

Living Church News

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Be Christ-Minded, Not Double-Minded

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Greetings from Charlotte! Many years ago, I saw a film revealing the double life of its leading character. This character went to church from time to time, and practiced certain rituals of his religion to please his family. Yet he was actually a vicious gangster, who would without any scruples kill, maim and torture his enemies. He was so “smooth” in dealing with his family that they were not fully aware of the depth of his degradation.

Very few people go to that extreme. But, regrettably, even many of God's people to some extent live a “double life.”

We all know that most people put on their “church face” as they walk in the door of the Sabbath meeting hall. A couple may have been arguing, or violently disagreeing, but as soon as they get out of the car or enter the hall, they immediately start smiling and warmly visiting with others. That is to be expected. We are all human. We all want to put our “best face forward” in public.

But the “double life” I am talking about goes much deeper than that. It involves our daily priorities—what we *really* put first throughout our lives. It involves how we actually treat others—even in our thoughts. It involves whether we are *totally committed* to God and His way—or if we are, in fact, constantly developing “backup systems” just in case God “fails.”

As the Passover season comes upon us, we should deeply and sincerely evaluate where we are—collectively and individually. Throughout His inspired Word, God tells us to do this. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write: “**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that *Jesus Christ is in you?*—*unless indeed you are disqualified*” (2 Corinthians 13:5). We need to honestly and fully examine ourselves as to whether Christ truly dominates our thoughts, our words, our actions and our entire lives. For I think all of us genuinely want to do God's Work, and to have a vital part in preparing for the Kingdom of God, which is soon coming. We earnestly desire to be used by Christ, as kings and priests in His coming Kingdom in straightening out the mess on this earth. *We want to fulfill the purpose for which God created us and made us in His image.***

Yet, because we are human, and because Satan the Devil is *always* there trying to undermine our faith and our commitment, we tend to “hold back”

and not make the *total commitment* to becoming the kind of Christians we should be.

In Luke 14:25–35, we find the challenging verses that were probably read to us during our original baptismal counseling. Each of us needs to go over this part of the Bible again and again as we honestly *examine* ourselves. Remember Jesus' challenging words? "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (v. 26). We must definitely learn to "love less"—as the original Greek means—*anyone* or *anything* in comparison to the total love, adoration and worship that we owe our Creator! Remember: "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (v. 27). Are *you*, personally, willing to face the "cross" just as Jesus did? Are *you* truly willing to serve even when it hurts, to *forgive* others even when it hurts and to *sacrifice* your life—even unto death if need be? These are very real challenges. For, as we come closer and closer to the Great Tribulation, many of these challenges will become *reality* much sooner than we might imagine! We must not constantly "kid ourselves" into thinking that we are fully dedicated Christians when we are, in fact, *very weak*—and sometimes not very deeply committed at all!

Remember Luke 14:31: "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?" Have *you* so dedicated your life—put your faith and trust and *entire being* into God's hands—that you will go "all out" in being willing to battle an army that you know is *twice* your size?

Or do you and I sometimes have—mentally, at least—certain "backup systems" so that we can "wimp out" or protect ourselves at the last minute by *human* means, because we are *not fully prepared* to put our *absolute trust in God*? Brethren, we need to *get real* about all these matters as the end of this age approaches.

Jesus Christ said: "But seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). Do *you* put God **first** when you get up in the morning? Do you drop to your knees and **pray** to your Creator early in the day—before *anything* else can interfere to distract your mind or take up your time? Is God important enough to *you* to put Him **first** in this way? Do *you* make sure that you really do **study** His inspired word regularly so that you are "drinking in" of His mind, His thoughts, His ways? Do *you* genuinely **meditate** on God's Word and on His way—taking time to carefully *think through* in detail, how to apply His law, His Word, His ways to every phase and facet of your life? Do you meditate on where you have *gone wrong*, *how* you should do better? Do *you* take time regularly throughout the year to **fast** before your Creator and to genuinely **seek** God throughout this day of fasting, prayer and meditation? Is eternal life in the very family of God important enough to you to do these things? Is it important enough that you seek **first** God's Kingdom?

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong said he felt that the greatest lack among God's people in their prayer lives was that they did not put

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Proofreaders Linda Ehman
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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
Mississauga, ON L5M 2B9
 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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Seek God's Will in Your Life

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

Even though we in the Living Church of God do not spend most of our time and energy *attacking* many of the vile practices in our society, I do want *all* of you brethren and your families to fully realize *where we stand*. For, in this mixed up world, you dear brethren—and your children and grandchildren—are constantly *bombarded* with the liberal media propaganda that, for instance, abortion and homosexuality are really “okay.” The liberal media constantly preach that **no one** should judge otherwise! In fact, the media appear to have most of the judges in this nation in their “hip pockets” on these two issues. *This is genuinely tragic*. For as God looks down from heaven, and sees these vile practices continuing and even worsening, does He have **any** reason to decide to spare our nation from the coming Great Tribulation?

Yet I have come to realize that many of our newer brethren—and *hundreds* of our young people—lack the right understanding on such topics as abortion and homosexuality. For we do not often preach about these topics in church, not wishing to make negative remarks continually and stray from teaching about God's Kingdom. So our young people—and perhaps hundreds of new members—have grown up hearing, over and over, the humanistic, liberal approach to the above topics and many others. I came to realize this, personally, very vividly when I

became Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College at Big Sandy back in 1986.

I found in personal counselings that even many of our Ambassador students had been greatly influenced by the liberal media. They knew that abortion and homosexuality were “frowned on” by the Church. But the constant presentation of these two issues in a positive light—by the media, by their friends, by schools and by the entire society as they grew up—had a profound effect on them and weakened their understanding. So we **do** need to talk about it from time to time, to “get our bearings straight.” As God's people, we *must* learn to think through and contemplate *His* will on all of these topics confronting our society, and come to understand what *God* thinks about these issues.

So please *think* and *pray* about it.

Very seldom do I quote from other religious leaders regarding social issues. However, I want now to quote from Dr. James Dobson's *Family News*, because his take on this topic certainly agrees with the Bible, and because I feel that Dr. Dobson is a very sincere man who is doing a tremendous job on this and similar issues—with the incomplete understanding that he has at this time.

Here is the introduction from his January 2004 newsletter: “It's January, and that means it is time to observe Sanctity of Human Life Month. At the outset, however, I would like to hearken back to the April 2000 edition of *Family News*, in

which I shared the remarkable story of Samuel Alexander Armas, a tiny baby boy who, at 21 weeks' gestation, underwent spinal surgery while he was still in his mother's womb. A photographer named Michael Clancy was on hand for the procedure and captured a powerful and heart-wrenching image of Samuel's hand extending from the womb and grasping the finger of the surgeon. This dramatic photograph should have been seen by people around the world, because it illustrates the marvelous humanness of a preborn child. Unfortunately, most of the major news outlets refused to share it with the public. Given their pro-abortion bias, it isn't difficult to figure out why. Seeing this wonderful photo reminds me of the struggle to outlaw partial-birth abortion and the many emotional debates surrounding it in the U.S. Congress. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA), the most articulate defender of life in the Senate, pleaded repeatedly with his colleagues to end the grotesque procedure by which the brains of un-anaesthetized babies are suctioned out in the final moments of delivery. For eight years, the battle raged. Coming from the other end of the universe, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), fought year after year to preserve the legality of partial-birth abortion. For her, killing babies was ‘a women's health issue’ that disregarded entirely the welfare of the child....”

“For 31 years, the abortion industry has treated preborn babies

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Relationships, Dating and Marriage

By Douglas S. Winnail

Are there really keys to success?

Why is it important to understand the subjects of relationships, dating and marriage? How do they relate to each other? Are there valuable keys to help us succeed in these vital and very personal endeavors?

In proper perspective, each of these subjects—developing relationships, learning to relate to the opposite sex and functioning effectively within marriage and family—represent important stages in life, that God has designed to help us prepare for the ultimate purpose of human existence. Each stage offers us numerous opportunities to learn important lessons.

The Bible reveals that God created men and women in His image to ultimately become *part of His divine family* (Genesis 1:26–27; 1 John 3:1–4). To help us prepare for that goal, God designed the human family and revealed important guidelines in Scripture. Each year millions establish relationships—at school, at work, at church or in other activities. Sometimes these relationships thrive and grow, and are very beneficial. Sometimes we form relationships that are detrimental, and that bring unhappiness and pain. Some relationships are accidental; some proceed according to a plan. Some people date and marry, some cohabit, and some try other non-traditional arrangements. Others simply indulge in wishful thinking. In this article, we will examine biblical principles for developing successful relationships, for dating and for marriage—principles of which modern society seems to have lost sight.

Positive Relationships

Today, powerful messages about independence, personal freedom and “doing your own thing” are everywhere. You may have heard the feminist slogan that “a woman needs a man like a

fish needs a bicycle.” Yet, long ago, God revealed that *it is not good* that human beings be alone (Genesis 2:18). Songs proclaiming “No man is an island, no man stands alone” and “people who need people are the luckiest people in the world” reflect this important truth—that we were created to be *social beings* and relate to one another. Learning how to relate positively and effectively to others is an essential aspect of learning how to live. To develop successful relationships, we must develop *specific social skills*. If we lack these skills, we will find it difficult, if not impossible, to initiate and maintain successful relationships—and frustration and unhappiness will be the result. This is why it is so important to understand, and learn to use, the guidelines God has provided in His Word.

