

Living Church News

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Are You a Faithful Living Sacrifice?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Somewhere on this earth, God has true servants who will really *do* His Work: preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to *all* nations, powerfully *warning* the peoples of Israel of the soon-coming Great Tribulation, and truly "feeding" the flock, strengthening God's people spiritually and preparing them for the responsibility *just ahead* of becoming kings and priests under Christ and assisting Him in *ruling* this war-torn world (Revelation 5:9–10). Where is that faithful Church? Who *are* the genuinely zealous servants of the living Jesus Christ?

We must remember Jesus' prediction that after the coming final wars, droughts, famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes, "*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake*" (Matthew 24:7–9). It is helpful for all of God's people to "get real" about this! We all should deeply respect and honor what Jesus Christ did through Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in "reviving" the Church of God and the Work in these latter days. I loved Mr. Armstrong deeply and continue to honor him—as all of my family and close friends know well. Yet it is a *fact* that most people on earth never heard of Mr. Armstrong or the Church he led. And *very few* people today, more than 21 years after his death, remember him—or have even the faintest idea about what he taught.

During Mr. Armstrong's lifetime—and also today—"all nations" certainly did not "hate" God's Church or His people. The obvious *reason* is that *they do not even know we exist!* For *all* of the little scattered groups of God's people who descended from the work of Herbert Armstrong—*all of us together*—do not even number as many as 100,000 people! Yet the Mormons claim about 12 *million*, the Seventh Day Adventists claim about 20 *million* and many lesser-known churches have at least a *few million* members—let alone the Roman Catholic church with its more than *one billion* adherents, and some of the major Protestant denominations with tens of millions.

Somewhere on this earth...?

My brethren, how did you approach our Church-wide fast last August 4? Did *you*, personally, go "all out" during that time to humble yourself and draw closer to the great God who rules the universe? Are *you* now dedicated more than ever to *giving your life* fully to the God who gives you life and breath? Are you *increasing* the time and intensity you devote to Bible *study*, to deep *meditation*, to fervent *prayer* and to **fasting**? You will be reading this article right around the biblically commanded fast, the "Day of Atonement." On that day, did we—or will we—as a Church, realize our *profound need* to

genuinely “seek God” and to go *all out* to zealously do His Work and reach out *far more powerfully* in preaching the Ezekiel warning to the peoples of Israel—*while there is time?* Will we also put our *whole hearts* into preaching the “Gospel of the Kingdom” as a “witness” to all the nations, as best we can?

While I am writing this, I just received several sobering news items describing how the President of the European Commission acknowledges that its recent “treaty” was crafted so that European Union member nations would not need to vote to approve it, since several nations voted to reject the European constitution previously proposed. Yet this “treaty” will, by their own admission, usher in a European empire! As the *Daily Mail* reported on July 11, 2007, “Gordon Brown was last night under pressure to hold a referendum on the controversial EU treaty after the president of the European Commission declared the document would usher in ‘the world’s first non-imperial empire.’”

Yes. A new “world empire” is in the making—as we have predicted for many years!

Also, news now comes that Pope Benedict XVI is beginning to impose his archconservative views on the Roman Catholic church, more than ever! Britain’s *Daily Mail* for July 11, 2007 also reported, “Pope Benedict XVI declared yesterday that Christian denominations other than his own were not true churches and their holy orders have no value. Protestant teachers immediately responded saying the claims were offensive and would hurt efforts to promote ecumenism. Roman Catholic-Anglican relations are already strained over the Church of England’s plans to ordain homosexuals and women as Bishops. The claims came in a document, from a Vatican watchdog which was approved by the Pope. It said the branches of Christianity formed after the split with Rome at the Reformation could not be called churches ‘in the proper sense’ because they broke with a succession of popes who dated back to St. Peter.”

Increasingly, the Pope has been asserting the “primacy of Peter doctrine,” and using this approach to try to claim *total authority* over Roman Catholics—and over *all* professing Christians who bend to His will! He may or may not be the “final one” described in 2 Thessalonians 2. In any case, he is certainly *preparing the way* for the final great false prophet who will work miracles and eventually *deceive* most of this entire world!

Meanwhile, the *Jerusalem Post* reports that the Israeli air force is practicing long-range bombing maneuvers in preparation for a strike against Iran (*JPost.com*, June 21, 2007). Israel’s military is also bracing for confrontation as early as this summer with one of many enemies: Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, World Jihad, or Syria (*JPost.com*, June 25, 2007). Richard Bolton, former U.S. Ambassador to the UN, has simultaneously been pushing the U.S. to “act now” to relieve Iran of its nuclear capability (*JPost.com*, June 27, 2007).

Perhaps even by the time you read this, Israel and America will *already* have “cooperated” in an aerial attack on Iran’s nuclear installations—setting off shock waves through the entire Middle East! Regardless of the exact timing, events of this type will increasingly put America and its allies against the more than a bil-

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Are You Willing to Suffer for Jesus Christ?

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

Brethren, with the entire panorama of prophetic events surging ahead more than ever, I deeply feel that I should once again give you “proper warning” about what to expect in the years ahead. We often emphasize the *blessings* and the *opportunities* we will surely have in God’s Work—and, later on, in Tomorrow’s World. Our reward will be *awesome*. However, it is *very clear* in the New Testament that many true Christians *will be persecuted—even before* the formal Tribulation begins. So it is imperative that you understand this, pray about this, and are not “shocked” or disillusioned if the world begins to *savagely turn on us* at some point before the end of our ministry!

After describing many of the major catastrophes that will strike even before the Tribulation, Jesus Christ stated, “All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another” (Matthew 24:8–10).

May God help *all* of us to draw truly close to Him in fervent prayer and fasting, and thereby receive the spiritual *faith* and *strength* to go through the trials ahead. Our eternal reward depends on this! For a time of trial and testing is beginning to come upon the United States in a

way it has probably never experienced before. Our British and Israeli allies, as well as other peace-loving peoples, have not escaped and will not escape the terrorists’ wrath.

It is obvious that mankind cannot solve the problems of human nature—vanity, jealousy, lust and greed. It seems the U.S. is destined to continue as the most visible target for cowardly terrorist attacks, since it is now—almost by default—the enforcer of whatever world peace and stability there is. But what about *spiritual* Israel (cf. Galatians 6:16)—the true Church of God? Will we somehow escape all the madness and be “whisked off to safety” with nary a scratch or a bruise?

No, indeed!

Even apart from the true Church, professing Christians around the world are suffering increased persecution. News reports tell us of more and more horrifying instances of their being tortured, killed, raped or even sold into slavery in many non-Christian lands.

And now there is a movement in many European countries to crack down on virtually all religious groups that are not in the “mainstream.” These groups include Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and others. Clearly, as the Living Church of God gains worldwide recognition and prominence for doing the Work of God, we too will be restricted—maybe banned!—and eventually *persecuted* in many nations around the world.

Although Christ’s *zealous* and *faithful* servants will be taken to a

Place of Safety at the very end of this age (Luke 21:36; Revelation 12:14), Scripture makes it quite clear that we *all* will have trials, tests and at least some degree of *real persecution* before this deliverance. For God inspired the Apostle Paul to warn us, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:12–13).

In Mark’s account of the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus cautions us, “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. **But he who endures to the end shall be saved**” (Mark 13:9–13).

Therefore, we should thoroughly *prove* to ourselves *what* we believe and *why*. Then, we will be able—through God’s Holy Spirit—to exercise the *faith* and the *courage* to “endure to the end!” As prophesied world events increasingly hurtle toward the traumatic developments

Editor’s Note: Although this issue is dated September-December 2007, we are still publishing the *Living Church News* at two-month intervals. Your next issue—January-February 2008—should arrive before the end of 2007. This re-dating will help us better accommodate bulk mail delivery and improve our scheduling of timely material such as Holy Day articles.

at the end of this age, I encourage all of you to “count the cost” and to be **sure** of what you believe. Truly, we all will need to “stand tall” against the storms of criticism, hatred and persecution that Satan will hurl at us, both from within and from without. For Satan will attempt to “break” us. He and his untold legions of demon spirits (Ephesians 6:11–12) will try to divide us, pitting brother against brother, even in God’s Church! He will attempt to discourage us profoundly, through repeated attacks, accusations and persecution. Eventually, after his “frontal assault” on God fails, Satan will “come down to you, having **great wrath**, *because he knows that he has a short time*” (Revelation 12:12).

Will you be ready? The time for us to be bickering, competing and accusing one another must quickly come to a close, brethren! For we have a **far greater** enemy in the “prince of darkness” than many of us may fully realize. And we will need all the love, encouragement and support of our brethren that we can possibly have during the trials ahead.

As British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said in the dark days of the London Blitz during World War II, “*if it is to be a war of nerves, let’s make sure our nerves are strong!*”

A few years ago, in Dr. James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family* magazine, there appeared a very moving article by Mr. Charles Carroll, who lived and studied in Berlin just as the Holocaust was beginning. Carroll described how the Jewish family he was rooming with had cyanide available in case they were captured and sent to the death camps. Behind each of the glass panels on their entrance door they had placed steel plates—probably to give them enough time to flee through some other exit.

Carroll describes how—imperfect as they were—those who believed in

Christ made up the primary backbone of the resistance against Hitler. At that time, and in that political climate, a great deal of moral and physical courage was required. “People minimize that today,” he says.

Carroll cites a letter from Helmut von Moltke, grandnephew of the famous 19th-century Prussian field marshal of the same name. He wrote these words to his wife just before he was to be executed by the Nazis: “I was not being tried because of an attempt on Hitler’s life, which I

And we must *strengthen ourselves* and be willing to go through every trial and test necessary—**give our lives**, if need be, in the service of our Savior Jesus Christ, just as surely as He *literally* laid down His life for us!

