Proverbs 14:33). This is why the Bible advises: “The heart of the wise *teaches his mouth* and adds learning to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23). What we talk about is a clue to the condition of our heart. Our conversation—our *verbal diet*—is an indicator of spiritual heart disease or a spiritually healthy heart—*if we listen!*

What Do You Look At?

David wrote in the Psalms: “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will *set nothing wicked* [worthless] *before my eyes*... a perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness” (Psalm 101:2–4). Scripture also advises us to “give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart... let your eyes look straight ahead... ponder the path of your feet... Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (Proverbs 4:20–27). This is extremely important advice in our visually oriented world—a world saturated with sex, violence, and visual enticements to every sort of perversion, excess and evil imaginable. What we look at, and what we let our eyes dwell upon, are indicators of the condition of our heart. This, too, can reveal symptoms of spiritual heart disease, or signs of a spiritually healthy heart.

What do you let *your eyes* dwell upon when you see a display rack full of magazines? What do you watch on television? What do you read? Is your *visual appetite* driven by lust, the desire to acquire, the thrill of violence or the titillation of sex? Does your *visual diet* generate or feed evil thoughts? If so, then your visual diet will contribute to spiritual heart disease. Those who desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and be in the kingdom of God, will not let their eyes dwell on such things—they will focus their eyes in a different direction!

Showing Love

The Bible reveals that “God is love” and that as Christians we are to learn to “love one another” (1 John 4:7–11). Godly love is patient, kind, self-controlled, does not envy, does not vainly promote or continually talk about one’s own ideas or opinions, is not rude, is not easily provoked to anger, is not resentful, does not strive to get even, does not gossip, but is forgiving, understanding and does not quit, give up or fail (1 Corinthians 13). Godly love comes from a spiritually healthy heart. It is the visible fruit of a person who is using and being led by God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–26). Symptoms of spiritual heart disease include a lack of godly love, characterized by selfishness and selfish ambition, anger, contention, jealousy, immoral thoughts and actions and a focus on physical gratification (Galatians 5:19–21). An inability to recognize and overcome these negative and ungodly qualities will rob us of our reward, and prove to be spiritually fatal. We need to strive to exercise the fruits

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Wanted:

Television Representatives for the *Tomorrow's World* Telecast!

By Wayne Pyle

Although the *Tomorrow's World* telecast is currently aired around the United States on more than 100 public access television stations, and on more than a dozen leased access television stations, there are more than 2,000 stations that have not yet been contacted to air the program. Might you be willing and able to help the telecast expand into as-yet-unreached markets?

As of this writing, more than 80 Living Church of God members are sponsoring the *Tomorrow's World* telecast on 103 public access stations and 14 leased-access stations. These stations are cabled into 14 million homes across America, where hundreds of thousands actually watch the *Tomorrow's World* program. Since the telecast began in 1999, public access television has brought in more than 38,000 responses for Church publications and audiotapes. In the past four years, more than 25,600 individuals have been added to the Church's mailing list as a result of seeing the *Tomorrow's World* telecast on member-sponsored public access television. Sixteen percent—one-sixth—of *Tomorrow's World* telecast responses come from public access television stations.

Airtime on a public access station is usually free of charge. Leased access stations, by contrast, charge up to \$150 per airing. The Church, of course, must pay for videotapes, shipping and the “free” 800-number phone calls that each telecast receives. Thanks to the relatively low cost of public access airing, the cost-per-response from these stations has been less than \$6.00—and some cost the Church as little as \$1.50 per response!


The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) calls these stations “PEGs”—an acronym for Public, Education or Government access. As a rule, religious broadcasts are not permitted on stations in the Education or Government categories. There may be an exception somewhere but, as yet, we have not found one.

If there is no local *Tomorrow's World* program in your area, you can find out whether there are any free public access television stations in your area. The Media

Department at Headquarters has state-by-state listings of most of the cable systems that are licensed by the FCC to do public access or leased access broadcasting. Most of these listings are just a page long, though some of the larger states take two pages. If you would like the list for your state, you may contact Mr. Wayne Pyle by e-mail (the most convenient way) at wpyle@cogl.org, by fax at (704) 841-2244, by phone at (704) 844-1970 or by postal mail addressed to Mr. Pyle at Headquarters.

The Communications Act—federal law enacted by the U.S. Congress—prohibits public access stations from airing political programming, smear campaigns, obscenity or commercial advertising. Some public access stations have been surprised by our telecast, which offers *free* religious material and is thus not a commercial enterprise even though it is “advertising” something. But stations are not allowed by law to reject our program because of its religious content. Public access stations are allowed to establish technical requirements for programs, such as type of video format, sound levels, light levels, length of program, and so forth, but they cannot edit or censor program content.

Most public access stations require sponsors to reside in their cable-coverage area. If you would be interested in sponsoring the *Tomorrow's World* program in your area, you would need to find out if your local or nearby cable system carries public access programming. To find out, you could check your phone book for cable television companies, and ask them if they have public access. If they do, ask for an application form and about any other requirements they may have. If you make it this far, contact Mr. Pyle at Headquarters for further assistance.

Most public access stations require a simple one-signature agreement, or merely a gentleman's agreement, to air the telecast. Other stations, however, require complicated contracts that should be mailed to Headquarters for approval. It is a hassle, but not necessarily that big of a deal. If you have a cable television public access station in your area, you may well be able to help the Church share the True Gospel with thousands of your neighbors! 