The art of *communication*—exchanging information and ideas easily in a pleasant, respectful and effective manner—is an essential skill that can be developed. It is also an important factor in developing positive personal relationships. However, effective communication involves more than just being able to *talk* about what interests you. It also involves *listening*, being able to intelligently discuss issues that interest other people, and *asking questions* that elicit the thoughts and feelings of others with whom you would like to build relationships. Relationships develop between people who can talk to each other, and who will listen attentively to each other. This is why the Bible has so much to say about the use of the tongue (see Proverbs 12:18; James 3:1–12). Use a concordance to study what the Bible says about the tongue (also study “mouth” and “speak” and “word”). The Bible provides valuable pointers for developing communication skills that enhance relationships.

Sharing is another quality that builds relationships. We share when we communicate information and share our feelings with others. When we share our blessings (such as our possessions, financial resources and time) with others in need, we establish a foundation for relationship. The Bible reminds us that “it is more blessed [benefi-

cial] to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Sharing with others is easier when we develop *love and compassion for others*. Jesus taught that we should love one another (John 15:12), and showed that He *really cared* for others (Matthew 9:36; 23:37). The biblical concept of love (*agape*) involves an unselfish outgoing concern for others, which forms the basis of strong relationships. To develop this kind of love, we must begin to think about—and care about—others’ needs and feelings, instead of just our own.

Wisdom and *self-control* also foster positive and successful relationships. Knowing *when* to speak—and when *not* to speak—is often as important as knowing what to say (Proverbs 25:11). The Bible reminds us of three

Managing our emotions is vital for maintaining positive relationships. Angry outbursts—slamming doors and hurling insults—will damage relationships. Relationships are promoted by patience, understanding and forgiveness.

important keys for developing self-control—be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath (James 1:19). Managing our emotions is vital for maintaining positive relationships. Angry outbursts—slamming doors and hurling insults—will damage relationships. Relationships are promoted by patience, understanding and forgiveness.

Self-understanding and *proper self-esteem* also contribute to the development and maintenance of positive relationships. The Bible teaches that we are to “love our neighbors as ourselves” (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31). When we can accept ourselves for who we are—and are comfortable and at ease with our body, our appearance, our abilities and our limitations—we can relax and be ourselves around others. Our genuineness fosters genuine relationships. People who are always trying to project an image and pretend to be something they are not (or only dream about being) are uncomfortable to be around, and the relationships they seek usually come apart.

Relationships can also lead to *friendships*. Real friendships demand specific qualities that people can develop (see Proverbs 18:24). Friendships can have a positive or negative influence on the people involved (cf. James 4:4). The Bible offers practical advice about how to form positive friendships, and how to avoid negative associations (Proverbs 13:20). This is why developing a *strong sense of values* is important. We can build positive relationships when we are able to recognize and avoid evil people and harmful situations (Proverbs 1:10), and when we are able to recognize and stay focused on what is good (Philippians 4:8) without becoming self-righteous and judgmental of others (Matthew 7:1–5).

Conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings are inevitable in nearly every relationship. We can build better relationships when we develop skills in *conflict resolution*. Here again, the Bible offers practical guidelines. A soft (gentle and respectful) answer is better than an angry and accusative response (Proverbs 15:1). Going directly to a person with whom you have a problem (sometimes with the assistance of an impartial advisor) is better than talking about people behind their backs (Matthew 18:15–17). *Overlooking* perceived offenses, and learning how to *avoid offending* others, promotes positive relationships and shows concern for others, as does being the first to *stop* contending (Proverbs 17:9, 14). Studying what the Bible says about the cause of con-

flict, and how to resolve—and avoid—difficult issues, will profit anyone who desires to build and maintain successful relationships. Conflict resolution skills have benefits now *and* in the future; remember, Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Successful Dating

While the social skills we have discussed are important in *any* relationship, these same skills—and *more*—are essential in developing meaningful relationships with members of the opposite sex. God created the man and the woman to be *companions*, who *complement* and *complete* each other in a permanent marriage relationship (Genesis 2:18–25). Building meaningful relationships with the opposite sex involves learning to understand and appreciate how we are different—not just in appearance, but also in how we think and react. Activities shared by men and women together, including dating, provide opportunities to learn and grow in this vital area. Initial dating experiences should be oriented toward social development—learning how to conduct oneself around members of the opposite sex respectfully and respectably. A date is when two people spend time together and share an experience. The idea that sex has to be part of a date is one of the most tragic and misguided ideas of our time. Modern pressures toward early sexual activity have done much to destroy an important stage of social development.

When (at what age) young people should start dating is really a parental decision. However, dating should not

be encouraged too soon. Pairing off prematurely can generate temptations and pressures that lead to tragic lifelong consequences. Double dates (two couples together), or activities planned for mixed groups, can be a challenging and rewarding experience that fosters initiative, creativity and responsibility—especially if the motive is to “give” an interesting date to someone instead of merely “getting” a date.

Dating provides an opportunity to gain understanding about important differences in how men and women think. You can learn what you like and admire in members of the opposite sex, as well as what you do not really appreciate. Studies indicate that men especially value attractiveness, recreational companionship, admiration

woman—same-sex unions are *wrong* and a *perversion* of a God-ordained relationship (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:22–28). The marriage union has profound spiritual significance as a training ground for becoming part of God’s divine family (Ephesians 5:22–33; Revelation 19:7–9). The institution of marriage and family is so important that several commandments were designed specifically to protect it—parents were to be honored, adultery was prohibited and lust was condemned (Exodus 20:12, 14, 17). Historians and sociologists recognize that stable marriages and families are the *fundamental building blocks of a stable society*. When they begin to crumble, the culture they are part of is beginning to *decay* and *die*!

The God who designed marriage also provided instructions for making it succeed. Marriages work best when both partners understand God’s instructions ahead of time, and then promise in the marriage ceremony to follow those instructions.

and domestic support in a potential mate, while women appreciate conversation, affection, openness, financial support (men with good jobs) and a commitment to family (see *His Needs, Her Needs*, Willard F. Harley, pp. 12–13). Anyone contemplating marriage should be *preparing* to meet these needs in a potential spouse. Studies also indicate that a lasting permanent relationship (i.e. marriage) is more likely to succeed if two people not only share similar interests and goals, but also share the same religion, come from the same racial and ethnic background, come from similar economic levels and have similar levels of education. When grandchildren come along, being from the same geographical area is usually a major plus. Dating can offer enjoyable and exciting experiences, but *before becoming serious* it is wise to obtain a good education, a good job and the necessary maturity that comes with learning to handle responsibilities. Above all, one should *seek and listen to good advice* (Proverbs 4:26; 10:1; 14:12; 15:22). These are all factors that should be *seriously considered* when contemplating a long-term relationship such as marriage.

Permanent Marriage

The institution of marriage did not arise from some vague evolutionary need. The Bible reveals that God *designed* the institution of marriage as part of His overall plan (Genesis 2:24). Despite skyrocketing divorce rates, easily dissolved marriages and the growing popularity of cohabitation, God intends marriage to be a *lasting* relationship between a *man and*

Marriage is not something to be entered into lightly. It is not for the immature. Divorce is much more frequent when both partners in a marriage are younger than 20. Before marriage, both partners should have taken the time to *prepare* for the commitment (Proverbs 24:27). Marriage should not be used as a way to escape loneliness or parental control, or to achieve some sort of status. It is to be a lasting relationship that requires *permanent commitment* and *faithfulness* from both parties. This is why the marriage ceremony involves making a covenant (a formal promise) in front of witnesses. A covenant is designed to hold relationships together when difficulties arise and feelings fluctuate. These points should be clearly understood before anyone enters into a marriage.

The God who designed marriage also provided instructions for making it succeed. Marriages work best when both partners understand God’s instructions ahead of time, and then promise in the marriage ceremony to follow those instructions. In spite of what many today believe, God designed *specific roles* for men and women in marriage. Husbands are to love and cherish (highly value) their wives, support their families and lovingly guide their children as the head of the household (Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18–21). A considerate husband will strive to understand and fulfill the needs of his wife and children (1 Peter 3:7). Neglect or abuse by the head of the household is wrong—simply unacceptable. Wives are to love and respond to their husbands and respect their authority (1 Peter 3:1–6). A loving wife will also strive to understand and fulfill her husband’s needs. Defiance and subversion by the wife are unacceptable.

The challenge for both men and women in marriage is to learn how to adapt and meet each other's needs (see Harley), to show respect and appreciation and to work together in harmony. This is where *social skills* can play a big role.

The effort to achieve a successful marriage is definitely worthwhile. Research shows that “first-time, life-long, monogamous marriage is the relationship that best provides for the most favorable exercise of human sexuality, the overall well being of adults, and the proper socialization of children. Marriage has no close rival” (*Why Marriage Matters*, Stanton, p. 11). The whole exercise is designed to prepare us to participate in God's divine family.