The time for “half-hearted” Christians who “play Church” is over! We must truly seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. And we must want to be in God’s Kingdom so much that we can “taste” it. Therefore, we must be willing to *totally surrender* the self,

The time for “half-hearted” Christians who “play Church” is over! We must truly seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. And we must want to be in God’s Kingdom so much that we can “taste” it.

did not make, nor because I was a great land owner, nor because I was of the nobility, but because I was first and foremost a Christian.”

Where will you and I stand when this kind of terror directly faces us and our families? We will never resort to cyanide as these persecuted Jews were ready to do; we know we can turn to our Savior, if we are walking with God and staying close to Him always.

Again, dear brethren, I beseech you in Christ’s name to thoroughly **prove** what you believe and why. Genuinely **study** your Bible regularly. Fully grasp the fact that we are **restoring** the true faith of God and following the direct teaching and examples of Jesus Christ and His apostles! Then you will better understand the **reality** of Almighty God and His Word as the trials and persecution of God’s people intensify in the years to come!

Remember, God has promised that He will **never** leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). But we must do *our part* to seek Him and walk with Him (Jeremiah 29:13).

lose (if need be) part or all of our families, friendships and physical possessions, and literally “forsake all” to gain eternal life in the glorified Family of God. As Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26).

Let us *daily* give our lives to God as *living sacrifices*. And let us so walk with Him and with Christ in **living faith** that at the end of our physical lives—*whenever* or *however* that may be—we may say what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7–8: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” ☞

Are You a Peacemaker?

Do you understand the Gospel of Peace?

By Douglas S. Winnail

Today we live in a world of increasing violence, growing terrorist activity, and scattered blood-soaked wars threatening to engulf entire regions of the planet. Many people around the globe live in fear, every day—and virtually every moment—of their lives. More and more, news reports remind us of Jesus’ prophecy that at the end of the age, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... for nation [ethnic group] will rise against nation [ethnic group], and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:6, 7). Scripture indicates that the last days of this age will be marked by an increase in lawlessness, hatred and callous disregard for human life (Matthew 24:9–12).

However, there is “good news” just beyond the present strife! Jesus said that He would return to set up the Kingdom of God at a time when the “nations were angry”—actively fighting each other (Revelation 11:18). He promised to reward His disciples with the opportunity to reign under His direction on this earth (Revelation 5:10).

Jesus Christ and the saints will soon establish a world-ruling government in Jerusalem, which will bring peace to the entire planet (Isaiah 9:6–7). Nations will be *taught* the way to peace. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war any more*” (Isaiah 2:2–4).

These are not just pleasant platitudes; they are prophecies of what will happen when Jesus Christ returns to this earth in the years just ahead! Our job in the Kingdom of God will be to bring peace to this world, and to show all of mankind the way to peace. This is what the “gospel of peace” is about (Ephesians 6:15). This is why Jesus told His disciples, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). This is our future—if we learn the way that leads to peace!

Questions to Consider

If you hope to be part of the government of God and to help bring peace to this strife-torn planet, you need to ask yourself some very important questions. Are *you* a peacemaker? Are you growing in that capacity? Are you learning how to promote peace between individuals—and, eventually, nations?

Ask yourself: “How good am I at ‘pouring oil’ on troubled waters?” Are you able to “smooth” ruffled feathers when people around you become upset? Or do

your words and deeds stir things up even more, like pouring gasoline on smoldering embers?

Watching world events, it is obvious that the leaders of this world have not been able to achieve the peace that nearly everyone desires. But do *you* know how to become a peacemaker? Do you recognize the skills that are needed to promote peaceful relationships? Can you identify the principles from Scripture that can help you become an effective peacemaker—among your family and friends today, and for the whole world in the Kingdom of God? Although many may say they want peace, only a very few understand what the Bible reveals about *the way to real peace*.

The Missing Key

In the last century, feuding governments fought two World Wars and countless minor wars, in the hope of establishing peace. The 20th century also saw the establishment of two transnational organizations—the League of Nations and the United Nations—which were created in the hope of bringing peace to this earth. But all those efforts *failed* to eliminate war, and did not bring lasting peace.

The Bible foretold this failure long ago. The Old Testament prophets looked ahead to the end of the age, and foresaw a time when misguided leaders would be talking about peace, negotiating for peace and praying for peace, “saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). The prophet Isaiah wrote of a time when the “ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly” upon realizing that all their efforts have failed (Isaiah 33:7). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul prophesied, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money... disobedient to parents... unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1–4). Prophecy shows us that the days just ahead of us will grow worse, not better—and for specific reasons!

The Bible reveals *why* all the efforts of brilliant and well-meaning people have been unable to establish lasting peace between individuals—or nations. The prophet Isaiah explains: “**The way of peace they have not known**, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace” (Isaiah 59:8). This is the sad lesson of history. The Colt 45 revolver, called the Peacemaker, never brought lasting peace to the American West. Neville Chamberlain

promised “peace in our time” to the British people, but World War II followed soon afterward. The policy of “peace through strength” saw the U.S. and the Soviet Union stockpiling nuclear weapons and pursuing “mutually assured destruction”—which brought terror, not real peace, to millions of citizens of the rival superpowers. Countless “peace plans” for the Middle East have been offered, but no amount of shuttle diplomacy and dialogue has been able to settle the region’s age-old religious and political disputes. Nations have built more prisons and hired more police, but this has not ended interpersonal violence. In every sphere of life, the best human efforts to establish peace between individuals, or between nations, have simply not worked!

However, God reveals in the Bible a *fundamental key* about the way to lasting peace. Long ago, David wrote, “**Great peace have those who love Your law**, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165). David understood powerful and practical principles in Scripture that point the way to real peace. He wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). David urged his readers to “depart from evil, and do good; *seek peace, and pursue it*” (Psalm 34:14).

Seeing David’s perspective, it should be no surprise why he will reign as king over the twelve tribes of Israel in the coming Kingdom of God (Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5). But what are some of the peacemaking principles known to David—and to others, schooled in the way of peace, who have developed the skills that God reveals in Scripture?

The Path to Peace

When God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, He pointed them toward the path that leads to peace. “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments... I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid... and the sword will not go through your land” (Leviticus 26:3–6). Moses’ words show how obeying God’s law will lead to peace. If we want to be peacemakers, we must follow God’s instructions—in every area of our lives.

Solomon wrote down many practical principles that promote peace and reduce the risk of conflict. He explained that contention is often the result of pride. This means that if we can recognize and eliminate pride, arguments and quarrels will cease (Proverbs 13:10). Solomon teaches us that harsh words (such as calling someone an idiot, or leveling accusations) stir up hatred, but “a soft [kindly, diplomatic] answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). He explains that peacemakers do not spread gossip or rumors or say derogatory things about others (Proverbs 16:27–28). Instead, they strive to remain calm

and objective, and are slow to become stirred up (Proverbs 16:32). Peacemakers overlook and forgive insults, and attempt to avoid arguments—or stop them before they start (Proverbs 17:9, 14)—because they understand that only “fools” start arguments and spread rumors (Proverbs 18:6–8).

Solomon also understood that jumping to conclusions before hearing from both sides in a conflict will not bring peace; it will only aggravate problems (Proverbs 18:13, 17). He also recognized that constantly harping and nagging about an issue is irritating, and undermines peaceful relationships (Proverbs 27:15–16). Solomon understood that angry people (who are often proud, as well as angry) tend to stir up strife involving other people (Proverbs 29:22–23). This is one reason for the common advice to “count to ten” (or 20 or 100!) before responding to someone in an emotional way. Peacemakers *understand* and *use* these principles.

In the New Testament, we see how Jesus Christ and His apostles also emphasized peace-promoting principles. Jesus advised His disciples to “turn the other cheek,” and to go the extra mile in forgiving those who irritate them, instead of trying to figure out how to “get even” (Matthew 5:38–48; 6:12–15). He also warned His disciples not to “sit in judgment of others,” but instead to focus on putting their own lives in order (Matthew 7:1–5). Jesus explained that when you have disputes with your brothers (or sisters), you should *go to them first* and humbly attempt to straighten out the situation, instead of telling others about the problem (Matthew 18:15–20). Jesus also pointed out that self-seeking—trying to get ahead of others—is a source of strife, and is not conducive to peaceful interpersonal relationships (Matthew 20:20–28).

The Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to be patient, to avoid showing favoritism and to give up the desire to “get even” with others. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18–21; see also Hebrews 12:14). James urges us, as Christians, to be careful how we use our tongues. We are to avoid boasting and bitterness. We should be humble, approachable and willing to listen, and we should avoid partiality. These are vital strategies, which those who make peace will use to promote peace (James 3:1–18).

The qualities listed in Scripture as promoting peace are actually fruits of the Holy Spirit, which we as Christians must strive to develop. Paul explains that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are “love, joy, *peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, longsuffering, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). At baptism, we repented of our old ways and made a commitment to walk in Jesus Christ’s footsteps and obey His instructions. As we grow,

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“I Believe—Help My Unbelief!”

By Dibar K. Apartian

Do you know the difference between real Christian conviction and mere belief? Whether you stay in God’s Church may depend on your answer!

At the time of his baptism, George (not his real name) said he would never leave God’s Church. He would always keep close to God and walk with Him, no matter what happened.

George was a student at Ambassador College. He had waited until his senior year to be baptized, because he wanted to be sure of himself.

Within a decade, George was gone.

Why? What caused him to turn away from the truth? What made him become an unbeliever? And how can you be sure that you will not follow his bad example?