International Corner...

With Living Church of God brethren keeping the Feast of Tabernacles 2003 at more than 40 sites around the world, it is no wonder that some of the Feast reports from international sites came in a bit too late to be included in the November-December 2003 issue. Below are the reports from several sites that missed the last deadline, but that certainly did not miss out on the joyous and uplifting spirit of the Feast!

Sierra de la Ventana, Argentina

—by Sergio Carvajal

More than 70 Feastgoers kept the wonderful Feast of Tabernacles in Sierra de la Ventana, Argentina, filled with harmony and joy, and appreciating messages of high spiritual and prophetic content. Brethren from Spain, Switzerland, Mexico, Bolivia, the United States and Chile joined their Argentinian hosts for eight millennial days. Several activities, such as the traditional “Gaucho Grill,” a trip to La Ventana hill, soccer, golf, hiking and games for children added joy to the Feast.



Argentina

The presentation of national dances by the Chilean and Argentinean brethren stood out, as well as the musical delight of the Festival Choir that sang a hymn for the rest of the congregation at the end of the Feast.

The qualities of this site ideally suited every Feast activity, and allowed

adults and children to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

The Feast was a wonderful opportunity for us to reinforce the bonds of the Family of God founded in His love, and to cultivate the way of peace, which doubtlessly many of us will remember for years to come.

Puerto Rico

—by Raul Colon

The Caribbean sun shone, and the cool ocean breeze delighted the 36 Feastgoers in Dorado, Puerto Rico. The lovely place, sunny weather and excellent facilities provided a most relaxing and enjoyable Feast, truly reminding us of the time when the earth will be at peace, rested and singing praises (Isaiah 14:7). Church members from Canada, the United States

and Puerto Rico assembled here, finding a festive and family atmosphere that will continue to provide strength, inspiration and joy. We are glad that, one day, the whole world will shine like that Caribbean sun, under God’s Kingdom, and that the Word of God will sparkle for everyone as it did for us for eight days.

Trinidad and Tobago

—by Fitzroy Greeman



Trinidad and Tobago

The Feast of Tabernacles 2003 was held at the Mayaro Civic Center, in Mayaro, Trinidad. More than 70 brethren kept the Feast with Associate

Pastor Mr. Fitzroy Greeman, and visiting elder Dr. Donald Roach (from Los Angeles, California).

On Monday afternoon, members met at the Mayaro Civic Center. At about 1:00 p.m., they boarded vehicles and took off for the Toco Lighthouse. The two-hour trip was very enjoyable, but what was most enjoyable was the fellowship we shared. When people who love each other are together, the distance or final destination is always secondary to the warmth and pleasant interaction they enjoy.

The memories acquired from such experiences last a lifetime, and it does not matter how well someone may describe it to you; it can never equal the actual experience. From the elevated position of the lighthouse, there was a beautiful scenic view of the sea, rocks and vegetation. Everyone enjoyed that activity.

On Wednesday, the Feastgoers enjoyed the selection of two mixed teams for a game of cricket. Another fun game was “Whistling Crix.” Everyone lined up and was given eight dry biscuits. We had to eat

those biscuits without any liquids, and then whistle. The first person producing a clear whistle was declared the winner.

There were no boos, crowd incursions, no fights, no quarrelling and no tantrums being thrown. The only conclusion that viewers could possibly come to was that these people were all one family. And they were absolutely correct.

On Thursday evening, there was a cultural show, catered dinner and dance, held at the Mayaro Civic



Trinidad and Tobago

Center. These were thoroughly enjoyable activities, revealing much talent among the Feastgoers. There were poems, songs, jokes, dances and short stories. Both children and adults participated. One highlight of the cultural show was a dance exhibition; two pairs of young people did the cha-cha and the waltz. Everyone seemed to have a rollicking good time; young and old—even babies—took to the dance floor. No one can say that God does not provide fun and entertainment for His people.

Throughout the Feast, there was a great deal of interaction among the brethren. Many members took the opportunity of inviting other members over to their place for food, drinks and fellowship. There was hardly a day when someone did not invite a group over. One expression was very often pronounced: “*This was truly the best Feast ever.*” It was truly a spiritual Feast for all, and many wished they did not have to leave after eight days.

Barbados

—by Jonathan McNair

Feast of Tabernacles 2003 was a real treat, both for the local “Bajans”

as well as visitors from overseas. Members arrived from the United States, Canada and Trinidad to join three dozen local members. As the feast began, we all enjoyed a “Get Acquainted Evening,” complete with a selection of local cuisine and some steel drum music performed by a local musician. Everyone was challenged to learn everyone else’s name by the end of the Feast.

Other activities included a “Family Day” picnic, a submarine ride and a bus tour of the island. Of course, the most popular activities were fellowshiping and eating, followed by relaxing on the beach. We also had the special treat of welcoming two new prospective members to services.

By the way, Israel Mallett won the “Name Challenge.” He was able to give the first and last name of everyone who attended the Feast! His feat might have been a bit more difficult at a Feast site with hundreds of people—but that is just one more advantage of attending a small Feast site!