As in any human relationship, difficulties arise in nearly every marriage. However, God does not provide a large “exit sign” pointing to an easy way out of marriage, as our modern society encourages. God plainly reveals that “He *hates* divorce” (Malachi 2:16). The only biblical reasons for divorce are sexual immorality (fornication, adultery or perversion), fraud, abandonment or abuse by a spouse (Matthew 5:31–32; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16). If two believers simply cannot get along, they can separate, but cannot remarry (Matthew 19:3–9). The biblical instruction is clearly weighted towards working things out instead of seeking a divorce. Divorce is simply not the panacea that many make it out to be—it comes with considerable costs (see Stanton, chapter 5). It is a sad fact that in addition to the lingering effects of divorce on spouses and children, remarriages after a divorce break up even more frequently than first marriages. These are some of the reasons why God speaks so strongly against this practice that today is so widely accepted.

Many books explain how to build successful marriages and resolve problems in marriage relationships. Statistics show that premarital sexual activity and cohabitation before marriage actually *reduce* satisfaction levels in marriage, and are associated with more frequent marital breakups (see Stanton, chapter 2). The highest satisfaction levels in marriage are found in first-time marriages between individuals who avoided premarital sex and cohabitation.

One of the most effective ways to deal with marital difficulties is to work on yourself, *not* your spouse (see Matthew 7:1–5; 1 Peter 3:1–7). Focus on what is good about your mate instead of what irritates you (Philippians 4:8). Success in marriage is much more than finding the right person; it is a matter of *being* (or becoming) *the right person*. Someone who strives to exercise the fruits of God's Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience and kindness—will not be difficult to live with (Galatians 5:22–26). Two people striving to exercise these fruits should not have

unresolvable problems. God simply does not recommend “cutting and running” as a way out of marital problems. The real solution is to find ways to *overcome* the problems *together*, which can actually *strengthen* the marital relationship (Revelation 21:7). This is God's way.

“But I’m Single!”

For a variety of reasons, approximately 10 percent of adults do not marry. Some adjust to being single, but others become frustrated. Sometimes people panic, blame God for their plight and jump into ill-advised relationships that only lead to more problems. It is *never wise to compromise* right beliefs, sound principles or the instructions in God's Word. If you are discontented with your single status, it might be wise to honestly and objectively analyze *why* you are single. Identify reasons. Sometimes a look in a mirror is helpful. Note your appearance, how you dress, and your normal facial expression. Listen to yourself talk, and to what you talk about. Examine your interests, activities and your lifestyle. Then ask yourself if *you* would enjoy spending time with the person you see. Begin to work on changes that you feel would help you become a more enjoyable person to be around. Notice, too, what turns people off—especially what members of the opposite sex might dislike. Common turnoffs include rude manners, an unkempt appearance, being absorbed in yourself and your own problems, being desperate to find someone to marry, becoming overly familiar too soon, being immature, possessive or jealous and having narrow interests. Find out what members of the opposite sex desire in a potential mate, and map out a program to develop those traits (see Proverbs 4:26; Ecclesiastes 9:10).

It is vital to keep a proper perspective. While marriage is an important part of God's plan, it is not a requirement for those who will enter the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ never married. Traditions say that Luke never married. There is no indication in Scripture that the Apostle Paul was married during his ministry. Whatever our status, single or married, our *primary* goal is to develop the mind and character of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5–11). While we may strive to change what we can, we must also develop the maturity to accept what we cannot change. Developing positive relationships in life is important, but the most vital relationship we can ever develop is with God, and with His Son Jesus Christ (John 17:6–11). Regardless of how much effort we invest in developing relationships, our relationship with God is the one that counts the most—because it is *the key* to developing successful relationships with others. ☐

Refined Gold

By Mark Mendiola

Many people in God's Church are going through severe trials. Some might wonder why God allows such trials, and what possible good could come from them.

Some brethren have gone through very unusual sore trials. We can bring much on ourselves through mistakes, lack of judgment or breaking God's laws. But sometimes trials can come out of nowhere for seemingly inexplicable reasons. *Does it seem strange to any of us that these trials afflict God's people?*

People in the Apostle Peter's time had the same question. Notice his answer. "Beloved, *do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you*, as though some strange thing happened to you; but *rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings*, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Peter said not to think it strange when put through *fiery trials*. "For the time has come for *judgment to begin at the house of God*; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is *scarcely saved*, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' Therefore let those who *suffer according to the will of God* commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (vv. 17–19).

Sometimes it is God's will that we suffer, though we can take comfort in knowing He has a glorious end result in mind that transcends anything our minds can conceive. But to achieve that result, He sometimes must put us through *fiery tri-*

als to refine us like precious metals. Although they may seem to last an eternity, trials are only temporary in the grand scheme of things.

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

Fiery trials test our faith, just as *gold is tested in fire*. Other than Jesus Christ Himself, no man in the Bible went through more severe trials than Job, who wondered why he was struck down by grievous afflictions. God allowed it for a purpose, but Job thought it was very strange. He could not see what God was doing with him, or why He was allowing it.

"Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him. But He knows the way that I take; *when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:8–10).

Job realized that his trials would cause him to come forth as refined gold. Refining separates gold from other metals and impurities. *God is putting all of us through a refining process to purge us of our impurities*.

There are obvious parallels with our refining process and how gold is purified.

A grinding mill pulverizes high-grade ore into powder. God often must beat us down before He can even start working with us. Refractory ore is *roasted to more than*

1,000 degrees Fahrenheit, burning off carbon. Ore without carbon is oxidized in an autoclave that uses *super heated steam under pressure* to free gold from sulfides.

We, too, sometimes feel as if we are put through extreme heat or pressure when in a fiery trial.

The ore is then leached with cyanide that dissolves the gold. Ultimately, the impure gold is sent to another refinery to be melted into bars of 999.9 parts per thousand pure gold. *God is refining, purging, proving, trying and testing His people, too*. He wants us to be pure and holy, to become perfect as He is perfect.

The Book of Proverbs plainly shows that God uses this refining process to test us. "*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold*, but the LORD tests the hearts" (Proverbs 17:3; 27:21).

Gold has played a major role in civilization, and has been highly valued since man's beginning. For centuries, it has been a universally accepted currency of exchange. It is the world's most cherished and most versatile precious metal. The Romans knew it as "shining dawn." A Hebrew word for it—*zahab*—means "to shimmer." Gold is something valued as the finest of its kind.

In Daniel 2, we read of the famous dream King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had. Daniel was the only one who could interpret his dream. Magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and soothsayers were clueless, but God revealed the secret to Daniel in a nighttime vision.

Notice what Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar about the dream: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great

image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:31–33).

Notice that the value and quality of the metals decreases from the image's head to its toes. God says that gold is the most valuable of the metals described.

"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you

were tried and tested as to whether they would obey God or man. Would they break God's commandment in order to keep a man's edict?

All citizens of Babylon were told that when they heard stirring symphonic music, they were to "fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (vv. 5–6).

This may have been the same furnace the Babylonians used to melt the tremendous amount of gold

answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (vv. 16–18).

They did not know the outcome of their fiery trial, but they were emphatic that they would obey God right to the end. They refused to break God's second commandment, which forbids bowing down to a graven image.

Peter said not to think it strange when put through fiery trials. "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

a kingdom, power, strength and glory... You are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron..." (vv. 36–40).

God shows that gold is superior to silver, which is superior to bronze, which is superior to iron. Even today, men rank those metals in the same order. Gold is definitely the most valued of all of those metals.

Nebuchadnezzar then made an image about 90 feet tall, but it was made entirely of gold, not a mixture of other metals as he dreamed. It was undoubtedly an image of himself, because he was the head of gold.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was 60 cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon" (Daniel 3:1). Its height-to-width ratio was 10 to 1.

Daniel's three friends then went through a literal fiery trial, but they did not consider it strange. They

needed to build the towering image. It had to be stoked to create tremendous heat for the refining process.

All fell down and worshiped the gold image. This was a forerunner of the image of the beast that will be erected in the not-too-distant future in modern Babylon (Revelation 13:15). There will also be a death sentence on those who do not worship its image.

There were certain Jews who would not serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods, or worship the gold image he had set up—just as many Jews and Sabbath-keepers will not bow down and worship the image of the beast.

An enraged Nebuchadnezzar ordered Daniel's three friends to be thrown into the fiery furnace for not worshiping the gold image. The Holocaust in Nazi Germany was not the first time Gentiles put Jews in furnaces!

Nebuchadnezzar asked: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Daniel 3:15). Notice their response: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to

In response, a furious Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the furnace be heated seven times more than usual and they be thrown into it. It was so exceedingly hot that its flames killed the men who threw them into it. God sent an angel to protect Daniel's three friends so the hair on their head was not singed nor their garments scorched. Not even the smell of smoke or fire was on them.

God will often allow trials to test our character. Daniel's three friends came forth from this trial as gold. "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10). God will sometimes refine and test us through afflictions and fiery trials.

The New Testament also shows that God wants our character to be golden. But it may take fire to determine it.

We see in 1 Corinthians 3 that gold is again listed as the most valued of substances, followed by silver. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is

Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with *gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear*; for the Day will declare it, because *it will be revealed by fire*; and *the fire will test each one's work*, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as *through fire*" (vv. 11–15).

Paul shows that we are rewarded according to our works, which determine what sorts of rewards we will be given. *Sometimes the only way God can determine our character is by putting us through fiery trials*. They reveal whether our works are of gold, silver, hay or straw.