Are you convinced of your beliefs?

One day the father of a sick boy came to Christ and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid” (Mark 9:17–18). The man further stated that Christ’s disciples had been unable to heal the boy.

“How long has this been happening to him?” asked Christ. The father answered, “From childhood... if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us” (vv. 21–22).

A pathetic cry from the father, beseeching Christ’s help for his son! The man was not sure whether Christ would—or could—do anything. But when he heard that “all things are possible” with God, he immediately cried out and said, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief” (vv. 23–24).

Do you understand the true meaning of that request? The father wanted to believe, but needed help

to dissipate his doubts. He needed help to overcome his unbelief.

Every one of us at times has some doubts. We want to believe—we think we believe—but we are not totally convinced.

If, for instance, you were asked, “Do you believe this is God’s Church?” your answer would certainly be, “Yes, I do.”

But would you give the same positive answer if you were asked, “Are you totally convinced of it?”

To be totally convinced, you must have overcome all of your doubts once and for all. If those who have left the Church had been totally convinced that this is God’s Church, they would have never left it.

George, the student at Ambassador College, merely believed. He was not totally convinced. That is why he is no longer with us.

There is a big difference between believing and being convinced. Once you are convinced, you have passed the point of no return. You can never go back. You have overcome all your arguments and doubts.

Requires Conviction

All of us in God’s Church need more conviction, not just simple belief. The difference between one who stays in the Church and one who leaves is the difference between believing with conviction and believing without conviction.

The Bible defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

A major part of faith is conviction, a quality some in God’s Church

lack today. Did you know that the words *convicted*, *convinced*, and even *refute* are derived from the same root?

In Acts 18, we learn that Apollos, a Jew, used the Old Testament to prove to his own people that Christ was the Messiah. Eloquent in speech and well versed in the Scriptures, “he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John” (v. 25).

Why was Apollos able to convince the people? The fact that he himself was totally convinced of his beliefs helped considerably, “for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (v. 28).

Can you do that? Can you “refute” someone with the Scriptures, as Apollos did, showing that Jesus is the Christ? You should be able to if you are totally convinced of this truth, and if you are conquered by the Spirit of God.

Notice the Bible’s simple, beautiful description of Abraham’s conviction: “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Romans 4:20–21).

This is faith with conviction. It opens all doors and helps you resist all temptations. It overcomes all feelings of discouragement or defeat. If you have this sort of conviction you can be sure you will always remain in God’s Church.

Faith in Action

Do you sometimes take the truth for granted? You should not! Make

the effort to check up on things, to prove and understand them.

Conviction requires action. It requires effort. Deepening your conviction requires great effort. You have to work harder, push harder, study and pray more.

Sadly, some in God's Church are not doing that. And their belief has no conviction!

One day four men brought a paralytic to Christ. But they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd around Him.

The men knew—they were convinced—that if Christ saw the paralytic He would heal him. Consequently, their task was to find a way to get near Him. They were determined to do their part.

“And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying” (Mark 2:4).

Imagine—they came right through the roof! Their faith stirred them to action. Removing the roof was not an easy task. It took ingenuity and effort, but they succeeded.

Christ marveled and said, “Son, your sins are forgiven you” (v. 5). And the man was healed.

Can you neglect your responsibility and honestly expect God to do everything for you? Conviction requires much more than folding your arms and passively waiting for something to happen.

The Bible also relates the story of a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for 12 years. She “came from behind [Christ] and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well’” (Matthew 9:20–21). Notice! The woman was convinced in her mind that if she touched Christ's garment she would be made well. She found her way through the crowd to Christ and touched Him.

Christ turned and said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well” (v. 22). And she was healed.

Is your faith without conviction—without action?

God's Church today is on the right track. But each one of us needs conviction to be able to remain on the right track. It is high time we all realize this! Faith requires conviction and action!

Jesus gave us an example in everything—in attitude, conviction and love. He knew why He was on earth. He was totally convinced of His mission and what His Father expected of Him. We, too, must be convinced of our calling and of our mission. The conviction of Christ must be in us through God's Holy Spirit.

A Positive Attitude

Look how Christ prayed before Lazarus was brought back to life. He lifted His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me” (John 11:41).

What a positive way to start a prayer! That is total conviction! Before asking anything of God, Christ stated, “I thank You that You have heard Me.”

How did Christ know God heard Him? Because of His conviction: “I know that You always hear Me” (v. 42). Then Christ added, “I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me”

That was Christ's whole prayer. The only thing left for Him to do was to order Lazarus to come forth. And Lazarus came forth.

If you ever heard Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's prayer when he anointed someone, you knew what prayer with conviction was. Humbly, but boldly and forcefully, Mr. Armstrong would claim God's promise of healing,

reminding God that when we repent of our sins and turn to Him in faith, He promises to heal us. We all need this type of conviction in our prayers.

Some Do Not Want To Be Convinced

Some people pass by the truth without noticing it. Others stumble onto it. Still others learn something about the truth but are not willing to be convinced by it, for fear or having to change their way of life!

King Agrippa was in that last group. He did not want to be convinced. He felt he had no need of conversion.

When Festus asserted that the Apostle Paul's great learning had driven him mad, Paul answered: “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:25–26).

Then Paul asked: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe” (v. 27).

Yes, indeed, King Agrippa believed, but was not willing to be convinced. “You almost persuade me to become a Christian,” he said (v. 28). But he resisted.

He was happy to be a king, happy to live the way he did. No need for him to change anything—certainly not to become a Christian, which would have meant giving up many things in his life, turning away from lust and observing the teachings of the Bible. All that was too much to ask of King Agrippa.

Could this be your attitude? Do you sometimes deceive yourself, hoping God will “understand” when you know you are neglecting your part? Do you close your mind to certain aspects of the truth that would

require changing things in your life that you do not want to change?

James wrote that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

The “works” mentioned in this verse refer to your part in faith. These “works” may require changing your habits, your way of thinking and living. It may mean, for you, praying more, studying more or being a better example.

If you are not fulfilling your part, you cannot be convinced that God will answer your prayers. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble” (v. 19). Yes, even demons believe, but they are not convinced to obey God!

The disciples of Christ, before their conversion, were not really convinced. They only “believed” in Christ. Think of it! After spending three-and-a-half years with Jesus, after hearing Him teach day and night, they still had doubts in their minds. They were not totally convinced of the truth. They lacked God’s Spirit. They could go no farther than the limits imposed by their human minds.

The disciples were indignant when Christ told them that soon they would all fall away because of Him, and that “the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matthew 26:31).

Peter objected vehemently to this pronouncement. “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble,” Peter assured Christ (v. 33).

Peter was sure of himself, but he was not fully convinced, even though he thought he was! He believed with his carnal mind, without having the spiritual strength to back his belief.

Christ told him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (v. 34).

Once again, Peter did not agree with that statement. He would prove his Master wrong! “Even if I have to

die with You, I will not deny You,” he answered (v. 35). Ironically, all of the disciples said the same thing to Christ. Nevertheless, when the multitude came to accost Jesus, they all “forsook him and fled” (v. 56).

However, the disciples’ attitudes totally changed after their conversion. They became men of courage, faith and conviction after receiving the Holy Spirit!

Today, in the Church of God, we too have received this Spirit of faith and courage and conviction. We must allow it to convince us. Sadly, some are not using God’s Spirit to help them grow in conviction.

Do you perhaps believe that if you personally witnessed a great miracle you would be convinced? Humans are prone to forget—even a miracle!

You have read many times the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man saw what was happening to him, he cried out for help for the other members of his family: “I beg you therefore, father [Abraham], that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27–28).

Abraham answered, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” (v. 29). The rich man wanted a miracle, hoping it would help his five brothers to be convinced. “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent” (v. 30).

That is human reasoning! That is what the world wants to believe. Christians, today, think they would repent and believe if they saw Christ return with power and glory! But they are mistaken. Miracles by themselves cannot convince anyone permanently.

As Abraham said, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (v. 31).

Likewise, if you cannot be convinced with what is already revealed

in the Bible, no miracle can ever convince you! Actually, conviction requires that you do something—not that a miracle or anything else be done for you.

The Miracle of Your Calling

The greatest miracle in your life took place when God called you and gave you His Spirit after baptism.

As John wrote, “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent” (Revelation 3:3).

Yes, indeed, remember the way you were called, how it all happened, the miracle of being among the very few God is now calling!

Read and study the Bible with this in mind. Learn how the men of God fought, how they endeavored to overcome their doubts and difficulties.

Yet, in the final analysis, it was always God who led them to victory. They did not win their battles—God did. He wins all of our battles. But we must be convinced of it and do our part—fulfill our obligations.

If you are completely convinced and convicted of God’s truth, nothing can make you turn away from God. You will not have any doubt that you are in God’s Church and that Christ is the Head of the Church. You can trust Him implicitly!

As Paul wrote: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35–39).

This is full conviction. It is living faith! 

God and the “Three ‘O’s”

By Wallace G. Smith

The e-mail I received from a prospective Church member grabbed my attention from its very first sentence: “I really am at a loss for where to start—bewildered doesn’t even begin to express my state of mind at this moment!” The writer went on to describe how he had heard something at services that caused him to question what the Living Church of God teaches about one of the three attributes of God most widely accepted in the world: that He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. Actually, it was the last of these three that began the discussion, but bringing up any one of the “Big ‘O’s” tends to raise the other two as well.

Where does the Church stand? Is God omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient? In answering such questions, we should *always* begin with *another* question: “What does the **Bible** teach on these matters?” If our beliefs are not rooted in God’s inspired word, they are not beliefs worth having!

Where Should We Focus?