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Oaxtepec, Mexico

—by Antonio Mora

A renovated hall set the appropriate tone for the renovated spirit of 65 members attending the Feast this year in Oaxtepec.

One of the aspects of the Feast most appreciated this year was the sharing and giving attitudes of all present, as emphasized in sermons

and practiced from the very first gathering during the Feast.

The brethren had plenty of variety, with video messages from Mr. Meredith, Mr. Charles Bryce, Mr. Carl McNair, Dr. Douglas Winnail and Mr. Mario Hernandez. Their messages were complemented by live messages from Mr. Antonio Mora.

After morning services one day, we had a baptism in the afternoon and also a children’s activity and a singles activity; the latter was interrupted by news of a nationwide government workers’ strike that would affect the facility where the Feast was being held, starting at midnight.

Concerned about our well-being, the hall administration offered to relocate our group in the next four hours. All the Festival department heads gathered for prayer, asking God to intervene in the minds and hearts of men, then joined with all the members present to pray once more that God’s will be done. Two hours later, word reached us from Mexico City that the strike had been averted. In the words of the hall administrators, “This could not have happened without God’s Church in our midst!”

The next morning, everything continued as previously scheduled, but this unique experience made everyone more confident in God’s ability to intervene in our future tests and trials.

The Last Great Day was energized by the first performance of the Children’s Choir, which was a great success. We thank God for our “best Feast ever,” and look forward to our “best yet.”



Colombia

Financial Update:

Strategic Reserves, Balanced Preparedness

By Rodger L. Bardo

You have no doubt heard the old saying: “If I had known I was going to live this long, I’d have taken better care of myself.” Truly, the “what-ifs” of life’s decisions are almost endless. It seems easier to see the “should have dones” in most any facet of life, *after the fact*.

Some of us teenagers, growing up in western New York, took part in the “Monday Quarterback Club,” which had been founded by a group of successful Buffalo businessmen to turn “should have dones” into real action. Starting as just a fan club, the group sponsored luncheons on the Mondays following Buffalo Bills football home games, where members of the community would talk about the game and how to lend their support to the young Bills franchise. It was not a place for negativity; rather, it grew and became (in their words) a place for “excitement in settings that are conducive to generating close business relationships and team bonding.” The club’s plans really helped to encourage support for the Bills in the local area, and formed a groundswell of community members, from all ages and segments of society, prepared to back their team.

By contrast, when North Carolina braced for its most recent life-threatening hurricane last year, some who *thought* they were really prepared *came up short*. Why?

Because at times it can be a real test of foresight to *balance* today’s actions with *right preparation for tomorrow*, even when we are following a plan.

The financial world struggles with similar challenges—especially how to pay for unexpected major expenses during an emergency or economic calamity that may have been unforeseen. While there may not be a hurricane to test our plans, or a “Monday Quarterback Club” to evaluate our progress, we know both from experience and prophecy that crises and catastrophic events *will* come, bringing inevitable disruptions, as we learned from both September 11, 2001 and the anthrax scare.

Yet financially *prepare* we must, while we *balance* spending today. In his “Dear Brethren” article on page 1 of this issue of the *Living Church News*, Mr. Meredith brings out the importance of preparedness in our individual lives. The Work must also follow that vital principle, while the Work grows and expenses increase around us. One important way God’s Work remains fiscally prepared for truly unanticipated expenses is through *strategic reserves*. *Reserves* are specially designated *savings* and *investments*, set aside for a “rainy day”—a time of real financial crisis.

Good financial practice, for all nonprofit organizations, requires *rainy day reserve accounts*; so says the Nonprofit

Finance Fund (NFF), a community-based development financial institution and leading source of financing and advice for nonprofits nationwide. While moving to Charlotte helped stabilize some of the challenges we faced in California with regard to rising expenses (or liabilities, such as rent, taxes and other costs), protecting the Work’s *rainy day reserve assets* also became an integral part of this picture—a vital part of preparing the work to meet the expenses of present and future growth.

Assets that form our reserves consist of cash savings, property equity (as in the building we purchased) and other resources specifically set aside for *no other purpose* than a *rainy day*. Just as we individually strive to prepare for emergencies, the Work of God must prepare to “manage” financially through a rainy day, especially during a time of crisis—such as a postal strike or a terrorist attack, or any disruption in airplane flights that carry mail. Reserves allow the Work to continue preaching the true Gospel even when “cash flow” is temporarily disrupted by the events around us. Make no mistake: physical preparation can never substitute for strong faith in God, but we are held accountable for what we *can* do.

Nationally, many leaders have not been accountable. Mr. Meredith wrote, in *How God Intervenes in World Affairs*: “Fiscal irresponsibility on a national

scale presages a clear decline in future prestige and power.” This is a sobering statement, as governments and organizations dip into their *rainy day reserves* at an alarming rate. And as the world’s economies struggle to emerge from the doldrums, even with some of the relatively positive economic news of late, having resources set aside for the future remains of paramount importance in today’s business environment. So the real challenge, then, is to *do the Work powerfully and effectively, as we continue to strive to be wise stewards of the financial resources He provides.*

Rainy day reserves are of several kinds. The first and most common is an *emergency reserve*, which the Church has maintained in some form since its inception. This would be available in case of a national or financial crisis.