Gold is the most malleable and ductile of all metals. A tiny ounce of gold can be hammered into a 100-square-foot sheet. It can be drawn into a wire that stretches five miles. It has been estimated if all the gold mined over the last 6,000 years were melted down, it would form a cube with sides of no more than 20 yards. The Gold Institute estimates the total amount of gold ever mined as 3.8 billion ounces. More than half of that has been since 1850.

Gold has shaped history. The California gold rush of the 1850s drew tens of thousands of people across the U.S. continent, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. People were willing to endure tremendous suffering, and even die, for gold.

The ancient Egyptians mastered the art of beating gold into thin leaf and alloying it with other metals. Gold leaf is pure gold pounded into sheets applied to other surfaces. When King Tut's tomb was opened in 1922, a 2,450-pound gold coffin and hundreds of gold and gold-leafed objects were found.

Before the Israelites left Egypt, they took with them articles of gold and silver. While there, they evidently

also learned the science of beating gold into leaf. The Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with gold, and the mercy seat was made of pure gold. The tabernacle also had gold in it. Solomon used it lavishly in the temple.

The Israelites demanded that Aaron create a gold image for them to worship. Aaron told them to give him their gold earrings. He melted the gold down, and fashioned it into the infamous golden calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4). Men have worshiped gold for millennia!

We read in the Bible that God compared Israel's slavery in Egypt to being inside a blast furnace. It was a *very fiery trial* for them. (Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jeremiah 11:4).

Modern Israel, like ancient Israel, also will be enslaved because of escalating national sins, and will be plunged into a fiery furnace unlike any in history: "And it shall come to pass in all the land," says the LORD, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: *I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested*" (Zechariah 13:8–9).

This refers to the Great Tribulation, the most horrendous punishment ever to afflict a people. The Americans and British will bear the brunt of it. God says He will allow it to "*refine and test*" them, to purge away their impurities so that they will come forth as gold.

Ezekiel was sent to Israel with a warning message. He took a barber's razor, shaved his head and beard with it, then weighed and divided the hair. "You shall *burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the*

wind: I will draw out a sword after them" (Ezekiel 5:2).

This is describing the same thirds as Zechariah, who compared the punishment to a *refining fire*.

"You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. Then take some of them again and *throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; from there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel*" (vv. 3–4).

Why will God allow this unprecedented affliction to come upon modern Israel? "And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, *because of all your abominations*" (v. 9).

Outside Pocatello, Idaho, the world's largest elemental phosphorus plant operated before it was shut down in December 2001. It used four massive electric furnaces to refine phosphate ore into a chemical, consuming nearly 15 percent of the state utility's total electrical output. About 250 megawatts were used to fire up those furnaces.

One of the byproducts of its refining process was molten slag tapped from the furnaces and channeled into waste ponds. It was dross or scum that had to be removed from the elemental phosphorus. It was waste or foreign matter, an impurity.

Because of national sins, God considers His tarnished people dross. He will put them through tremendous heat to refine them and melt away their impurities.

"The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, *the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron and lead [not gold, but inferior metals], in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver*'" (Ezekiel 22:17–18).

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Because you have all become

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Lessons from Four Passovers

By John H. Ogwyn

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

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

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

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

Identifying Four Passovers

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

From the prophecy in Daniel 9:25, we know that from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearance of the Messiah, there would be exactly 483 years. We arrive at this figure by using the day for a year principle (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), after we have calculated

the number of prophetic "days" that comprise the 69 "weeks" ($69 \times 7 = 483$). Ezra 7:7–26 locates the issuing of the decree in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, in 457BC. Shortly before the fall festivals of 457BC, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and read the decree. During the fall of 27AD—483 years later—Jesus came to where John the Baptist was baptizing. John, who had begun preaching and baptizing six months earlier, proclaimed Jesus as the promised Messiah (John 1:29). At Jesus' baptism, God the Father supernaturally confirmed Jesus' Messiahship when a dove descended upon Jesus and a voice from heaven spoke (Matthew 3:16–17).

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

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

Needless to say, this provoked quite a stir among the priests and religious leaders. Even so, the miraculous signs that He performed in the temple, as He taught the crowds that gathered around Him, were enough to convince these religious leaders that He was not some self-appointed prophet, but was indeed sent from God (John

3:1–2). This Passover season of 28AD marked the dramatic opening of Christ's ministry.

What took place during the second Passover season of Jesus' ministry? Mark 2:23–28 (there are parallel accounts in Matthew 12 and Luke 6) tells the story of Jesus and His disciples walking through the grain fields, and the disciples plucking heads of grain to eat. From the arrangement of the story, especially in Mark's and Luke's accounts, it is clear that this occurred very early in Jesus' ministry. Luke, alone, makes clear the *exact* timing of this event, telling us that it occurred on “the second Sabbath after the first” (Luke 6:1). What does that mean? The Greek term is *sabbato deuteroproto*. This refers to the second Sabbath of first rank; in other words, the last Holy Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Luke, therefore, places this event in the second Passover season of Jesus' ministry, 29AD.

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

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

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

Passover 28AD—For God So Loved the World

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

left for the Judean desert, and disappeared from public view for several months.

When He walked into the temple complex on a bright spring day just before Passover in 28AD, Jesus very quickly became the talk of Jerusalem. He challenged the religious establishment by cleansing the temple and driving out the moneychangers, and doing miracles in open view of temple crowds (John 2:23). Even many religious leaders acknowledged privately that this teacher from Galilee must be someone sent by God (John 3:1–2). On one evening during the Days of Unleavened Bread that year, Nicodemus (a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin) came privately to Jesus, who gave him an important message about salvation, explaining much of the real meaning of the Passover ceremony that God had instituted more than 14 centuries earlier.

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

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

Passover 29AD—Mercy Rather Than Sacrifice

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

Jesus undoubtedly knew what the Pharisees' reaction would be, and purposely allowed His disciples to do some-

thing that would provide a setting for a very important lesson. During the Days of Unleavened Bread, we focus on righteousness and putting away sin. The Pharisees' approach was to think themselves more righteous by adding human rules to God's law. In fact, in their quest to achieve righteousness, they became "more 'righteous' than God"—and actually lost sight of what God *really* sought. Jesus defended His disciples' behavior by quoting examples from Scripture, and by asking the Pharisees to explain the meaning of those examples. With those scriptural illustrations, given on the last Day of Unleavened Bread, Jesus explained what God truly wants of us.

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

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

Passover 30AD—Feed on the Bread of Life

One notable miracle of Jesus' ministry was His feeding 5,000 men (and also the women and children present) with five barley loaves and two small fish. The disciples left by boat, while Jesus dismissed the crowd and withdrew to the hills for a time of private prayer. Late that night, the disciples' boat was still at sea, caught in

strong winds. Jesus came down to the now-empty shoreline, then began to walk on the water to cross the lake and catch up to His disciples! Though at first frightened as they saw Him approaching, the disciples were then overwhelmed with a sense of who He really was—the very Son of God (Matthew 14:25–33). John tells us that this occurred immediately before the Passover (John 6:4), and is the only writer to recount what happened on the following day (vv. 22–25). Many whom Jesus had fed found Him in Capernaum, and He began to teach them.

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

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

Passover 31AD—In Remembrance of Me

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

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International Corner...

Canadian Update

by Gerald Weston

Just after the Feast of Tabernacles, Canada launched a new series of advertisements designed to draw people to Church material on the Internet. Some 50,000 very attractive full-color cards, printed on both sides, were delivered to mail boxes from British Columbia to Newfoundland and parts in-between. Members were able to do the work of delivery, thus saving postage costs, because Canadian law permits such advertisements to be placed in home mailboxes. A side benefit was that some members shed pounds from the exercise!

Results are incomplete, but for mid-October to mid-December 2003, this effort has already produced around 350 visits to the designated Web pages. In addition, we have received 57 phone calls. One lesson is that when given both a phone number and a Web address, seven out of eight chose to check us out via the Internet, and it is likely that the majority who phoned did so because they lacked Internet access. A very surprising and instructive pattern emerged concerning the time of day when people logged onto our Web pages. In addition to the late night slot, an equal peak time was at noon. We infer from this that some individuals took the cards with them to work (where they have Internet access) and logged on during their lunch breaks. In other words, they made the effort to carry the card to work with them rather than pick up the phone at home. All of this speaks volumes about the power of the Internet, and the degree to which people rely on it to receive information.

On another topic, we formally accepted the ministerial credentials of Mr. Yvon Brochu, a former employed minister in Worldwide. Mr. Brochu lives in the Quebec City area, where we have had significant growth in the last year-and-a-half. Much of that growth has been a result of Mr. Brochu's work and the high respect that people have for him. While he has in no way sought to be used in any kind of ministerial function with us, we have asked him to take on this responsibility and he has humbly accepted.

In addition to overseeing the Quebec City congregation, Mr. Brochu will also be working with small groups in Saguenay (three hours north of Quebec City) and Edmundston, New Brunswick (three hours east of Quebec City). This will give needed help to Mr. Jacques Secours, who oversees our Montreal congregation and previously had to cover these other three groups. What a great blessing it is to have two fully bilingual ministers to serve in an area where both French and English are spoken, but not always by the same people.