Before we begin *any* discussion of God’s attributes, we should understand where God *Himself* wants us to focus our attention. Of course, it is important to know God. Jesus Christ told us, “this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). But how can we come to know God?

Can we know God through scientific inquiry? After all, the Apostle Paul tells us that we can benefit by meditating on the world around us and reflecting on what such a creation reveals about its Creator. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...” (Romans 1:20). Yes, human beings can exercise their intellect to determine that God exists; they can know something *about* Him. But can they truly come to *know* God—to know Him in the way that leads to eternal life—simply by examining His creation?

Similarly, can we arrive at a knowledge of God through the faculties of human reason and logic? After all, God—the Creator and Lawgiver—is the author of reason and logic. He invites us: “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18). Are human reason and logic a pathway to knowing God in the way Jesus meant—a way that leads to eternal life?

The answer, on both counts, is: “No!” As Paul explains: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways *past finding out!*” (Romans 11:33). Yes, human intellect can know something *about* God, but human beings cannot truly come to *know God* through the use of our logical mind and our human wisdom: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, *the world through wisdom did not know God*, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:20–21).

The godless musings of so many scientists, theologians and philosophers throughout history have been limited in what they can accomplish, because they do not have access to spiritual truths! Such matters are “spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14), and are not accessible to the natural, carnal mind apart from God’s Spirit.

The truth is that to really *know* God, one must *obey* Him! With God’s Spirit, we *can* know and obey Him! But John warns us plainly: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3–4). Why is the connection between obedience and knowing God so important? *Because God wants us to know His character, so we might develop it ourselves!*

We are here on earth for a *purpose!* We are here to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into the task of serving Christ and submitting to His rule in our lives. We are here to let Him live His life in us (Galatians 2:20), and develop His own mind in us (Philippians 2:5). We are here to become perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). God even expected this of ancient Israel (Leviticus 11:45) and of Abraham (Genesis 17:1). So, God wants our focus to be on the vital question: “What is God’s character? What is He like, so I may strive to be the same?”

God has given us the answers to many deep philosophical questions, including the question of His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. Understanding these aspects of God’s nature can help us grow. But unless we build a strong foundation based on our obedience to the God we seek to know, we can “miss the boat” if we jump into the realms of logic and philosophy, and we will miss out on the *chief matters* God wants us to know—the things we *need* to know!

Are These Questions Important?

As Christians, we understand that as we strive to *know God*, our focus should be on the character and righteousness of the Father and His Son—**on walking in God’s law and commandments**. But is it important to know whether God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient? What do those words even mean? Should we even care?

Yes, we should care! The Bible tells us much about these topics, and we should all want to know more about God’s word. As followers of Christ, we must also be “ready always to give an answer, to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15, KJV). If someone asked you about God’s omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, could you give the Bible’s answers? Are you grounded in the truth of what Scripture says about these attributes of God, so that you can recognize those deceivers who may arrive with “philosophical” distortions of God’s word, as they have done before? You need to be ready!

So, the question of whether God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient *should* be answered. However, as with *all* questions related to God and the things of God, we should answer it not with our human reasoning, but with His word—the Bible!

Do not be fooled. Theologians and philosophers throw those three “omni” words around as if they all agree as to what they mean, **but in fact they do not agree**. Scholars define the words based on their own human “wisdom” and reasoning, then try to force the God of the Bible to fit their humanly devised descriptions. As we have already seen, that is *not* how God tells us to understand Him! Rather, we need to let God’s perfect word—which cannot be broken (John 10:35)—tell us what He is like.

Is God Omnipotent?

This is, perhaps, the easiest of the three to answer: **Yes, God is omnipotent!** There is even a verse that, in the *King James Version* and *New King James Version*, uses this very word: “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6).

The Greek word translated as “Omnipotent” here is *pantokrator*, meaning “All-ruling” or (as it is more frequently translated) “Almighty.” When we say God is “Almighty,” we are stating our belief in His authority and rulership over all creation, and the Bible is firm in declaring this fact. Even though Satan is now the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), it belongs to him only because Almighty God has granted it to Him: “And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority [over all the kingdoms of this

world] I will give You, and their glory; for *this has been delivered to me*, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6).

It is God who ultimately reigns in the universe, and all legitimate authority must derive from Him. If we let Scripture tell us of God’s authority, we must agree that He has all authority to do all His pleasure (Isaiah 46:10–11), and to see to the fulfillment of His plans without fail. If we accept the Scriptural definition of “almighty”—and we must accept no other!—we can rightly call God omnipotent. Indeed, Christ says clearly that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

However, if we were to insist that *omnipotent* meant God could do anything and everything at all, we would need to reject that description, because His word says He cannot! For example, God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), and He “cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). The Bible clearly shows that God cannot act contrary to His nature. But do these “cannots” mean He is not omnipotent—not almighty? Not if we let *Scripture* define its own terms!

Is God Omnipresent?

Correctly understood, the question of God’s omnipotence has historically caused little controversy. The term *omnipresent*, however, has caused more trouble. Basically, being *omnipresent* means being present everywhere at the same time. Can this term be applied to God? What does Scripture tell us?

Ask yourself: is there any physical location in this universe where we can hide from the presence of God? The answer, according to Scripture, is a resounding “No!” In fact, King David posed this question directly, asking: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or *where can I flee from Your presence?* If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell [the grave], behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:7–10).

David answers the question beautifully: it is futile to search for a place to hide from the presence of God (and it is unwise to try—just ask Jonah!). In this sense, God’s infallible word shows that He is omnipresent—within His vast creation, there is no place where you can hide from His presence.

Still, we must be careful with our terms! Many have tried to twist God’s omnipresence to portray Him as some kind of shapeless “blob”—even though the Bible *clearly* shows that God has a body and a shape—and it is a shape like ours! Consider Genesis 1:26, which tells us that man is made in God’s *image* and *likeness*—words that *do* convey a sense of *shape*. We do *not* use human philosophies to avoid the clear

statements of Scripture! Consider, as well, the passage in which God says *unambiguously* that He has a face, a hand and a back (Exodus 33:18–23)! The only way to understand this passage from Exodus *without making a mockery of God's word* is to agree that God has a shape and a body!

So, how is God “everywhere”? We already read the answer, in David's words: “Where can I go from **your Spirit?**” (Psalm 139:7). It is by their *Spirit* that the Father and the glorified Christ have complete access to their creation! Through His Spirit, God's reach extends to every nook and cranny of the universe, and there is—as David wrote—no place to flee from His presence. Yet He *still* retains a shape—a body—ruling in glory from His throne in heaven. It is *from there* that “His eyes behold” the sons of men (Psalm 11:4).

We must also note that although God is omnipresent through His Spirit, we *can* become separated from Him. In fact, we are warned, “your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus Christ experienced this horrible separation during His crucifixion, when on our behalf He took upon Himself the full penalty of our sins (cf. Mark 15:34; Isaiah 53:4–5).

The world's scholars and theologians often have a wrong idea about God's omnipresence. But if we let God's flawless word teach us what God's omnipresence truly means, our footing is made sure.

Is God Omniscient?

Having considered God's omnipotence and His omnipresence, we can address the most troublesome of the “Three ‘O's”—His *omniscience*. Is God omniscient?

Philosophers and theologians have debated this question over the millennia. Were you to read what the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says about God's omniscience, you would find more philosophical gobbledegook than you may have seen in your entire life. So, before we determine whether or not God is omniscient, we need to recognize that the world has some weird and conflicting ideas about what this word means. Why is there so much confusion?

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary (2006) offers this definition of *omniscient*: “having complete or unlimited knowledge, awareness, or understanding; perceiving all things.” That is quite a mouthful; what does it mean to have “complete or unlimited knowledge”? Scholars *disagree* about what it means, but if we let the lamp of God's word light our path and guide our steps (Psalm 119:105), we can know the truth of the matter.

The Bible tells us that God *does* perceive all things, which means that no fact can be hidden from His knowl-

edge. As King David recognized: “Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You” (Psalm 139:12). God sees all things, and nothing can be hidden from His knowledge—not even the secret intentions of the heart (Psalm 44:21). In fact, *He* understands our *own* intentions better than we do (cf. Jeremiah 17:9–10; Hebrews 4:12)! As Paul explains, “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

Human beings perceive through the senses, but there are limits to what the senses let us perceive and understand. But God's senses are *not* limited like ours! His Spirit searches all things (1 Corinthians 2:10), and nothing is beyond God's ability to perceive it. In this sense, He is omniscient. Nothing can escape His gaze and His knowledge. If it can be known, He knows it!

But if we are to use the word *omniscient* to describe our Father and His glorified Son, it *cannot* mean that God knows our every choice before we make it in every circumstance, because Scripture tells us otherwise! For example, the Bible shows that when God gave Abraham the supreme test of sacrificing his son Isaac, He did not know until that moment whether Abraham would choose to obey. Upon seeing his choice, He told Abraham: “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for *now I know* that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). This was one of the most crucial points in the history of faith and in the plan of God! It was a challenge so *intense*, and involving such *faith*, that God did not know what choice Abraham would make.

Most of the choices we make each day may be rather predictable. Parents with young children can see this for themselves. If a parent can often predict a young child's choices, how much more can the One who sees all—even the intent of our heart, which we sometimes do not know ourselves—predict our choices? Yet the Bible reveals that God does arrange circumstances to challenge our character—to help us to *grow*—where the outcome is *not* so predictable. When we choose, we *participate* with God in the creation of our character. *We have a role to play in God's creation of His character within us, as He prepares us to become future members of His Family!* We should not allow vain philosophy to rob us of this truth.