The second is a *building reserve*, for future building needs, new air conditioning or other major capital expenditures related to our property. When we moved into our building, Messrs. Meredith and Ames specifically designated a building reserve, because the physical *simply wears out*. Consequently, we must be prepared for that inevitable reality by having monies available to pay for any needed improvements.

A third area is *project-specific*—reserve accounts that save for longer-term needs. Saving for a particular purpose is a great way for all of us to buy that new item we want but cannot afford today. It is no different in the Work—as, for example, when we saved expressly for our Charlotte relocation and facility. As the Work grows, we cannot just “go out and buy” everything we need to preach the Gospel and feed the flock. Careful planning—saving—is required.

Fourth, most well-managed organizations have a “checking

account” reserve. This is a minimum amount of “cash on hand” set aside in our normal operating accounts, which simply smoothes out the short-term peaks and valleys in income received. God always provides, but He sometimes provides more this week than next, or vice versa. We must then *manage* what we have been given. Further still, expenses can vary, as we well know from our personal budgets. Some bills are paid for the whole year, or all at once. Others are paid monthly, or may vary depending on usage, as with utility bills. So, the “bottom line” is that while achieving budgeted goals is our aim, it remains a monthly “balancing effort” for which we must prepare.

This all seems so simple—not “rocket science”—and full of common sense, right? Perhaps, but still we are faced with a predicament: the task of setting aside *enough* in our reserves, especially for events we might not even be able to fully quantify! As the principal author of the article “Hidden in Plain Sight: Understanding Nonprofit Capital Structure” (*The Nonprofit Quarterly*, spring 2003), NFF president Clara Miller clearly enumerates the entire picture of a nonprofit’s financial worth, and discusses this dilemma. Obviously, we could just save and save and not do the Work, or we could spend and spend and soon be *unable* to do the Work because we had spent ourselves out of existence!

According to Ms. Miller, “all nonprofit [organizations must] *manage* the tension between the *pursuit of mission* [doing the Work] and the preservation of organizational and financial viability [reserves]. This tension exerts pressure on day-to-day operations, and while it sometimes seems that one role dominates the other, in a *healthy organization* they must *always be balanced*”

[Emphasis mine]. Here we see the real challenge. Proper preparation to pursue the mission”—or in our case “do the Work”—requires *balance*.

Balance occurs through effective management of day-to-day spending, while we properly prepare for the future with *reasonable* strategic reserves. Many have tried to quantify this—the old *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, in Lesson 55, even gave some practical personal savings guidelines. However, in general, the goal of a reasonable strategic reserve is to give the Work enough financial resources to carry us forward for a short period of time even if all access to normal sources of income were temporarily cut off because of some financial or social disruption. We have not yet reached this laudable goal, but thanks to the generosity of the brethren and careful financial management in the Work, we are making encouraging progress, for which we are grateful to God—especially considering that we “started from scratch” just over five years ago, and considering that expenses invariably increase as the Work continues to grow and reach more people!

Proverbs 6:6–11 teaches us that when winter comes, the ant enjoys lots of food because it practices *balanced preparation*. It works hard throughout the other three seasons of the year, but prepares *to the extent it is able* and then *does not need* a wintertime job! The rest is up to God. Proverbs 24:27 also confirms the *how* of balance; it simply requires putting first things first. We cannot cover every possibility but, as the ant, we can do our part. The ant rose early, worked hard, prepared and accomplished its goals.

In the same manner, the Work is committed to “maintaining” strate-

gic reserves by systematically replacing what is used, as God provides. It may mean that we tighten our belts at times to accomplish this goal, but in the end it is a goal well worth realizing!

Proper investment of our reserves also helps us keep our rainy day reserves viable. While space does not permit me to address this subject in detail, the Work has taken prudent steps to make sure that our reserves are sound. As just one example, our building equity has increased since we moved in last year. While values can vary yearly, and the real estate market can be somewhat volatile, it is clear that good preparedness, coupled with responsible spending, has already begun to bear fruit through the purchase of our Charlotte headquarters.

Those of us who have lived through natural disasters know that being prepared is an indispensable key to weathering the storm. Years ago, when my family lived in Houston, we were prepared even when a strong hurricane caused rain to pour into every room of our home. No, we could not stop the storm from affecting us, and we did not have everything we would have liked. But after the storm passed, we were blessed with clean water, a battery-powered radio and plenty of food to last us until the electricity came back on almost a week later.

So *balanced preparedness* is a *healthy* fiscal approach—doing what we really can do *now* to help prepare for *future* growth and unforeseen events. Proper saving is necessary to

allow proper spending as the Work continues to grow. Just as we do not expect blessings if we “rob God” by choosing not to tithe, we should not expect blessings if we spend without preparing our finances properly. As Mr. Meredith wrote in his article this issue: “Remember, *if* we truly obey God’s financial laws, and are also careful to do our part in wise financial management—not overspending, and taking care to set aside a moderate financial reserve—then God *will* intervene to take care of us in this area of our lives, and *protect* us even from financial and other perils that we may *not* be able to foresee.” In Proverbs, the ant teaches us this; we should follow its example in our Christian lives, as we do in the financial management of God’s Work. LCN

Child Rearing: “In God’s Image”

(continued from page 9)

our children will not be lost. They will have a positive foundation to turn to before the close of this age, during the millennium or during the White Throne Judgment.