The year 2003 saw a major financial milestone—income topped the \$1 million mark. At the same time, the slumping U.S. dollar benefited the Canadian work by lowering our costs for magazines, booklets, postage, and other products and services coming out of the United States. All told, this helped us end the year with a surplus, allowing us to bolster our meager reserves. This is good news, but a number of increases kicked in late in 2003 and just after the turn of the year. Vision Television increased its rates by 38

percent, hall rental costs jumped significantly in 2003 and postage has gone up again. In spite of these increases, 2003 was a good year financially for the Work in Canada.

Children's Camp in Chile

by Sergio Carvajal

From Sunday, January 25, to Sunday, February 1, nine children attended a summer camp organized by members of the Living Church of God in Chile. The camp was held at "El Quisco" beach, located 140 kilometers from Santiago, Chile. The children were kept busy with different activities, including sports, games, ocean-bathing, and Bible studies. The children enjoyed using the swings at the beach, playing "Tacataca" (a type of soccer) and visiting an amusement park.

Every day, the children had a Bible study and made Bible questions. They also watched several Bible movies, such as the stories of Joseph, Abraham and Moses. Several parents joined in for the Sabbath, and a holy convocation was held at 11:00 am with a total attendance of 15.

The children's summer camp in Chile went peacefully, thanks to God's protection, for eight wonderful days.

Caribbean Update

by Jonathan McNair

The Caribbean is known for its variety and flavor. From the Blue Mountain coffee of Jamaica to the fiery curries of Trinidad, "Caribbean" means "spice"! But it is not just the food that is known for its flavor. If

you have visited our brethren in Jamaica, Barbados or Trinidad, you have had a taste of their warmth and hospitality firsthand.

There are many reasons for this outgoing attitude. But there are a number of reasons that are often behind the scenes. I would like to introduce you to some of them. First, we will go to Trinidad.

Fitzroy and Doreen Greeman serve the Church in Trinidad, and their history of service goes back many years. They met as young people attending Church in Georgetown, Guyana. They eventually married. Doreen's skills as a pianist led her into teaching, and also serving the Church. Mr. Greeman worked as a carpenter, and later as a manager in the U.S. Embassy warehouse. When the Church began a program to help members produce and market agricultural products, Mr. Greeman was selected as a manager for the effort. He was ordained a deacon and then, more recently, an elder.

As Mr. Greeman moved into his new responsibility as associate pastor serving the Trinidad brethren, there were changes and sacrifices. The Greemans left family and close friends behind. Mrs. Greeman left her piano students behind. College classes were interrupted for their daughters. But they willingly stepped up to the task. The Greeman family has been of great service to the Church in Trinidad. Their effort has shown the Church's commitment to our members there, and they have given stability and leadership. Their perseverance in the face of all kinds of challenges has been an example for the members.

In Jamaica, Mr. Hugh Wilson has been a pillar of the Church for a long time. He built a successful surveying company, becoming one of Jamaica's most trusted names in the business. His use of sophisticated aerial photography equipment provided some

of the best service available. But he also became a trusted name in God's Church. He was eventually ordained an elder. As doctrinal confusion began to make its way to Jamaica, many members looked to him for answers. He ultimately withdrew from Worldwide. Members asked him to provide Bible studies at his home, to review sound Biblical doctrine. Before long, he came in contact with the Living Church of God, and found that the true doctrines were still being taught. Following his example and encouragement, others in Jamaica rededicated themselves to Apostolic Christianity. From a handful in a living room, the church in Jamaica has grown to three congregations and 100 people. Mr. Wilson's commitment to the truth, and to serving his brethren, provides a powerful example.

In Barbados, Mr. Clyde Skeete began serving as video host for the Church in Barbados five years ago. Mr. Skeete has a background in teaching, and has used his talents to strengthen the church. He was later ordained a deacon, and has been able to provide even greater stability and leadership. As our office manager, he coordinates members as they fulfill requests for literature and other business matters. His warmth and dedication have provided an example for all of us.

A positive example is a powerful force. These leaders' positive example has helped to foster the warmth and hospitality that has become a hallmark of God's Church in the Caribbean.

French-Speaking Europe

by Ray Clore

The Geneva congregation, composed of about 10 faithful members, augmented by occasional visitors from other Church of God groups, meets each Sabbath to view a sermon

video by Mr. Apartian and to share mutual encouragement. On December 13, 2003, they were visited by Paris-based local elder Mr. Ray Clore, and his wife Rhonda. After Mr. Clore's sermon, the congregation enjoyed a cheese fondue meal together, then saw a video of the 2003 Evian Feast talent show. Everyone encouraged local member Mrs. Mary Cochet, who sang for the talent show, to use her musical talents more often! The Geneva group, which has some English speakers, welcomes visitors, although translation of the French-language sermon is only possible when Mrs. Clore is present.

Services in Paris, for the 16 faithful local members, are held every Sabbath, either in the Clores' apartment or, on the last Sabbath of the month, at the Tim Hotel across the street from the centrally located St. Lazare train station. English-speaking visitors are welcome, and Mrs. Clore will simultaneously translate the French-language sermon as needed. The Paris congregation has a tradition of having a buffet meal of wine, cheese and other French dishes after each service. After services on January 10, 2004, Mr. Clore gave a study on the Temple Mount, Petra and other parts of the Holy Land, based on his four years of experience in that area in the 1980s.

On January 17, 2004, Mr. and Mrs. Clore visited two members in the Marseille area in the south of France who, because of distance and financial constraints, are only able to attend services twice a year, at Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. Mr. Clore remarked that he gains more encouragement than he feels he gives to such scattered sheep because of the faithful example and good attitudes they display.

Mr. and Mrs. Clore will return to the U.S. in July 2004, at the end of their four-year tour of duty at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, where Mr. Clore has worked as Science Counselor. LCN

2003 Year End Financial Report:

Strong Purpose and Encouraging Growth

By Rodger L. Bardo

The Living Church of God experienced encouraging financial growth in 2003, bucking an overall trend that saw many religious organizations experience stagnation or even financial reversals. God provided income to allow growth and to cover the many expenses associated with relocating its Headquarters facility to Charlotte, North Carolina.

In the United States, many are still noting a “jobless recovery” and consumer debt is at a shocking all-time high of \$1.98 trillion (having doubled in the last 10 years). However, a short-term overall economic stabilization does seem to be continuing into 2004. While clouds still lurk on the horizon, a more positive outlook for 2004 is projected—barring some new international crisis.

Reflecting this optimism was a year-end 2003 headline in the *Non-Profit Times* magazine, reporting that: “Giving Index Rebounds to Greatest Six Month Increase.” A *Charlotte Observer* news story (December 30, 2003) exuded even more optimism: “After setbacks in 2002, Foundation for the Carolinas is expecting to close this year [2003] with record-breaking totals.... It’s extraordinary,” said foundation president Michael Marsicano. “It could be that some people are saying, ‘I’m doing well; others are not. I’m going to help.’”

Upbeat indicators also come from the “Center on Philanthropy” at Indiana University in Indianapolis, showing an upward trend in non-profit contributions. Quoted in the *Non-Profit Times*, the center reported that “the greatest six month increase [in charitable giving] since inception of the survey in 1998, and the greatest one year increase since December 2000” occurred in the last six months of 2003, and that these findings “are in stark contrast to the report this past summer that showed the PGI [Philanthropic Giving Index] dropping to an all-time low.”

This was when the non-profit sector saw both financial and volunteer contributions steadily *fall off* during 2002 and early 2003. The PGI is similar to a “consumer confidence index,” and measures charitable giving. Greater optimism in the overall charitable giving climate, driven by increases in personal income and growth in corporate profits, seems to be responsible for this upward trend—with one notable exception. Gifts to religious

organizations did *not* rise in similar fashion, and some religious organizations that faced cutbacks in early 2003 are still in the doldrums. Will this trend continue into 2004?

Perhaps for some, but not for all, according to Melissa Brown of the Center on Philanthropy. She notes that non-profit organizations have been more successful financially, even in “down” markets, when they consistently and “with purpose, communicate” who and what they are, and have a strong “mission,” or purpose. She observes that religious giving in general is not tied as closely to the stock market, and on an average increases “about 3 percent per year” in contrast to the 2003 downturn.

Keeping Brown’s comments in mind, it is worth noting that God’s Work has a *strong purpose*, consistently communicating that the only true solution to man’s problems is obedience to God’s law and way of life, including His financial practices. So it is no surprise that, with God’s blessing, the Work has remained *economically resilient* during these unsettling times. We thank all of you for your consistent prayers and fiscal sacrifices to help make it so.

As of this writing (in mid-February), the Finance Department is engaged in the final stages of the Church’s annual audit for year-end 2003. While the auditors (Maginnis Knechtel & McIntyre Certified Public Accountants and Consultants) have not yet completed their findings, some exciting information regarding God’s Work can be seen.

Traditionally, the Church has periodically had an outside auditor review the financial “books.” An audit *reassures* us and *inventories* our financial resources, enabling us to better conduct the business of the Work. This benefit was reemphasized to us recently when we began negotiations for a new computerized mail-processing machine.