It is not that God cannot determine the future. He can, and He does! We read: “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the begin-

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Living University: Recapturing True Values

On August 15, a little less than 60 years after Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong started the new Ambassador College in 1947 with an initial student body of four on site, Living University opened its virtual doors to more than 210 students enrolled online.

Students from 18 countries have signed up for courses. Although the instructors and the University's computer equipment reside in the United States, the first semester's students are from Australia, Barbados, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, El Salvador, Germany, Ghana, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, the United Kingdom and Zambia, as well as the U.S.—all able to participate in the online distance learning program and interact with each other though they are thousands of miles apart.

As Dr. Roderick C. Meredith wrote in his March 2007 co-worker letter: "This is an exciting development! It should genuinely strengthen God's people and God's Work. It should help prepare more leaders for the future of God's Work as it grows. Your prayers are solicited that God will guide and bless this exciting endeavor."

Satan has tried to block the progress of Living University in various ways, but God has delivered one blessing after another to help the University move forward. Even a series of early software problems, caused by a vendor's failure to meet promised specifications, turned into a wonderful opportunity, when the Headquarters Information Technology staff were able to modify a widely used open-source course delivery system for the University's needs. Instead of having to rely on an expensive propri-

etary solution, course management can now be adapted far more easily to Living University's unique needs.

For the fall semester, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, who started at Ambassador College 58 years ago, is teaching the Living University class THL 135, "The Life, Ministry and Teachings of Jesus." His course has 134 students enrolled. There are currently 60 students enrolled in THL 200, "Principles of Christian Living," taught by Dr. Douglas S. Winnail. Mr. Richard Ames is presenting THL 332, "The Biblical Text," to 57 students.

Though there are more than 50 Living Church of God elders, deacons and deaconesses enrolled in Living University courses, the majority of students are Church members with widely varying backgrounds—some with previous degrees, others with little or no previous exposure to college-level coursework. What they all share, of course, is a zeal to deepen their understanding of God's Truth.

If you are thinking about taking courses in the spring semester, there is still time to register and get ready. Spring semester courses begin on Wednesday, January 16; registration for spring courses ends on Friday, January 18.

Three courses will be offered in the spring:

- THL 136:
Acts and the Writings of Paul
- THL 250:
Introduction to Biblical Doctrines
- THL 326:
Christian Leadership

These are the final three courses in the one-year sequence leading to a Certificate in New Testament Studies. However, students do not need to be pursuing the Certificate to enroll in one or more of the courses.

Students should realize that while Living University is a distance-learning institution, it is not offering "self-paced" coursework. Those who enroll should be prepared to complete course assignments on schedule, and should be familiar enough with computers that they can participate in online discussion forums comfortably. The course material is rigorous, but rewarding.

Basic typing proficiency is key for success in the Living University distance-learning format. Some potential students, instead of jumping right in to take a Living University course, are spending several weeks brushing up on their typing skills, so that when they later decide to enroll, they will be able to "hit the ground running" and not feel limited by inadequate typing skills.

As Dr. Meredith wrote last March: "This will be an outstanding opportunity for thousands of young people—and for some of you 'older' ones—to obtain more 'in-depth' training in theology and in the liberal arts than most of you have ever had. Many of you know that I, personally, was used by Christ to teach more theology classes at Ambassador College than any other man. Along the way, I was blessed in obtaining a doctorate in Theology from Ambassador College. I thank God for those opportunities which I did not deserve, but which He provided. I sincerely want to share much of that knowledge and teaching experience with thousands of additional students by personally teaching a number of the Theology classes offered by the Living University."

To learn more about Living University, visit its Web site: www.livinguniv.com.

—William Bowmer

Coping with Stress

By J. Charles Ogwyn

Do you ever feel completely stressed out? Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by everything you need to do? Are you laboring under a very heavy load? Sometimes, our responsibilities at work, at home and even at church can leave us feeling that we will never be able to “get it all done.” In such times of great stress, Christ’s words can be of particular help.

Our Savior said: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). Far from being simplistic, Christ’s words give us a roadmap that, if followed, will ensure that we do not continue laboring under an oppressive load.

If you are looking for a quick fix—a way to “have your cake and eat it too”—please understand that what you are seeking is not a biblical concept. Christ admonishes us not to let ourselves become distracted by the cares of this world (cf. Matthew 13:22). Often, the things we think we *need* to do can serve as distractions that keep us from making progress towards our primary goal in life—seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (cf. Matthew 6:33). However, even when we are careful not to let our other responsibilities distract us from building our relationship with God, we can still feel overwhelmed by all the demands on our time. If you have come to this point and you want help, Christ’s words offer a way to change your life.

Come Unto Me...

In the physical sense, His words are not easy because, carnally speaking, they do not make sense (cf. Romans 8:6–7). In Matthew 11, Christ draws a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. He begins by addressing those who are heavy laden—those who are carrying a heavy and stressful load. He then assures us that if we will come to Him, He will give us rest. The first step is to come to Christ, but what does this really mean in practice? Sadly, modern professing “Christianity” has turned this phrase into a cliché, so for many the real meaning of these words has been obscured. But we do not need to speculate on what Christ meant, because in the next verse He goes on to tell us what He means. He meant that we are to serve Him only and completely—and if we will do so, He will give us rest.

This rest has a physical dimension, but its ultimate fulfillment is the spiritual rest to which we all look forward, which will become a reality upon Christ’s return to this earth (cf. Hebrews 4:9–11). The physical, here-and-now aspect of this promised rest comes as a result of serving God spiritually with all our heart, and trusting in Him to provide for our needs.

People today are obsessed with seeking food, clothing and shelter—just as they were in Jesus’ day. Advertisers spend billions of dollars each year to stir people’s lust for fancier and fancier versions of these three basic necessities of life. But our Father in heaven knows all of our needs, and promises to provide them to us, *if* we seek Him first and above all else.

How do we do this? Jesus Christ tells His followers to take on His yoke. Just as we cannot serve two masters, we cannot wear two yokes (cf. Matthew 6:24). In order to take on His yoke, we must first take off any other yoke. How can we tell if we are wearing Christ’s yoke? Christ describes His yoke as “easy.” In other words, if you are feeling weighted down by a heavy burden, you have taken on the wrong yoke!

How do we put on the yoke of Christ? Our Savior tells us that we begin by learning of Him, and then He draws our attention to His humility. In Philippians 2:5 we are told to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” It is not enough to *know* about Christ and to know about His character; we are to *learn* of Him so that we can be like Him.

Humility

We read that Christ was “lowly in heart.” We should think about this aspect of Christ’s character as we evaluate our priorities and the items on our “to do” list. As we develop Christ-like humility in our character, this will affect every aspect of our lives.

What does humility have to do with feeling stressed? If we have a truly humble heart, we will not waste time in vain pursuits, seeking what is fleeting and temporary. True humility also involves recognizing that even if our cause may be noble, our part in it is not indispensable; God is perfectly capable of bringing His will to pass without our help. It is a privilege to be called and used by God, but He does not depend upon us. Having this knowledge, we should seek balance in how we spend our time, and not allow our pri-

orities to become unbalanced—even for the most noble of causes.

When you are feeling stressed out and overwhelmed by the demands on your time, are you tempted to cut back on the time you spend deepening your relationship with God? Remember, the time you spend with God should be your very first priority; everything else in life should come after this. If you feel that your time is so squeezed that you cannot spend enough time with God, you need to consider which of your other priorities have become unbalanced and are coming between you and your Creator.

Stress occurs when there is a mismatch between the things we want to do and the time available to do them. We all have the same amount of time—24 hours in the day. That is an absolute and unalterable

fleeting. Remember, Christ admonishes us to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:20–21).

In Luke 10:38–42, we read about Jesus’ visit to Martha’s house. Martha was busy preparing food and tending to the physical necessities, while her sister Mary sat with the guests gathered around our Savior, listening to His words. Martha felt overwhelmed by her work, and became upset that her sister was not helping. Martha asked Jesus to tell Mary to help with the household duties, but Jesus responded that it was Mary—not Martha—who was spending her time more wisely. In essence, Martha had lost sight of what was most important. Tending to her guests’ needs may have been noble,

When you are feeling stressed out and overwhelmed by the demands on your time, are you tempted to cut back on the time you spend deepening your relationship with God? Remember, the time you spend with God should be your very first priority; everything else in life should come after this.

constraint. Since we cannot increase the time available to us, we must set priorities for what we want to accomplish, and then spend our time accordingly. And our relationship with God must always be the top priority!

Simplify Your Life

To put this into practice, we must simplify our lives so we can invest quality time in the areas that are most important—God, family, work, etc. We have to accept that not only is our time limited, so also is our energy and stamina. Just as a runner can put forth a short burst of speed, we too can put short bursts of energy into what we do. However, just as a runner must find a pace that can be sustained for the duration of the race, we must find a comfortable pace in our lives so we do not “burn out.” Maintaining balance in our lives will allow us to endure those inevitable moments when a crisis throws our schedule temporarily out of balance. Finding our appropriate pace involves recognizing that there are limits to what and how much we can do. Coming to grips with these limits forces us to focus on our priorities, because if we cannot do it all, we must determine which priorities are most important.

As we simplify our lives, we need to make sure we are seeking the Kingdom first, and not letting ourselves become distracted by carnal desires to pursue what is

but Martha had let her chores steal her away from listening to Christ speak. It would have been far more profitable for her to listen to the words of life that the Savior was giving. After all, if tending to guests’ needs was a concern, Jesus had just recently blessed the loaves and the fishes and fed a multitude (cf. Luke 9:11–17). These two examples should make us pause and consider how we are spending our time in light of Matthew 6:25–33.