And for those children who “see the light” in their youth and turn fully to their God, what an amazing future they have! God offers to be their parent and their partner for life, guiding them through every decision and milestone in their life, just like a loving father. The result will be better marriages, stronger families, peaceful and stable minds—and birth into the very Family of God at Christ’s return. They will have the opportunity to work with Jesus Christ Himself as he establishes His Kingdom and brings peace to the earth. Cities will be rebuilt God’s way, without pollution or crime or the blight of overcrowded inner cities. Our children *can* have the opportunity of being in on this worldwide transformation of this new age.

We, as parents who are begotten “children of God,” have a responsibility to help in fulfilling the Church’s twin messages at the end of this age. Our prayers and financial support can help the Work of God in announcing the coming Kingdom of God “in all the world as a witness” (Matthew 24:14). We also find that before the Day of the Lord and the end of age there will be an effort to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth

with a curse” (Malachi 4:6). The ultimate Father, to whom the hearts of the children must be turned, is God the Father. As we have seen, God’s purpose on this planet is to “make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). God is creating future members of His Family, as they are voluntarily created in the spiritual and character image of God as His literal children.

So we parents have a very high calling. Our God is training *us* as *His children* in His image! In turn, God is calling us to train and shape *our children’s* young impressionable minds in His image. This is a lofty goal in a dark and dangerous world. But as a loving parent, God promises that: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper” (Hebrews 13:5–6). The closer we move to our Father, the more we will radiate His qualities as the perfect parent. Every last parent has made mistakes in parenting, but God knows that parents, like their children, are capable of learning and changing.

As parents and grandparents—as for *all of us* as begotten children of the great God—let us rededicate our lives to turning the hearts of the children to their spiritual Father. This is the **ultimate goal and purpose** of child rearing: to have children “**in God’s image.**”

Watch upcoming issues of the Living Church News for further installments of this ongoing series on child rearing. LCN

Avoid Being a Laodicean

(continued from page 3)

your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” Is *your* “food” doing the Work of God? Is *your* “reason for being” primarily that of genuinely preparing for the coming of Christ’s government soon to be set up on this earth, getting Christ’s message out to the entire world as a “witness” (Matthew 24:14) and “laying down your life” for your brethren?

Jesus said: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26). Many of God’s people are in a “comfort zone.” They are “nice” people, and they *mean well*. But the **passion** for Christ and His service has gone out of their lives—if, indeed, it was ever *in* their lives! These people are “comfortable” in their social lives. They usually associate with other “successful” people to the degree they are able. Perhaps without realizing it, their *real* desire is to live safe and comfortable lives—though remaining, outwardly, in the Church of God. *In reality*, the idea that they are in a “**crusade**” to get Christ’s message to the world—*regardless* of personal safety and comfort—does not appeal to them at all.

When they hear Jesus’ words that each of us should “**deny** himself and take up his cross,” the eyes of the Laodiceans sort of glaze over. Perhaps unconsciously, they think

these sayings of Jesus are *just idealistic*, and probably intended for people like the Apostle Paul—but not for *them*. They do not want anyone “messing up” *their* personal lives with an approach to Christianity that they feel might be too strict or too demanding!

But, again, Jesus Christ says: “So then, because you are **lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:16).

Learn To Seek God

Another *key* concept that can revolutionize each of our personal Christian lives is the concept of **zealously seeking** God. Most people in the various “Church of God” groups *assume* that they already know God and His ways. Without realizing it, they often *limit themselves* to halfheartedly observing the outward forms of Christian living. They go to church. They at least partially keep the Sabbaths. They generally live by the Ten Commandments. Soon, it all becomes *routine*. But the Apostle Paul wrote: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). *Paul’s type* of **passionate** relationship with Jesus Christ is almost completely missing from the lives of the Laodiceans. Often, they do not really realize this, or know what to do about it.

However, again and again in His inspired word, God reminds us to actively “**seek**” Him with all our hearts! After the modern Israelites are scattered and taken into **slavery**, they will finally learn to *do this*. “But from there you will **seek** the LORD your God, and you will find Him *if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul*. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the **latter days**, when you turn to the LORD

your God and obey His voice” (Deuteronomy 4:29–30).

Speaking of Judah’s first captivity, God describes this same “*key*” response—*which He obviously desires in all His people*: “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will **seek** Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12–13).

God inspired the prophet Isaiah to give us this basic instruction: “**Seek** the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:6–9). So each of us must build within our hearts and minds the awareness to constantly “**seek**” God and draw ever closer to Him. We must **not** take God or Jesus Christ for granted. We must **not** sink down into the “comfort zone” of Laodiceans.

We should all know the primary avenues by which we must **seek** God. They are: *zealous Bible study*, *heartfelt prayer*, *thoughtful, purposeful meditation*, *fasting*, and *actively exercising* the Holy Spirit and “walking with God” in every phase of our lives. If we, as true Christians, let down or leave out *any one* of these, the power and effect of our Christian lives will be greatly diminished. These five “tools” for Christian growth **must** be used continually, or we will lapse back into a “lukewarm” Christianity, if, indeed, we do not altogether fall away.