Our current mechanical mail-processing machine helped process many of the more than 800,000 letters and publications the Work sent out in 2003 (not including the hundreds of thousands of *Tomorrow’s World* magazines mailed directly from the R. R. Donnelly printing facility in Pontiac, Illinois). After 18 years of service (we had originally bought the machine

“used” several years ago), it has become so antiquated that many replacement parts are difficult to obtain; some say it seems ready for a museum. Obviously, we needed something more sophisticated to prepare for the future. As part of our preparation to lease new equipment, the first piece of financial information we were required to provide was an *independently* audited financial statement.

Our 2003 audit also helps us appreciate what God is doing. Preliminary figures indicate a *total* mail and Holy Day income up by approximately 7.2 percent. What a blessing, for which we thank Jesus Christ and all the faithful donors, coworkers and members who support this Work!

And there is more. In 2003, we also saw more than a 30 percent growth in the circulation of *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, and an approximate 8.2 percent increase in total U.S. Church attendance. Holy Day offerings increased 8.6 percent in 2003, and mail income alone (excluding income from the Holy Days) went up by 6.8 percent over 2002. Please note that these figures are again preliminary, and will be con-

confirmed by the completed 2003 audit.

The audit will also show that because of move-related expenses, the Work *technically* spent approximately 3.6 percent more than was received in 2003 income. This is an accounting anomaly, as most of the costs for the Charlotte move were paid off in 2003 from reserves that we set aside *before 2003* for that purpose. That way, we were able to avoid financing our move expenses over a three- to five-year period, as many businesses would normally do. This saved the Work loan costs, and allowed us to start 2004 fresh—with *no unsecured debt*.

As was mentioned in the Financial Update in the January-February 2004 *Living Church News*, reserves for special projects are primarily made up of special “one-time” donations. And, just as expected, these dipped in

2003 after having risen *significantly* in 2002—just when it was needed to pay our one-time relocation expenses.

Another piece of good news is that we were able to document a savings of more than \$300,000, compared to expenses the Work would have incurred if it had remained in California. This savings exceeded our original projections of move-related savings in 2003. Encouragingly, many of these savings will continue on into future years.

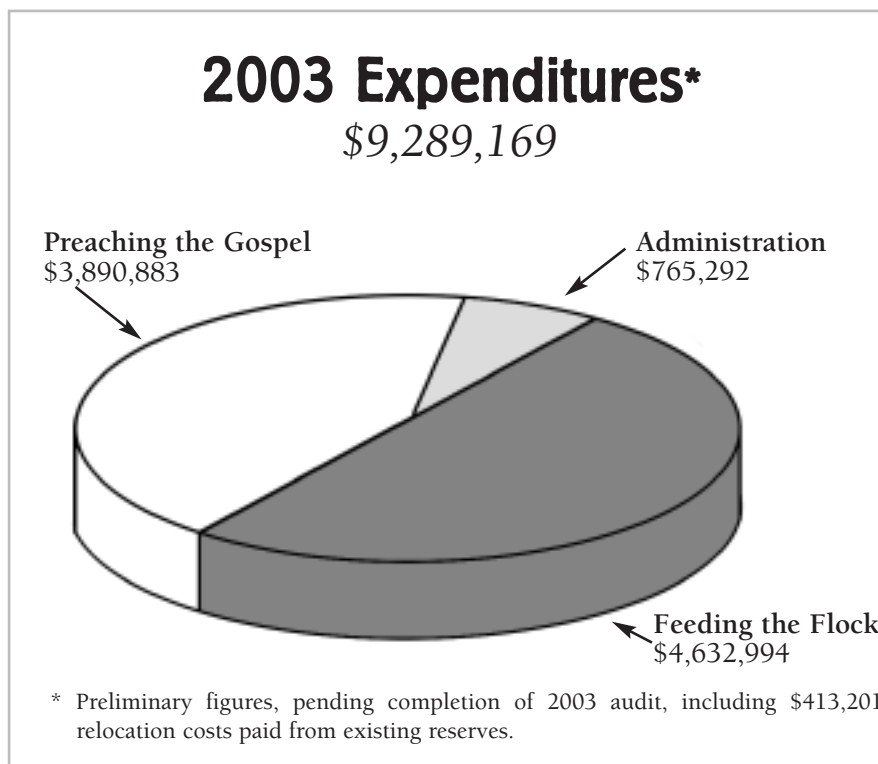
So we have a lot to be thankful for. And as growth in income steadily continues, it will enable the Work to build necessary reserves for exciting future projects such as more television stations, new advertising venues, new publications and substantial increases in *Tomorrow’s*

World magazine circulation, which will add thousands of new subscribers each month through the end of 2004.

Recently, a new donor called to say that he was “so excited” about the *Tomorrow’s World* program and magazine, just after a very hard-hitting article by Mr. Meredith: “Will You Be Left Behind?” Indeed, because of our *strong purpose*—as exemplified by many powerful articles and telecasts—

we are seeing the fruits of the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine and telecast, and many coworkers and members have been willing to back it up with generous donations, recognizing that the Work *does* answer the deeper questions of life. How much is that worth? It is *priceless* to many who are being called (Matthew 13:45–46). So please pray fervently that God continues to move many new donors to help shoulder this massive undertaking.

Yes, the needs are great. There are many worthy priorities to consider, which could help us do the Work even more effectively and efficiently. Your continued financial support makes this all possible. We are thankful for your kindness and responsiveness. Your prayers for the continued success of the financial part of God’s Work remain vitally important, as we move on into 2004. ☐



Refined Gold*(continued from page 10)*

dross.... As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead and tin into the midst of a furnace, to *blow fire* on it, to *melt it*; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there *and melt you*. Yes, I will gather you and *blow on you with the fire of My wrath* and you *shall be melted in its midst*. As *silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst*; then

(vv. 15–16). “I counsel you to buy from Me *gold refined in the fire*, that you may be rich...” (v. 18).

The Laodiceans must pay for their lethargy by going through the Great Tribulation, *so they can be refined*. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore *be zealous and repent*” (v. 19).

God will put His Church through a refining process. “And some of those of understanding shall fall, *to refine them, purify them* and make them white, *until the time of the*

watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be *a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time*. And at that time your people shall be delivered.... Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:1, 3).

We must first be refined to achieve that glory. Paul said sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in

Should we strive to make sure our character is golden? Yes! God is refining us, sometimes putting us through fiery trials so we can come forth like gold.

you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out my fury on you” (vv. 19–22).

God promises to protect dedicated members of His Church from this Great Tribulation that will ultimately consume the entire world in a global conflagration.

Jesus Christ commends the Philadelphians, noting they have a little strength, have kept His word and have not denied His name: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the *hour of trial* which shall come upon the whole world, *to test* those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! *Hold fast* what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:10–11).

Christ says that a *fiery trial* will come on the entire world to test the earth’s inhabitants, but those members of His Church who are faithful will be spared.

Notice Christ’s description of the Laodiceans, who dominate the last era of His Church. “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”

end; because it is still for the appointed time” (Daniel 11:35).

In God’s Church, we have seen many of understanding topple. The Bible shows that even God’s ministers will be *refined* before Christ’s return. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a *refiner’s fire* and like launderer’s soap. He will sit as a *refiner and a purifier of silver*. He will *purify the sons of Levi* and *purge them as gold and silver*, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:2–3).

Christ will refine His entire Church before His second coming, so all of us will be righteous. Christ wants all sin purged, so it will not be in His Kingdom.

“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom *all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire*.... Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:41–43).

We are being refined so we can shine as glorified spirit beings, just as Christ now radiates power and light (Revelation 1:15).

“At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands

us (Romans 8:18). That refining process is intensifying as we approach Christ’s return.

“And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. *Many shall be purified, made white and refined*” (Daniel 12:9–10). God will purge the wicked on earth like dross (Psalm 119:119).

Peter said we are not to think it strange concerning our *fiery trials* or be grieved by them. He said *our faith is much more precious than gold and also is tested by fire*. He concludes his last epistle by showing that God ultimately will purge the physical earth and universe, melting away all dross, impurities and sin with fervent heat, burning it up (2 Peter 3:10–11).

Should we, then, strive to make sure our character is golden? Yes! God is refining us, sometimes putting us through fiery trials so we can come forth like gold. We should not think it strange when we go through fiery trials, but rather realize that our Creator is forging us into His glorious image.

We should not consider fiery trials as something to be dreaded. Rather, they are *golden opportunities!* ☐

Seek God's Will in Your Life

(continued from page 3)

like non-persons whose lives mean nothing in the eyes of the law. Indeed, the late James McMahon, an early practitioner of the hideous partial-birth abortion procedure, suggested that it isn't a question of *if* a baby is human, but instead, 'Who owns the child?' Well, how about it? Did the perfectly formed little hand in Michael Clancy's photograph belong to a human being, or was it merely part of something the early abortionists used to refer to as 'a blob of tissue' or 'meaningless protoplasm'? What I am going to share with you now will answer that question for time and eternity. Samuel Alexander Armas, the 21 week-old preborn baby who struggled for life in his mother's uterus, is now [a] four-year-old, bustling, energetic boy... What a dramatic testimony this is to the humanity of not only this one child, but every baby conceived down through the ages. Each of us can say with King David, 'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be' (Psalm 139:14–16, NIV)."