You Shall Find Rest...

Christ’s words hold out great hope and a marvelous promise. Although this promised rest has a spiritual fulfillment, there is a physical aspect to it as well. We read, “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth” (Lamentations 3:27). Why is it advantageous for us to put on Christ’s yoke early in life, rather than late? God’s word guides us through life, and keeps us from many mistakes—mistakes that can carry consequences for years, or in some cases for life (cf. Psalm 119:105). By taking on Christ’s yoke, we can have rest from the stress and anxieties of this life, and look forward to entering into His rest at His return.

Remember, Christ tells us, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” If your burden does not feel light, you are laboring under the wrong burden! Look to Him, and to His way, and He will help you cope. ☐

Guarding the Door of Your Mind

By Don Davis

What we take into our bodies affects, to a tremendous extent, the state of our physical health. Similarly, the thoughts and images we allow into our minds will define our character and who we are as a person.

Our five senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste—are the gateways to the mind. All our decision-making processes are based on what these five senses relay to our brains. Through these physical senses, information becomes a part of our mind, and become lodged in the very core of our psyche. If we have the Holy Spirit, it will help us process the signals that come to our brain, showing us what is good and beneficial and what is bad and harmful. To protect our minds, we need to fortify the gates by which Satan and his world continually strive to send us messages through our five senses.

The Devil is a master at advertising his wares. The media broadcast his attitudes around the world through movies, television, radio and the Internet. Satan is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2–3). Sex sells, and advertisers use it to peddle everything from toothpaste to trucks. Today's song lyrics often involve violence and illicit sex, and these words and attitudes are mirrored in the news we see and hear each day. Countless millions are victims of the real-life attitudes found in so much popular entertainment today. These influences constantly bombard our senses. They can seduce us and chip away at our character, even if we are part of God's Church. We *must* guard the door-

ways into the mind. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14–15). Satan wants to lead our thoughts down paths where Christ would never allow His mind to travel.

What are the media constantly feeding the unwary, and why is Satan encouraging it? "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19–21). The devil's goal is to seduce human beings—including those in God's Church—into practicing evil. Satan knows that his time ruling this world is limited, and that he will soon be replaced by Jesus Christ, the Father's firstborn Son, who will rule the Kingdom of God—assisted by His spiritual younger brothers and sisters. Satan wants to thwart God's plan for humanity by luring as many people as he can into living contrary to their Creator's laws.

Our eyes and ears are the major gateways into the mind, through which Satan tries to influence us to succumb to our carnal, human, fleshly desires. The human brain is a marvelous instrument that stores all our experiences—good and bad—so

God warns us to protect and defend it against Satan's attacks. All the evil we see portrayed, and all the off-color "jokes" we hear, are indelibly etched into our minds, where we can recall them as easily as a computer opens a saved file. With the wrong prompting from television, the movies, radio or the Internet, all those evil images and thoughts can come flooding back into our minds, into the forefront of our thoughts.

Tools for Defense

How can we defend ourselves? King David gives us a vital key to establishing our first line of defense: "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me" (Psalm 101:3). The prophet Isaiah also offers good advice: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil, he will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure" (Isaiah 33:15–16).

With the media offering so many temptations over the airwaves each day, we must remain fully prepared to face Satan's insidious onslaught. We will not succeed in resisting these temptations unless we arm ourselves each morning, noon and evening with prayer and the word of God. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand

against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:10–12).

Some will say, “I can handle my television and Internet viewing, and an occasional night out at the movies won’t hurt me.” That may be true for some, but many of us can too easily become affected by—even addicted to—what we see and hear. When in doubt, the best approach is to abstain from these media until we know we have developed the character—the mental, emotional and spiritual maturity—to select the programming Jesus Christ would be willing to sit down and watch with us. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17).

The Apostle Paul succinctly described the human condition of Christians who struggle daily against the forces of evil that assail them. “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:21–25).

Don’t Begin a Bad Habit


Our flesh is weak, and we must remember that it is easier to begin a bad habit than to get rid of it. Once we let our minds become infected by Satan’s influence, we will have to struggle mightily to fight our way back to the light from the dark side of our lustful human nature. “Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them” (Proverbs 22:5).

The mind is the seat of God’s Spirit in us. To keep it clean, we must flush out the wrong thoughts and ideas that come into it. We do this by flooding our brains with the word of God, and by walking with Him every waking moment. We do this by being instant in prayer whenever Satan’s wrong messages reach our eyes and ears. The devil has no power over us, except for that which we grant him. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7–8).

When we find ourselves being tempted to sin in mind or body, it is not enough merely to turn away from sin; we must turn toward our God. He promises that as we do so, the very peace of God will guard our hearts and minds, through Christ, our Savior (Philippians 4:7). In the “model prayer,” Jesus gave us a powerful weapon against Satan. When we are tempted, we can follow this model in our own mind and adapt it to our particular trial: “In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not [allow us to be led] into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For

Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9–13).

As you apply Jesus’ words in your own life, you will be reminded instantly of your Christian goal and of God’s purpose for your existence. Your mind will become refreshed and settled. “Flee sexual immorality [mentally and physically]. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he who committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Or do ye not know that your body [and mind] is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, that ye have from God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:18–19, ASV).

Yes, evil is all around us in this dying world, but Christ gave us the means to resist that evil. We need to have the mind of Christ, our sinless Savior who suffered and died for us (1 Peter 4:1). We have been offered the marvelous opportunity to be in the first and better resurrection and to help Jesus Christ restore righteousness to the earth “and [He] has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:6). Why would we sell our birthright for the poisonous bowl of soup that is this world’s satanic entertainment, which offers us nothing but a temporary titillation of the senses? Let us all focus on viewing only programming that is uplifting, and let us redouble our efforts to resist viewing and hearing the evil that pervades the Internet, television, movies and radio. We know that to be carnally minded leads to death, but if we guard our minds by using God’s Spirit, we will have life and peace (Romans 8:6). As we do so, we will be preparing for Tomorrow’s World, which our Father is so eager to give us. 

LYC 2007: Amazing! Awesome!

"It was amazing! I learned so much there. I can't wait to go back."—Mandy, 13

"It was the highlight of my summer.. I want to come back next year! Amazing!"—Elizabeth, 14

"It was awesome!"—Joshua, 16

These were just a few of the enthusiastic comments recorded on the Camper Survey at LYC Michigan 2007. Before I relate the details of this two-week experience, take a look at a few more comments from those who participated in what was clearly one of our best camps ever:

- *"It was a lot of fun. I made new friends and was inspired."*—Adrian, 15
- *"Camp has helped in my social life."*—Jason, 13
- *"At LYC you learn many things, make lots of friends, and learn about God."*—Erica, 15
- *"One of the most memorable times of my life"*—Christopher, 13
- *"It was a lot of fun and I met a lot of friends. I learned that I must work with others and to pray for everything."*—Daria, 14
- *"It was fun and I learned a lot. Rules and laws are very important."*—Sara, 16
- *"Order was kept with love. Everyone was kind to one another. I almost thought I was at the Feast."*—Emily, 15

This is what campers said they wanted to tell their friends and parents. Space does not permit me to relay all the positive comments made by all the campers, but suffice it to say that this was truly a wonderful summer for the teens who traveled to the north woods of Michigan this year. As 15-year-old Alyshia put it, "There is too much to say! It was one of the best experiences of my life and it's undescrivable. You have to see and be here for yourself." Nevertheless, we will try.

Physical activities are important for the LYC program. Most teens love

sports, dancing, and new challenges. This year we had plenty of activities and challenges. Jerry Ruddlesden and Christie McNair taught the traditional standbys of soccer and volleyball, and Ultimate Frisbee was enjoyed as part of the less formal evening activities. Less active, but just as challenging, was the archery class taught by Derek Forrestier. Over the years we have found that some teens, who may not be as skilled in more physical activities, really shine at this ancient sport—it is a real confidence booster for many.

Dance class is always popular and this year Mr. and Mrs. Elertson and staff taught the swing, Crocodile Rock, fox trot, and Texas tradition—Cotton-Eyed Joe. One of the points emphasized in Dance Class is proper etiquette. Those of us in camp administration are pleased when we hear comments from adult members who notice the proper behavior of our young people during Festival dances. Not surprisingly, we also hear questions from outsiders at weddings: "Who are these young people? How do they know each other? Where did they learn to dance this way?"

Each dorm also had the opportunity to share an evening with another dorm for "Topics and Dance." This gave everyone an opportunity to put into practice speaking skills Mr. Mario Hernandez was teaching them in Speech Class, as well as to practice their dance steps and proper dance

etiquette. Mr. Hernandez hosted these occasions, always encouraging campers to "use your voice" and to "speak up!" This was his third year teaching speech and each day at the department heads luncheon meeting,



he would become emotional telling us about all the progress he had seen in veteran campers from previous

years.

Earlier this year, Northwoods Christian Camp hired a company to come in and harvest the more mature trees in the camp. This left behind many dying branches, and the woods looked pretty rough when we arrived. What a difference when we left! Floyd Spencer and his Campus Improvement (CI) crew motivated campers to stack brush for later chipping or burning. By the time camp was over, most of the main campus had an entirely new and refreshing look. The CI staff also repaired three-foot bridges, stained the Lodge deck, and did a few other painting jobs.