Yes! It is just that serious! We **must** use these five tools in order to

become fully mature Christians. *There is no other way!*

And in *all* our Bible study, prayer, meditation and fasting, we must constantly have the approach of “seeking” God—seeking for a *deeper*, a more *profound* and a more *loving* relationship with Christ and our fellow man. We must **not** assume that we are somehow “superior”—that we “have it made.” Remember, Jesus said: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** for one another” (John 13:35).

There are a few professing Church of God fellowships that exemplify the *exact opposite* attitude toward their fellow man. Although hanging on to some of the basic truths we have all learned, these people set themselves up as “hanging judges” not only of the carnal world, but of other sincere Church of God people! They are notable because of their obvious feelings of superiority and of the atmosphere of *harshness, fear* and *intimidation* that permeates their fellowship.

Genuine **love** and *outflowing concern* must permeate the minds and hearts of all “Philadelphian” Christians! Otherwise, they are no more “Philadelphians” than Mickey Mouse!

Yet, as each one humbly **seeks** God and the things of God, the true Philadelphian will zealously avoid becoming bogged down in worldly pursuits and interests. He will be ever mindful of Jesus Christ’s warning in Matthew 13:22: “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”

Focusing on the “cares of this world” can easily distract *any* of us if we are not careful. That is one reason why Philadelphian Christians should spend much of their time, energy and resources in the **crusade** to proclaim Christ’s message to the entire world. Jesus said: “And this *gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and

then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). And to the Philadelphia era of the Church, Jesus proclaimed: “I know your works. See, I have set before you an **open door**, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Revelation 3:8).

In 2 Corinthians 2:12, 1 Corinthians 16:9 and Colossians 4:3, the term “door” clearly indicates an opening or opportunity to preach the gospel. The Philadelphians *zealously desire* to have a very active part in proclaiming Christ’s message. They personally work, pray and sacrifice so the magnificent message of Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom may be powerfully proclaimed to *all the nations*.

Truly having our hearts in **doing** God’s Work, zealously using the “tools” for Christian growth and scrupulously avoiding the pitfalls of *lukewarmness*, will help us avoid being Laodiceans—especially if we humbly and passionately “seek” God in *every facet* of our lives. ☐

Spiritual Heart Disease: Will You Be a Victim?

(continued from page 12)

of God’s Spirit, and show godly love in every situation we encounter—because *that* is a sign of a spiritually healthy heart.

When we are able to recognize our human tendencies, and understand how Satan attempts to influence, deceive and pervert the human heart and mind, we can better realize why the Bible emphasizes the need to *repent* and *change* and become more like God wants us to be (Mark 1:14–15; Acts 2:37–40). The Apostle Paul equates the process of *repentance and change* and becoming a Christian with *circumcision of the heart* (Romans 2:29)—the *cutting away of the rebellious attitudes* that emanate from the carnal (Satan-influenced) human heart. God emphasized this same necessity to the ancient Israelites through Moses (Deuteronomy 10:16), and to the nation of Judah through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4). Sadly, in each of these cases, spiritual heart disease proved fatal to the individuals and

nations involved. Can we learn from these tragic examples?

Those who are called, and who overcome the symptoms of spiritual heart disease and become Christians “after God’s own heart,” can be in the Kingdom of God and reign with Jesus Christ on this earth. However, the time to grow and overcome is *limited* (Isaiah 55:6–7). For the world at large, the time is coming when Jesus Christ will return, as the Great Physician, to perform radical spiritual surgery on the rebellious hearts of mankind. Satan will be dethroned, and the peoples of this world will learn some very painful lessons, after which God will give human beings a “new heart” and take away their “stony heart” so all mankind will be able to understand the wisdom of the laws of God and the happiness that comes from obedience and doing things God’s way (Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33–34; Ezekiel 11:19–20; 36:26–27). We can have a dramatic part to play in the plan of God if we learn important lessons *now*—and we do not let ourselves become victims of *spiritual heart disease!* ☐

Prepare NOW for Financial Woes Ahead!

(continued from page 2)

consumers together borrowed at an annualized rate of \$2.52 trillion! The U.S. government now has \$44 trillion in unfunded liabilities. The process of printing *trillions* of dollars to cover unfunded liabilities will certainly destroy the dollar if it continues!

Mr. Herbert Armstrong used to say: “Knowledge is of *no value* unless it is *used* or *applied!*” So there are times when we have to *act!* *This is one of those times.*

The truth is that most Americans would rather be lied to and kept in their “comfort zone” than hear the *truth* and be moved out of their comfort zone. But you, brethren, as the people of God, should be willing to *stir* yourselves and be sure you do not fall into this financial “trap” that is affecting so many millions of families. The Bible says in Proverbs 27:12: “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished.” Remember that the “simple” generally just “go along” with the majority and do *nothing* when a disaster of this sort is about to strike. I pray that all of you will understand the warning I am now giving you, and begin to take action.

Finally, brethren, I hope that *all* of us will strive to get our balance on this and on *every* issue of life. This is *not* a time to panic. But, it is a time to *act*. Acting as dedicated *Christians* is the ultimate “key” to our financial, physical and spiritual survival. So, obviously, we should obey God’s command to tithe and to give offerings. For our

Creator directly tells us: “‘Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ Says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’” (Malachi 3:8–10).