Brethren, Dr. Dobson certainly "hit the nail on the head." I appreciate the fact that he is speaking out so powerfully on this issue. And I feel that all of us should educate our children and loved ones about this horrible crime that is being perpetrated *every single day* in most of the world! From time to time, we will refer to it on our television program or even have an article about it in the *Tomorrow's World* magazine. We *cannot* directly attack it in the same way on television as in print, or we might be thrown off dozens of our stations. In all of these things, as Jesus said, we are to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

However, this Work *can* and *should* teach the *full Truth* on such matters as this. For we *in God's Church* should fully understand the lengths to which many of the leaders of the media, in the judiciary, in politics and even in the pulpit are willing to go to defend these vile practices. Many of you realize that nearly 45 million babies have been sacrificed since the Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973. *Only* the coming government of Jesus Christ—and *our participation* in it, as the coming *kings* and *priests*, to help straighten out this entire world—will fully solve this awful situation.

We should contemplate our need to "seek first" the Kingdom of God—and our need to *pray* and *prepare*

with all our hearts for Christ's coming government. For, as the Apostle Paul was inspired to write: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2–3). It is inspiring to realize the **tremendous good** we can do as members of God's family, working under the living Jesus Christ, in straightening out this wretched world before too many more years!

Coming now to the topic of homosexuality, let us again remind ourselves *how important* it is that we teach our young people what *God* says, in order to help them sort out the confused messages coming through our media, our schools and indeed our entire society. For these perverted messages **do** have a *powerful* effect on young people—unless they are confronted with **facts** and biblical scriptures in response.

It is vital that we all remember *God's purpose* in making us male and female. Notice how He described this matter: "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Genesis 2:18). The woman was to be a "help" to her husband to make life more complete for both of them. So mankind, in the beginning, was created as "opposites"—male and female. Down through human history it has been *proven* over and over how important this balance is, and how important it is that a genuine *marriage* between a man and a woman be the basis of every decent civilization.

From the first few chapters of Genesis, it is obvious that God made *one* woman for *one* man. That was His plan, in order to give balance and fulfillment to the human race. In Malachi's inspired message, God indicates a second great *purpose* why He made man *and* woman: "But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth" (Malachi 2:15). God purposed the marriage of man *and* woman so that "godly offspring" would be produced—potential sons and daughters of the great **God** who gives us life and breath in the first place! Men "marrying" men, or women "marrying" women, could **never** produce children—thus accomplishing **Satan's** greatest *goal*, the **utter destruction** of the entire human race!

But man has always tended to "reason" around what God says. In His inspired word, God certainly warns us about this many times. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Yes, all kinds of ways "seem" right to

our modern ministers, politicians and our modern media. But—as we *must teach our young people*—the end is **death** if these ways directly contradict the laws and purposes of God!

Repeatedly, God's word *directly condemns any* form of homosexuality. "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to **death**. Their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:13). This teaching was *consistent* throughout the Old Testament—the only "word of God" available when Jesus Christ stated: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (Luke 4:4).

In the New Testament, God's word is equally plain. Describing the perverted thinking of ancient philosophers—the very men who are often used as a **standard** of wisdom and guidance in much modern thinking—Paul described their perverted reasoning regarding homosexuality. "For this reason God gave them up to **vile** passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the **penalty** of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:26–28).

Paul describes such individuals as those "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of **death**, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (v. 32). Here, God's inspired word clearly indicates that those who "approve" of these vile practices are also **guilty** in God's sight!

For, whether we *practice* wrong ways or merely *approve* of them, we are here on this earth to learn the ways and laws of the great **God** who created us—the God who made us male and female in the first place!

Paul writes: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **homosexuals**, nor **sodomites**, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–10). Some such individuals, Paul indicates, came into God's Church in his time. A number of these have come or will be coming into God's Church today. As verse 11 indicates, they will be "washed" through the name and power of Jesus Christ. Through God's Spirit within them they will be cleaned up—if they have truly

repented. But the **key** in all such matters is that genuine *repentance* must come before God's Spirit will be given, and before His great power and help becomes available to any individual!

This world's media and educational systems bombard our senses with carnality and vain human reasonings, under the influence of Satan the Devil. To counteract this, we *must* learn to think through, to study and to **teach** our fellow members and *especially our children* God's will and God's Truth in all these matters. We are now *in training* to be kings and priests in the soon-coming government of God (Revelation 5:9–10). As the coming teachers and priests of God, serving under Jesus Christ in tomorrow's world, we must carefully learn God's will, that we "may **distinguish** between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may **teach** the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses" (Leviticus 10:10–11).

At the very **end** of this age, God's true people will be protected, delivered and treated as God's **jewels** if they truly serve and obey their Creator. For God's Word tells us: "And I will *spare them* as a man spares his own son who serves him.' Then you shall again **discern** between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:17–18).

Each of us, dear brethren, must learn to properly *discern* these things **now**. And we must be willing to *saturate* ourselves with the Bible—with the "mind" of God—on all these issues. I exhort all of you to carefully *study* and *prove* God's will in all such issues as abortion, homosexuality, the use of illicit drugs, "marriage" between those of the same gender, indulgence in pornography and all the other vile practices so often promulgated in our confused society. For we as God's people, especially, must "feed" on Jesus Christ and His Truth in order to be the leaders and judges in tomorrow's world.

As Paul points out: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' *But we have the mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2:14–16).

Let us, dear brethren, fill ourselves with the "mind of Christ" so that we and *our children* and loved ones are **not** easily overthrown by the perverted propaganda spewed forth continually in this world's society! Only then will we be truly "fit" instruments to serve under Christ in His coming Kingdom. ☪

Lessons from Four Passovers

(continued from page 13)

toward these events of Jesus' final Passover.

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

In addition to fulfilling the Old Testament types that pointed to His role as our Savior, Christ also used His final Passover to teach His disciples many lessons. He taught them

the importance of serving and helping others (Luke 22:24–27, John 13:1–17). Not only were they to serve one another; they were to *love* one another with the same kind of love with which Christ Himself loved (John 15:12–13). Jesus told them about the Father's great love for them (John 16:26–27) and of the promised Comforter—the Holy Spirit—that He and the Father would send them (John 14:16–17; 16:7).

In an upper room in Jerusalem, gathered together with His disciples after sunset at the start of Abib 14, Jesus celebrated the final Passover of His human life. On that night, a transition was made from the Old Testament observance to the New Testament Passover. At the close of the meal, Jesus took some of the

unleavened bread from the table, blessed it and broke it into small pieces, and told the disciples to eat it as a symbol of His body broken for us. Then He took a cup of wine, blessed it, and told them to all drink of it, as a symbol of His blood shed for us. "Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus told them (Luke 22:19).

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

Be Christ-Minded, Not Double-Minded

(continued from page 2)

their "hearts" into their prayers. Mr. Armstrong quoted the *Moffat* version of Hosea 7:13–14, which is a prophecy describing this lack among God's people, Israel: "Though it was I who redeemed them, they have lied to me; they never put their **heart** into their prayers."

Dear brethren, many of you are deeply sincere and growing in grace and in knowledge. I am sure that God is well pleased with that—though you and I can always do better. I know I want to do better myself, and need to do better continually. But there are quite a number of you brethren who are "holding back" in your total commitment to God, and to Jesus Christ your Lord. You have not *fully surrendered* to let Christ live His life in you. And, perhaps without realizing it, you are "drifting" along with one foot in the Church and *one foot in the world!* God tells all of us: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Each of us needs to make a *conscious effort* to profoundly *surrender* even our thoughts—as well as our words and actions—to the God who made us, who died for us through Jesus Christ and "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Even though we may have been hurt or disillusioned by problems in the past—sometimes even *very real* problems in God's Church—we must "go onto perfec-

tion" and set ourselves to *go all out* to make it into God's Kingdom. That is not surrendering to *man*—or even to the Church—but to **God Himself!**

So, each of us needs to "get serious" about becoming more and more like Jesus Christ in every way, and letting Him truly *live* His life within us through the Holy Spirit. We *must*, therefore, begin fervently to *use* the "tools" of Christian living that I have described above—fervent *study*, deep *meditation*, passionate *prayer* and regular *fasting* in order to truly draw close to God. However, even then, you and I **cannot** do it on our own. As Paul explains in the very next verse of the above passage of Philippians: "For it is **God** who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (v. 13).

We cannot just say: "I'll *force* myself to pray more, to grow more and to overcome no matter what!" Our own willpower may produce a short-term change. But we human beings, of ourselves, do **not** have the spiritual strength to become like Christ—to *genuinely overcome* and to honor God in the way we should—without the *powerful* additional help of God's Holy Spirit.

We need, therefore, to truly "burn our bridges" and *passionately* seek God—and to determine to *give* our lives to God in a way that we may never have done before! It is very obvious to most of us, I am sure, that this present society is coming to an end—whether in ten years or 25 years. In any case, we *individually* need to be prepared to meet God at *any time* because we do not know the day of our death. We need to show our Creator *now* that He can

fully *rely on us* to do *exactly* as He says in ruling over our “ten cities”—or perhaps even an entire planet later on—as full members of His family.

Remember the example of ancient King Saul. He was *very humble* at first, but gradually began to take matters into his own hands and also to drift away from the wholehearted fear of God and dedication that he had expressed at the beginning of his reign. Finally, in a display of vanity and self-will, Saul refused to obey God’s *command*, given through His human servant Samuel, to *completely destroy* Amalek and its animals as well. Even when confronted with his obvious rebellion, Saul tried to “reason” with Samuel. “So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For *rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry*. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king’” (1 Samuel 15:22–23).