The overnight canoe trip was a highlight for many campers. The trip began with a bus ride to the quaint little village of Hessel on the north shore of Lake Huron. From there, campers travelled to "Survivor Island," where Mr. Sheldon Monson and his staff had a number of challenges set up and waiting for them. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith arrived for the last few days of camp, and

although this was their third trip to Northwoods, they had never been to the island. By pre-arrangement, we were able to take them to a shortcut where they paddled a few hundred yards to a rousing welcome from dorms 3B and 3G, followed by a delicious burrito dinner. After dinner, they observed survivor challenges: slingshot, a canoe slalom course, starting a fire with knife and magnesium block, and a memory test on canoeing. Hot chocolate was served to all before the Merediths returned to Northwoods. For the campers, it was then time to finish their evening activities and retire to their tents.

Purpose and Meaning

One reason why young people live such reckless and careless lives is that they do not know why they are here, so they have no goals beyond the here and now. To aid our teens and young adult staff in the decisions they are making, this year's Christian Living classes focused on *purpose* and *meaning*. All campers and staff met in one of five groups each morning to learn about the purposes for laws, why we have physical life and how we can maximize our time and make it meaningful, what is the purpose for marriage, why the church, why we need a Savior, why Christ must return, and what is our ultimate destiny. Kellie, age 14, summed up what we were trying to accomplish in these classes: "Seeing God's truth through my own eyes." Here is a sample of other responses given by campers to the question, "What point in the Christian Living Classes is the most memorable to you?"

- "That we only have so little time in life and we should spend it wisely"—Britni, 13
- "God wants order"—Katie, 15
- "The fact that we are training to be actual kings and priests"—Tyler, 15

- "The meaning of physical life"—Blake, 13
- "Every decision I make will impact my life in some way"—Joey, 16
- "Cause/Effect"—Michelle, 13
- "To not waste your life and live it to the fullest"—Laura, 13
- "Don't date outside the Church"—Madeline, 16
- "The laws and postmodernism"—Matthew, 16
- "Mr. Monson's point about keeping a steady pace"—Joe, 16

- "When Mr. Elertson explained about the troubles of this world"—Eric, 15
- "When we talked about the Ten Commandments"—Asa, 16
- "When Mr. McNair taught us about how laws were important"—Tegan, 14

Other instructional opportunities included the Principles of Living Class where discussions were held concerning the physical

The Living Church of God Pre-Teen camp returned to Cuivre River State Park in northeastern Missouri this year with 44 eager campers, 40 supporting staff members, and four little "minicampers" as well.

Our schedule of activities kept everyone busy! Riflery and archery classes improved our campers' aim. A nature walk helped teach appreciation for God's creation. Agility and swiftness were put to the test in our obstacle course, and teamwork skills were practiced through Ultimate Frisbee. In arts and crafts, boys built wooden chests to hold any goodies their hearts desired, and saw the full process from assembly and sanding to applying a coat of finish. Meanwhile, girls created "accordion"-style memory books, complete with photos taken during their stay at camp. Our canoeing class seemed particularly outstanding this year; many staff members commented that it was one of the most instructive and helpful canoeing classes they had ever attended.

The daily Christian Living classes, taught by Camp Director Mr. Wallace Smith and Assistant Director Mr. Darrell Lovelady, focused on the camp theme of "Who is God?" to teach that God is friend, Father, and Creator, and is wise and trustworthy. Ultimately, campers learned that God is love.

Evening activities included a Fun Show that highlighted our campers' many talents. On Friday, in a camp-wide treasure hunt, members of each dorm ran all over campus to locations hidden in Scriptural clues, each containing a portion of a mystery Bible verse they ultimately had to assemble.

During Sabbath services, campers and guests heard Mr. Bill Oswald (an elder from Columbia, Missouri) and Mr. Lovelady stress the biblical wisdom behind the lessons learned at camp, and the need to make godly choices in life. After the "Camp Quiz" that night, awards were given in such categories as Most Polite Dorm and Most Courageous Camper.

Many of our twelve-year-old campers lamented that they would be too old for Pre-Teen Camp next year, and I can see why! Our heartfelt thanks go out to our Heavenly Father for the many blessings He mercifully rained down on our Pre-Teen Camp this year. It was a *fantastic* camp, and we are looking forward to making next year even better!

—Wallace G. Smith

and social challenges facing teens following high school graduation. Bible Studies and Sabbath services provided more opportunities to impart wisdom. A highlight toward the end of camp was Mr. Meredith giving a Bible Study on the history of the Church. The following afternoon, he spoke on the need for heartfelt prayer in a teen's life. Numerous comments were made on the camper survey indicating many of the teens understood the importance of this subject and appreciated Mr. Meredith bringing it to them.

The Media Department constructed a video recording studio in the classroom building and worked with each dorm to produce a news broadcast to be shown during Morning Motivation. For any who are

interested, you can view one of these newscasts at: www.youth-web.org.

One goal we had this year was to have cleaner dorms. Daily inspections and focusing on the task made this beyond any doubt our cleanest camp ever! It was a pleasure taking Mr. and Mrs. Meredith through the dorms to see how the teens of the church *can* keep a clean living area!

The final day of camp was busy. Organization is all important and so the day began with the counselor and staff meetings. Group photos had to be taken. Equipment and personal belongings had to be packed up. Dorms and classrooms had to be cleaned. Then there was final rehearsal for the Talent Show in the morning and the Show itself in the afternoon. Kresge Lodge had to be transformed

into a beautiful banquet facility. Steaks had to be barbecued, flowers and bou-tonnieres had to be distributed, and everyone had to get dressed. When the time arrived, elegantly dressed young ladies were met by their dapper escorts and proceeded to the banquet. After dinner there was time for fellowship, a short address by the camp director, viewing of the "End of Camp" video, and, of course, the dance. At midnight the dance ended, and it was time for 57 campers and staff to board the bus for MBS airport to meet their rides or take flights home.

LYC 2007 seemed to stand out from previous years. Dustin Christal summed it up well: "The spirit this year was incredible; happiness everywhere."

—Gerald Weston

God and the "Three 'O's"

(continues from page 12)

ning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9–10).

Yet this passage shows that declaring the end from the beginning is not just a function of "seeing" what is "destined" to happen. Continuing in Isaiah, we read that God *acts* and *intervenes* in history to accomplish His ends, "calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (v. 11).

We can say with confidence that God is omniscient. But we must allow the *Bible* to define what *omniscient* means. Let the world's theologians and philosophers wander from the path of Scripture in their pointless arguments if they choose—we need not follow them!

The Final Word

So, what does God's word teach us? We learn from Scripture that God is omnipotent—or "almighty"—such that no part of creation can escape His influence or authority. We see that God—through His Spirit—is omnipresent, such that no part of creation can escape His presence. And we understand that God—perceiving all

things—is omniscient, such that no part of creation can escape His knowledge.

Yes, as did Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong before us, we believe in the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of God the Father—and of the Word, who became His Son and our Elder Brother upon His resurrection. We believe because that is the testimony of Scripture. Where philosophers differ from Scripture, we will happily differ with *them*!

But is there any *practical use* for this knowledge? Yes, absolutely! We should never forget that God has called us to become His *full sons and daughters*, to share *His* level of existence with us for all eternity. Just as these characteristics—amazing power, access to all of the universe and perception of all things—apply to Christ and the Father *now*, they one day will apply to us!

As John wrote in his epistle, "everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). The more clearly we can see our *awesome* calling, the better we can put this present life into perspective. So, for those who wish to purify themselves, understanding the nature of the God Family has more practical application than you might at first assume!

As we seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, let us be motivated by our high calling and our ultimate destiny! We must avoid the snares and pretensions of this world's philosophers, and instead let God teach us truthfully of His glory, that we may one day share it with Him. LCN


Are You a Peacemaker?*(continues from page 6)*

we must continue to work diligently to exercise the fruits of the Spirit, and in doing so to develop the peacemaking skills outlined in Scripture. This requires effort on our part, continual practice—and the willingness to be guided by God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ will soon return to the earth as Prince of Peace, to estab-

lish the Kingdom of God. We have been called to reign with Him. This is what Scripture calls the “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). As you prepare for that wonderful future, take the time to examine yourself, and your relationships with family, friends, coworkers and other members of the Church. Ask yourself: are you a peacemaker? Prayerfully determine what you need to do to promote more peaceful relations with those around you. Study the

biblical principles which point the way to peace, and strive to develop the skills you need to become a more effective peacemaker.

If you want to become a son or daughter of God and reign with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God, you must become a peacemaker. Make that a goal and a priority in the days, months and years ahead—so you can receive the reward Jesus Christ will bring when He returns to establish peace on earth! 

Are You a Faithful Living Sacrifice?*(continues from page 2)*

lion people who comprise what is sometimes called the “Muslim nation!”

In addition, vast *water shortages* are beginning to occur in the U.S., in Australia and many other parts of the world. Within a few years, this **will** affect *your life!* As *The Kiplinger Letter* recently warned, “Get used to living with less water. Severe droughts are here to stay. Worst off: The South and West. But other areas also must learn to cope with less rainfall. The shortage is not yet a crisis, and with planning, it won't ever become one. But it still means lots of big changes” (June 22, 2007).

Brethren, these are just a few of the challenges now facing the peoples of America, Canada, Britain and Australia. We in the Church of God *do* need to realize, more than ever, that our God wants **us** to “watch and pray.” As I write this, the radio news just reported that at least *400 fires* are now raging across the U.S.—destroying *trees*, destroying *crops* and destroying *lives*.

At such a time as this, our God instructs us, “Consecrate a **fast**, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and **cry out** to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods, storehouses are in shambles; barns are broken down, for the grain has withered. How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless, because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. O LORD, to You I **cry out**; for fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field also cry out to You, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures” (Joel 1:14–20).