Remember, if we truly obey God’s financial laws, and are also careful to do our part in wise financial management—not overspending, and taking care to set aside a moderate financial reserve—then God *will* intervene to take care of us in this area of our lives, and *protect* us even from financial and other perils that we may *not* be able to foresee. We will certainly be in all kinds of trouble if our heavenly Father does not watch over us, and guide and protect us in *all* things, in the years ahead. So it behooves us to do *our part*. Yet we must look beyond the purely physical circumstances, and know that the great God whom we serve *will intervene* to take care of every one of His faithful children.

God’s inspired Word tells us: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5–6).



Full Council of Elders Meets in Charlotte



From November 17–20, 2003, all 15 members of the Living Church of God Council of Elders met at Church Headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina. For two of the newest Council members—Messrs. Syd Hull and Bruce Tyler—this was their first COE meeting attended “in person” rather than via long distance telephone call.

“The togetherness and bonding, the one mind and one spirit of all the men, was unlike anything I have seen before,” remarked Mr. Tyler, Regional Director for Australasia. “Through the harmony of God’s Spirit, and the energy He gives us to do the Work, it is evident God will bless His Church and people to finish the Work He has given us to do.”

Mr. Syd Hull, Regional Director for South Africa, remarked: “As a ‘rookie,’ I have been very blessed to attend the Council of Elders Conference. I have learned a great deal, and have been blessed by getting closer to the experienced members of the Council.”

Regional Pastor Mr. Rand Millich observed: “As one of the newer members on the Council of Elders, I appreciated being with fellow servants from around the world. I was moved to see dedicated men yielding to God and to each other, with Dr. Meredith taking the lead. The purposes were clear: to more effectively serve God and His people, to do His work and to grow in understanding God’s word more perfectly.”

The Council of Elders will next meet in February 2004, on the Thursday and Friday preceding the March 1–3 Ministerial Conference in Charlotte.

Church Web Sites Set Record in November 2003!

November 2003 was the busiest month ever for the official Living Church of God Web sites www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org.

More than 22,000 unique visitors were responsible for more than 62,500 user sessions, 213,000 page views and 129 gigabytes of downloaded sermons, telecasts, booklets, commentaries and other material.

The sites also received 3,193 online literature request forms, asking for 1,351 *Tomorrow's World* magazine subscriptions and 1,142 enrollments in the *Tomorrow's World Bible Study Course*, as well as for thousands of booklets.

In the last 12 months, the sites have recorded more than 665,000 user sessions, 1.8 million page views and 1,029 gigabytes of downloaded material—more than a *terabyte* of downloaded sermons, telecasts, booklets, commentaries and other material. More than 30,000 online literature request forms were submitted in the last 12 months.

With recent first contacts from Lesotho, Benin and New Caledonia, visitors from at least 176 countries are now known to have visited the official Living Church of God Web sites since their inception in 1999.

Upcoming *Tomorrow's World* Telecasts

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 5:30 PM & Thursday, 3:00 AM ET

Air Date	Broadcast Title
February 1	How Do You Spell Relief?
February 8	War in Space?
February 15	Peace of Mind Through Prayer
February 22	Christ's Coming Government
February 29	What Will the Millennium REALLY Be Like?

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

Legacies and Other Gifts

Some have requested information on how to make a current gift to the Living Church of God, or a future gift by way of a will or a trust, or by way of other charitable means. Those wanting to receive such information should send their request to Legal Affairs. Please write to:

Living Church of God
Attn: Legal Affairs
PO Box 3810
Charlotte, NC 28227

You may also write via email to legal@cogl.org. As the laws of different countries vary, most of the information available through Legal Affairs will only apply to the United States. However, Legal Affairs will furnish as much information as possible. You may also wish to consult with your own financial and legal advisors.

Marriages

Matthew Kidney and *Rebecca Sterling* were joined in marriage on June 29, 2003. Mr. Walter Warrington, an elder in the Akron, Ohio area, officiated at the ceremony. The couple reside in Ashland, Ohio, and attend the Akron congregation of the Living Church of God.

Brian Russell McKenzie and *Bethany Janine Tyler* were married on September 29, 2003 in Brisbane, Australia. The bride's father, Mr. Bruce Tyler, performed the ceremony. The couple will reside in Perth, Western Australia.

Ordinations

Bill and Verilee Williams were ordained as deacon and deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets, September 27, 2003, by Mr. Daniel C. Hall. They will be serving the Laurel, Mississippi congregation.

Timoteo Quiao, of Cateel, Philippines, was ordained as a deacon during the Feast of Tabernacles 2003 by Mr. Gorgonio de Guia and Mr. Benito Parbo.

Births

Madeline Emma McNair was born on November 25, 2003, to Mr. & Mrs. Rod McNair of Sacramento. She weighed 8 pounds, 7 ounces, and was 20.5 inches long.

Sarah Angelica Valmonte was born on October 4, 2003, to Mr. & Mrs. Wally Valmonte of Cavite, Philippines. She weighed 8.4 pounds, and was 22 inches long.

In Loving Memory

Raul H. Reyes, age 54, an elder in the La Crescenta, California LCG congregation and a longtime member of God's Church, died in Tucson, Arizona on November 27, 2003, after a long battle with cancer. His family was with him when he died. He helped greatly in the Spanish Work, especially in Guatemala but also in serving the Spanish-speaking brethren in the United States and Mexico. Mr. Reyes gave one of the prayers during the 2003 Feast of Tabernacles in Prescott, Arizona, and despite being in pain he was seen signing cards for those who were unable to attend the Feast. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him, for he sought to help and serve others wherever he saw the need.