As all of us in God’s Church know, and should fully understand, we are now “in training” to become “kings and priests” under Jesus Christ and to judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:1–3). Do you honestly feel that Jesus Christ will put you over a city or an entire nation if you “reason” around obeying some of His laws and teachings that should be applied today? If you drift back into the world in certain areas of your life, and *refuse* to put your **trust** in God—refuse to *fully* serve Him and His people, and refuse to *fully* support His Work in preparing for the coming government of God on this earth—what *should* your reward be?

Think!

We need to face these questions honestly and directly, brethren! As Paul commands all true Christians: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). Each of us must genuinely be “transformed”—or **changed**—from the type of person we were before conversion. Each of us needs to ask ourselves: “How *much* have I really **changed** since my baptism?”

Through the years I have found that even many brethren in God’s Church have “hidden corners” of their lives. They do not want God to “put His nose” in their sex life, or in their financial affairs, or in how they run their business, or in how they train their children, or in how they deal with the outside world and

sometimes make “gods” out of their career, their society friends and connections, their family—or whatever. We know that God is aware of even the thoughts that go through our minds. He is **not** out to “catch” us—I do not mean to imply that. But He is sincerely and earnestly concerned that—even in our thoughts and motivations—we learn to fully **trust** in Him, and in His ways!

In Philippians 2:5, we are told: “Let this **mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Dear brethren, I love you and want to help you. Please, for your own eternal life’s sake, learn to be *unafraid* to fully *put your trust* in God, in *His ways*, and in the *leadership* of Jesus Christ as you know you should! Even when faced with terrible suffering and death, Jesus said, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; *nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42).

Dear brethren, we in the Living Church of God must be “on fire” for the living God, His ways and His Work! Each of us had better quit “holding back” and being afraid to make a *total commitment* to our Creator. I do not know what may be holding some of you back. Perhaps you do not know what is holding *me*—or others—back, in **total**ly giving ourselves to God as He would wish. But whatever it is, *we need to get over it!* The Creator God is looking down on earth to see which of His people are *truly surrendered* to Him as Jesus was. He wants to have totally dedicated instruments in His hands to complete His Work. He wants a people who *genuinely* realize that they are “bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), and will, therefore, *give* their lives unreservedly to God through Jesus Christ!

Let us fervently pray for one another that *we* may be instruments God can use to complete His Work! If not us, *who*? If not now, *when*? We must **never** take our eyes off the **Big Picture**—the realization that God has truly called us to become *just like He is*—full sons of God inheriting ineffable *glory* and *power* in His eternal Kingdom.

May God help each one of us fulfill our calling with **zeal**! And may He help each of us remember the awesome reward that this *total commitment*, which I have been describing, will bring. For God’s inspired Word tells us that, at the time of the resurrection, “Those who are wise shall **shine** like the brightness of the firmament, and those who *turn many to righteousness* like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).



Tahoe Singles Weekend

The fourth annual Lake Tahoe Singles Weekend was once again a rewarding and positive experience for Living Church of God singles from all over North America. The event was held just a few blocks from Heavenly Lake Tahoe ski resort, renown for its world-class skiing and fantastic Sierra views of beautiful Lake Tahoe. Thirty-three singles arrived in the afternoon of Thursday, December 25 at the Lakeland Village Resort, greeted by several feet of pristine snow.

The 15 skiers in the group hit the slopes on Friday and Sunday. From all reports, skiing conditions were excellent. The rest of the singles enjoyed talking with one another in the relaxed atmosphere at the condo, playing cards and games as well as venturing out to enjoy the fluffy white stuff. Some even tried a little snow-shoeing!

The event was organized and chaperoned by area pastors Mr. Rod McNair and Dr. Jeffrey Fall; food was prepared by their wives. Mr. McNair gave a Friday night Bible study on the opportunity and responsibility to be a Christian leader in the local congregation. Dr. Fall gave a Sunday night Bible study on proper self-confidence through walking with God, and pointed out the fallacies of building self-esteem by just focusing on the self.

December 27 Sabbath services were held in Minden, Nevada, for a combined group of 79, consisting of Tahoe singles and brethren from the Reno congregation. In the sermonette, Mr. Harold Way, a visiting elder from Sacramento, spoke about the need for Christian encouragement. In the sermon, Dr. Fall spoke about our destiny to become truly successful by walking with God every day of our life. After services, the Reno ladies put on another delicious covered-dish meal for the whole group, and the dance began at 6:00 p.m., lasting until 9:00 pm. The atmosphere of the whole day was upbeat and very positive. Everyone enjoyed an evening of music, dancing and Christian conversation. It was a fitting highlight to another year of the Tahoe singles weekend—according to some, the best yet!

—Rod McNair

Ordination

On the Sabbath of January 31, 2004, Mr. Charles Bryce, Mr. Jonathan McNair and Mr. Hugh Wilson ordained *Mr. Lascelles Fraser* of the Kingston, Jamaica, congregation as an elder in God's Church.

Birth

Dean and Carole Greer of the Spokane, WA congregation are proud to announce the birth of their granddaughter, *Erin Colleen Merritt*. She was born October 27, 2003 in Rochester, Minnesota; she weighed 7.2 pounds and was 20 inches long. Erin is Dean and Carole's first grandchild.

In Loving Memory

Gladys V. Holder of Little Rock, Arkansas, died on February 16, 2004, at the age of 83, after a brief battle with cancer. She was widowed in 1977, and is survived by three daughters and two sons. A faithful member of God's Church since 1971, Mrs. Holder was a talented and dedicated homemaker who loved gardening, needlework and her family. She was a gentle and quiet person; a joy to know and to be around. Her greatest pleasures were her family and God's Church. She truly loved to attend Sabbath services and the Holy Days. She brought words of encouragement and a good example to all who knew her. Mr. Davy Crockett conducted a graveside service on February 20, 2004.

Ronald James Smith, member of the Rolla, Missouri congregation, suffered a stroke and died on December 25, 2003, at age 68. Mr. Smith had served diligently and faithfully in the Church in a variety of ways, despite multiple health problems he had suffered for a number of years. Mr. Smith is survived by his wife Shirley, daughter Sherri Ziegler and son-in-law Fred—all members of the Rolla congregation—and by sons Dennis and David, daughter-in-law Karla and several grandchildren.

Living Youth Camp 2004:

Time to Get Ready!

Ready for a break from school? Want to see the good ol' outdoors? How about the opportunity to spend time with friends and to make new ones? What about challenging yourself to learn some new skill, do something you have never done before or travel to new territory? If so, LYC 2004 is the place to be!

Three camps are planned for this summer: Teen LYC Michigan, Pre-Teen LYC Missouri and Pre-Teen LYC Texas.

We would like to make a special appeal this year to any adults who have ever thought of helping out with one of the pre-teen camps. The continuation of these camps is very much dependent on having sufficient numbers of adults to oversee various programs, to serve as counselors and to serve in support areas. If you think you can help, *please* apply. Adult staff will be *needed* to oversee various programs and work in various support areas of the teen camp. Young adult workers, aged 19–24, are also needed. It is preferable if high school workers have previous experience as LYC campers.

You may request a teen camp application by mail from Headquarters; indicate "Attn: Living Youth Camp" on the envelope. You may request an application by phone at (704) 844-1960, ext. 235. You may also download an application at www.youth-web.org, or request one by e-mail at lyc@cogl.org.

For the pre-teen camps, please download a form from www.youth-web.org or contact the camp directors. For the Missouri camp, write to Mr. Randy Gregory, 1981 Alpine Court, Gurnee, IL 60031. You may also reach him by e-mail at rgregory@cogl.org or by phone at (847) 249-1057. For the Texas camp, write to Mr. John Ogwyn, 1218 Brooks Dr., Kilgore, TX 75662. You may also request an application by e-mail at alamogutter@yahoo.com or by phoning Mr. David Crockett at (972) 962-4474. All applications should be returned no later than April 15, 2004. Applications

received after that date may be accepted, but the likelihood of acceptance will drop. Please note that there is a non-refundable \$5 application fee for each applicant.

Teen: Northwoods Camp, Michigan, July 20*–August 3

Location: Near the Eastern Upper Peninsula town of Pickford, Michigan.

Age: Open to campers aged 13 to 17. High school workers must be 16 or older.

Cost: Tuition is \$345 for campers, \$120 for high school staff and \$40 for adult staff.

*Counselors and department heads arrive on July 18.

Pre-Teen: Camp Sherwood Forest, Missouri, June 20–27

Location: About one hour northwest of St. Louis, Missouri, in Cuivre River State Park.

Age: Open to campers aged 8 to 12. High school workers must be 15 or older.

Cost: Tuition is \$100 for the first, \$90 for the second and \$80 for the third camper from the same family. Tuition is \$40 for high school and adult staff.

Pre-Teen: Fort Parker State Park, Texas, June 6–11

Location: Near Mexia, Texas, about 90 miles south of Dallas.

Age: Open to campers aged 8 to 12. High school workers must be 15 or older.

Cost: Tuition is \$75 for the first, \$65 for the second and \$55 for the third camper from the same family. Tuition is \$20 for high school and adult staff.

—Gerald Weston