As the people “called” by God to *warn our nations* (Ezekiel 33) and to preach powerfully the Good News—that God will soon intervene in human affairs to set up *His Kingdom* and *His way of life* for all peoples—we should indeed “cry out” with increasing intensity and ask God to **use our lives** in His service. And we should *not* try in *any way* to “water down” God's commands for us to *fully surrender* and to **give our lives** in His service.

However imperfectly, brethren, I am sincerely trying to do that—more than ever—and I hope **all** of you can “catch the vision” and realize the absolutely **awesome** reward we will each have if we truly let Christ *fully use* our lives, our talents and our resources. The Christ of the Bible tells us, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26).

As the world around us *dramatically* changes over the next five to ten years, I hope and pray that **all** of you dear brethren will deeply understand why these things are happening and where events are leading. I hope we all can become even more sensitive to God's will, and to His **awesome purpose** for our lives. And I pray that we **all** can “burn our bridges” with our past weaknesses, and that we can rededicate our lives to God in a profound way. Truly, we must learn to **trust** that the wonderful practice of “giving” our lives to God on a daily basis is **not** really “giving up” anything, but is actually preparing us to “walk with God,” right on over into the most glorious future that can be imagined—*fully sharing life* with God and with Christ, interacting with Them and *fellowshipping* with Them throughout all eternity.



Local Church News

Wedding

Laura Fay Cates and Leonard Elmer Casey were united in marriage on July 14. Mr. Bob League performed the ceremony attended by friends, family and nearly all the local congregation. A festive and joyous reception followed the ceremony. The happy couple resides in Rising Fawn, Georgia and attends services in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Ordinations

Mr. Eddie Breaux was ordained as an elder on July 30, by Dr. Douglas Winnail, Mr. Dan Hall and Mr. Rod Reynolds. He serves in the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation.

Mr. Malcolm Jennings was ordained as an elder on August 4, by Messrs. Bruce Tyler and Dayrell Tanner. He serves the congregation in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, where he and Mrs. Jennings had previously served faithfully as deacon and deaconess.

On June 16, two ordinations took place in the Coatepeque, Guatemala congregation. *Mr. Sergio Roca* was ordained as an elder, and *Mr. Ramiro Sanchez* was ordained as a deacon, by Regional Pastor Mr. Mario Hernandez.



Mr. Jerry Sam, Living Church of God elder serving in Vanuatu, recently baptized four new members of the congregation in Orap on the island of Malekula. Pictured, left to right: Mrs. Yannick Malili, Mr. Jerry Sam, Mr. & Mrs. Francois and Jacqueline Slee and Mrs. Julie Tarey.

Births

Troy and Jessica Belcher, of Radford, Virginia, are very excited to announce the birth of their daughter *Ariana Faith Belcher*. Ariana was born on June 19, weighing 7 pounds, 1 ounce; she was 20 inches long.

Mike and Rachel Keesee, of the Kansas City, Missouri congregation, are thrilled to announce the arrival of their firstborn, *Joshua Michael Keesee*, on August 7. He weighed a very healthy 9 pounds, 3 ounces, and was 21 inches long. He is the first grandchild of Larry and Barbara Moluf of the Newton, Kansas congregation, and nephew to happy aunts and uncles Marshall, Peder, Lanna, David, Laura and Kevin Moluf.

Anniversaries

John and Carol Rodberg of the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida congregation (where Mr. Rodberg serves as a deacon) recently observed their 45th wedding anniversary; they were married on June 30, 1962. They have been members of God's Church for 37 of those 45 years. The Rodbergs' daughter *Tina*, and her husband *Robert Stephens*, also of the Ft. Lauderdale congregation, also observed a June anniversary; they celebrated their 20th anniversary on June 28.

On the Sabbath of April 28, the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation gathered to honor three couples in an anniversary celebration. *Russell and Shirley Sonnier* celebrated their 50th anniversary. *Don and Kim White* celebrated their 30th anniversary. *Joe and Brandy Hamby* celebrated their 10th anniversary. The three couples were presented with a cake, refreshments and cards from the congregation at a reception given in their honor.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Carl Ponder, an Area Pastor for the Living Church of God, died on August 12; he was 67 years old. When he began attending services in 1964, he began a process of dedicating his life to the service of God and His people, and he fulfilled that Christian commitment with enthusiasm, wholeheartedness and joy. He served in many and increasing capacities over the years, most recently pastoring congregations in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. That he died just after completing a caving expedition with a group of young people, and that he was singing as they came out of the cave, seems most fitting to those who knew him well. He is survived by Lorene, his beloved wife of 45 years; son Ray (Tammy) Ponder and grandsons Christopher and Timothy; son Mark Ponder; daughter Susie (Brian) Burch and granddaughter Sarah. Hundreds of friends and brethren share their grief and loss and, with them, look forward to the eternal joys ahead.

Lucille Fruehwald, of the Baltimore, Maryland congregation, died on June 29; she was 95 years old. A faithful member of God's Church since the early 1980s, she was the only one of her family to be called. Over the years, she made rooms available in her home to young singles who needed housing. She is best remembered for her wonderful hospitality, hosting many Nights to Be Much Observed and Bible Studies in her home in Vienna, Virginia. Those who knew her appreciated her plain speaking.

Martin H. Gerfen, of the Kansas City, Missouri congregation, died on May 16; he was 76 years old. He is survived by Phyllis, his wife of 48 years, with whom he was baptized in 1971, and by daughters Susan Gerfen and Linda (Edward) Ruder and three grandchildren. Mr. James Wells conducted the funeral.

Vivian V. Jaspersen, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, died on July 10. Born in 1920, she is survived by four generations of descendants. A long-time member of God's Church, she was grateful for the wonderful fellowship and the loving friends she made among her brethren. Mr. Daniel Friz conducted the funeral on July 13.

Gary Morris, of the Houston, Texas congregation, died on July 2, after battling cancer. He was 66 years old. A member of God's Church since 1970, he was a loving husband,

a caring father and a dedicated servant to the brethren. He liked to fish and to work on computers, but loved spending time with his family most. He stayed faithful to the end, and said "I feel great about everything" with a smile on his face shortly before he died. He is survived by his mother Virginia Morris, his beloved wife Barbara, his 13-year-old son Jason, and sisters Diane Barron and Karen Munn, along with many nieces and nephews.

Virginia Sharp Piazza, of Abbeville, Louisiana, died on August 3; she was 70 years old. She is survived by her son Charles, and by daughters Jennifer (of the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation), Tonya, Kimberly and Ginger, and by ten grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband Peter Piazza and by a brother and sister. Baptized in 1999, she was a source of inspiration to the members of the Lafayette congregation during her recent struggles with cancer, and she will be missed by all. Mr. Rod Reynolds conducted the funeral on August 6.

Evelyn L. Riddell of the Knox, Indiana congregation, died on July 25; she was 84 years old. She is survived by her husband Robert and son Louis; two daughters, Donna and Loretta, preceded her in death. Mr. Daniel Friz conducted the funeral on July 28.

Ulton "Jake" Durward Smith, age 90, of the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation, went to sleep peacefully on May 5. He had been battling cancer for several years. He is survived by several nephews and nieces, including Coletta Baldrige who cared for him continuously during his final months. He was preceded in death by three brothers and two sisters. He came into God's Church in 1972 after having retired from the military in 1962; he had served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was a prisoner of war during World War II. A champion skeet shooter, he was an accomplished gunsmith and watchmaker and an avid hunter. Members of the Lafayette congregation will miss his smile and his lively conversations. Mr. Rod Reynolds conducted the funeral and graveside services on May 7.

Primrose Smoak, a long-time Church member in Walterboro, South Carolina, died on June 20; she was 87 years old. Baptized 24 years ago, she will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

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

Commentary

A Drastic Turn of Events...

By Carl Ponder

For years, we in this Work have been warning of a coming reunited and remilitarized Europe. Events have now brought us closer to the dream of so many Europeans—an end-time revival of the mighty Holy Roman Empire. And, as one American businessman I know has said, “You can bet the Europeans are not uniting Europe for the benefit of the United States!”

Because of the stepped-up nuclear missile threat from several countries, the U.S. has announced plans to station components of its new missile defense in the Eastern European countries of Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia has responded by announcing a buildup of its conventional forces to counter the perceived threat.

With its armed forces stretched thin in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. is in no position to neutralize the Russian buildup. So, for the first time since 1945, a major European force deployment can soon be expected to be led, once again, by Germany! The chilling facts were laid out in a Reuters report dated April 26, 2007: “Making what he called his last annual address to lawmakers, [Russian President Vladimir] Putin said he was suspending Russia’s commitments under the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty and linked the move in part to U.S. plans for a missile shield in Eastern Europe.

“Under Putin, relations with the United States have soured dramatically, prompting some foreign officials to warn of a new Cold War... Putin said he saw no point keeping the treaty, which limits the number and type of conventional weapons either side of the old Iron Curtain, if other signatories were flouting it.”

For more than 2,500 years, Bible prophecies have predicted the end-time emergence of a united, armed and aggressive European empire, which will hold Russia at bay while attacking and destroying the greatest nation and the greatest commonwealth of nations ever to exist on this planet—the U.S. and the British Commonwealth nations—and will take the survivors into captivity and slavery shortly before Christ returns!

The power behind this European aggression will be derived directly from Satan the Devil, described in Scripture as the “dragon.” The end-time European superpower, called in several prophecies the “Beast,” will impress the world with its might. “So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” (Revelation 13:4).

That “Beast” power is prophesied even to fight Christ at His coming! Scripture describes the returning Christ as finally breaking in pieces the nations of the united Europe: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

The modern descendants of ancient Israel, along with their brothers of Judah, will then be released from slavery! “‘For it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them’” (Jeremiah 30:8).

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org Web sites.