George Albert Embury, age 86, died on December 7, 2003, after an extended illness. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Genevieve Griffis Embury of Waycross, Georgia, daughter Nancy J. Hall (husband Dan) of Daphne, Alabama, son Stephen M. Embury and two grandchildren. Funeral services were conducted in Waycross by Mr. Dan Hall, his son-in-law. Baptized in the early 1970s, Mr. Embury was an outgoing man, willing to help others in the congregation, and was known as a good organizer.

Marie Muus, age 95, died on October 8, 2003. A member of the Long Island, New York congregation of the Living Church of God, she was baptized in 1968. She is survived by Bob, her husband of 67 years, by her daughter and son-in-law Linda and Roger Allgeyer, two grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. She was very active, and will be fondly remembered and greatly missed.

Sylvia Jean Stout, age 75, died on October 11, 2003. A long-time member of God's Church, baptized in 1955, she attended the Joplin, Missouri congregation of the Living Church of God. She is survived by Vernon, her husband of 25 years, by her children Barton F. Reed, Jr., Barbara Jean Reed, Beverly June Petersen, Bradley J.W. Reed, Bryce C. Reed and Michael Stout, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her son Anthony and her sister Aletha Hines Fields.

Albert A. Springmeyer, of the Reno congregation, died on November 26, 2003, at age 82, following a prolonged struggle with cancer. Baptized in 1957, along with his wife Barbara (who predeceased him), he was a long-time faithful

member of God's Church. He is survived by two brothers, two daughters, four sons, 19 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. The funeral service was conducted on December 1, 2003 by Mr. Rod McNair, and was attended by many friends and brethren. A World War II veteran, Mr. Springmeyer was buried at the Veterans' Cemetery in Fernley, Nevada. He was a loving, faithful man with a cheerful smile and a quick wit, and will be sorely missed by his family and the brethren of the Reno congregation.

From the Philippines

Raymundo Madrid, age 90, died September 23, 2003, in a pedestrian accident. Mr. Madrid was a long-time member of God's Church, and attended the Pozorubio, Pangasinan Bible study.

Cocoy Benitez Umali, age 27, was killed by an assailant on November 10, 2003, during a break-in and robbery of his home. Mr. Umali was a prospective member attending in Iligan City.

Fruto Leopoldo, age 73, died December 13, 2003, from a stroke and diabetes. He was a long-time member of God's Church who attended and helped organize the Makilala congregation of the Living Church of God.

Juanita Santa Ana, age 85, of Bukidnon, died September 6, 2003, from complications resulting from an ulcer. Mrs. Santa Ana had been a member of God's Church since the 1960s.

Commentary

Bible Study: “Proverbs, Chapter 1”

By Charles E. Bryce

Notice, as we begin this first chapter of Proverbs, how practical these instructions and these principles are. They are not “high-falutin.” They are not principles that are beyond our understanding, especially if God is working with us and opening our minds—and especially if we ask Him to help us understand them. These are not words that have to do with some kind of vague, complex, complicated, out-of-reach subject. These are words that are full of meat, and full of clear direction and full of practical knowledge that we can apply in our everyday lives—*tremendous* words that if we follow will produce *tremendous* fruits in our lives.

We read in Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (KJV). We can study more and more books, but if we do not start out standing in awe of Almighty God, we are not really going to attain the right kind of knowledge, and we are not really going to attain knowledge that produces the right kind of fruit. Standing in awe of God is the principal part of knowledge. Here is the Creator God who made heaven and earth and all human beings. Here is the One who knows all that can be known and what He says here is, “If you want to have knowledge, the very principal part of knowledge, is to stand in awe of the great God.”

We read: “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood [a better translation would actually be ‘to shed blood’], let us lurk privily [secretly] for the innocent without cause. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the Pit. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our

houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse” (vv. 10–14, KJV). Now, this enticement can be very tempting. It can be very alluring and seductive. It can seem so interesting and so inviting—and yet, it is trying to entice you to sin. We see this happen around us all the time in today’s society. We see gangs that are bloodthirsty, and kill for the sake of killing. We see people who are violent, and like to commit violent acts just for the thrill of it. Solomon knew about that 3,000 years ago—yet look how up-to-date this book is today.

Now, notice the next verses: “My son, walk not you in the way with them; refrain your foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain” (vv. 15–19, KJV). In other words, you will pay the price, and you will pay *deeply*, and you will pay over a *long period of time*, if you cast your lot with those who want to shed blood—those who want to commit violent acts, those who want to rob, those who want to plunder the innocent, those who want to get wealth like this. It will come back, and it will create tremendous problems for you. “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap,” the Bible says (Galatians 6:7). So if you throw your lot in with the violent, you become violent—and you will follow the way of violence. The wealth that you might gain for a little while will not be wealth, but will be full of penalties, and full of pain and suffering and sorrow. So, “Don’t go that way,” is what he is urging here in the first set of verses.

The above is an excerpt from Mr. Bryce’s online Bible Study audio series on the book of Proverbs. A new installment will be available each week, beginning in mid-January, at the www.lcg.org Web site.