

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Out of the Abundance of the Heart

Dear Brethren,

Jesus declared, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). How true and how important a concept is contained in these few words.

I’m reminded of a high school friend who went on to attend Ambassador College. His speech class (“Ambassador Club”) held a Wild West–themed ladies’ night in the Frontier Room of Ambassador Hall. Various props were spread out on tables, including several rather old guns. During a break in the meeting, a high-profile faculty member was using the barrel of a pistol to dislodge the rusty safety device of another gun.

My friend owned a .22 caliber rifle and was very finicky to make sure that no scratches or rust developed on it. We used to go down to the dry riverbed in Santa Maria to shoot rabbits, and he always made sure to clean his rifle meticulously afterward. (For those who were “triggered” by that, trust me: No animals were ever successfully killed on our excursions.) Watching this faculty member working on the safety as he was, my friend could imagine that if his hand slipped, the gun could receive a deep scratch down the barrel. But how do you tell a faculty member twice your age that you do not think this is a good idea?

Inspiration suddenly seized him. The individual in question was known to have shot his foot practicing “quick draw” some years earlier while in the Navy, so my friend opened his mouth with what he thought was a tactful question: “Is that how you shot your foot?” In his mind, it seemed to be a good question, but coming out of his mouth it did not sound quite the same as it had in his head. The tone of his question betrayed a bit more than he would have liked, and he received a tongue-lashing as a result!

What comes out of our mouth—not only the words but the intent behind them—cannot completely hide what is in the heart. As the proverb says, “Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:18–19).

The fact that Jesus warned the people of His day about their words indicates that there was a problem at that time. But how much more the problem is magnified today! It involves not only what comes out of the mouth, but what is typed into cyberspace. Social media demonstrates the problem all the time. How often individuals vent their thoughts on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and other platforms. People are less inhibited “hiding behind” a keyboard and screen than they are in the presence of flesh and blood. They say things they would never

Editor’s Note: *We understand that many of us are going through serious trials related to the COVID-19 crisis that has kept so many of us isolated for so long. Much of the content in this issue of the Living Church News was written before the pandemic hit. So, while the magazine may seem a little out of touch due to its lack of coverage on the topic, we decided that you might enjoy reading some spiritually edifying and uplifting messages that do not focus on the coronavirus. In the meantime, let us all continue to pray for one another, beseeching God in a heartfelt manner, as the effects of this crisis continue to unfold and as the Day of Pentecost approaches.*

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consider saying to someone in person. For whatever reason, the Internet greatly reveals the problem of the heart.

Every Idle Word

Jesus also warned that we will have to answer for every idle word that we speak (Matthew 12:36). We trust that if we repent of our indiscretions, we will be forgiven. Nevertheless, even with forgiveness from our Creator, there are consequences for our words as well as for our actions.

A number of revelations have come out in recent times regarding high-profile political leaders who said or did something regrettable while in high school or university. This is no doubt grossly unfair, mean-spirited, and politically motivated. Should any successful judge, senator, governor, or presidential candidate be held accountable for something he or she did several decades ago? Surely, we are mature enough to forgive the indiscretions of youth! Sadly, that is not the world we live in, and that is why it is important to instruct and warn our teens, young adults, and even ourselves of the importance of guarding our mouths and what we say on social media.

Do we realize, dear brethren, how much is known, stored, and studied about virtually every one of us? Marketers and analysts have data galore on a vast percentage of the population, including the members of God's Church. You may think that because you aren't on social media—perhaps because you don't even own a computer or smartphone—you are safe. Think again. How many pictures of you and your children have *others* posted? How many times has your name appeared on someone *else's* Facebook page? Probably more than you think.

Do you realize that every time you give a command to Echo or Alexa, it is being stored in a database, and that Amazon and other providers use "artificial intelligence" to analyze every bit of data about you and your habits to see how they can market to you? How many have experienced having a private conversation in their home regarding a purchase they want to make, only to have pop-up ads appear on their computer for that very product or service the next time they logged on?

What about all the technology that watches over your home with cameras, and that allows you to turn appliances on and off and lock doors remotely? Do you realize that infor-

mation is being stored and analyzed? For the most part, it is simple and (relatively) harmless marketing. If that is all there is to it, it may not be a big deal. But can we understand that these technologies can also be used to *control populations*? Many observers have noticed that YouTube and other platforms hold a leftist bias against content that does not fit the politically correct agenda.

We are warned in Ecclesiastes 10:20, "Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter." Has there ever been a time when this warning is more applicable? Have you ever experienced having a conversation with others only to have your smartphone begin talking to you? I have, on more than one occasion. Anyone who has the "Okay Google" app open may trigger a Google response if it thinks you are asking it a question. Now that is a *genuine* "trigger warning"—but one that few heed.

Serious Business

We can be certain that persecution is on our horizon as Christians. What we believe on an ever-increasing number of issues is not politically correct, and those taking it upon themselves to decide what is right and wrong are becoming bolder and more militant. Perhaps it is time to be more thoughtful about what we say to others, even in private. It is certainly important to teach our youth to carefully consider their words and their actions—and to understand that lesson ourselves.

Smartphones and social media may appear as innocent toys or tools, but they are serious business and require wisdom. Cyberbullying has caused some to take their own lives. Sexting, where teens invite others to post pictures of themselves in compromising poses, can be dangerous and come back to bite them years later. Making threats or venting quickly online "in the heat of the moment" when upset by something is a foolish practice.

It is shocking what people display over social media, and this is even true of some Church members and teens. Many employers will not hire someone until they have checked the applicant's social media pages. How many people fail to get hired because their social media history is a liability

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The Missing Dimension in Knowledge

The world is full of knowledge. So many facts, so much reasoning, so much research, so much increased technology and amazing study—and we can understand it because God gave human beings mind power beyond that of the animals. God expects us to use our minds to gain knowledge. But there's a missing dimension in the world's knowledge. How can we fulfill our potential, use the amazing mind God has given us, and do so in a way that brings us not into the errors of the world, but into the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ?

We are all familiar with the prophet Daniel's famous prophecy that "knowledge shall increase" at the end of this age (Daniel 12:4). The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century brought an unprecedented increase in the technology and capability available to human beings, and in the last 50 years the Information Age has sped up that process even more.

A Knowledge Explosion

The famous futurist R. Buckminster Fuller estimated in his 1982 book *Critical Path* that before 1900, it took about a century for human knowledge to double, and that by 1945 knowledge was doubling every 25 years. What about today? In 2006, IBM Global Technology Services stated, "It is projected that just four years from now, the world's information base will be doubling in size every 11 hours" (*The toxic terabyte: How data dumping threatens business efficiency*, p. 2). Is knowledge now quadrupling every day? It depends on what we mean by "knowledge." Certainly, with ongoing research in biology, astronomy, oceanography, physics, health, and so many other areas of science, we are gaining so much data and new information that it can be hard even for experts to keep up to date. Some of you may be familiar with Alvin Toffler's 1970 book *Future Shock*, which warned of the information overload we face as a society and as individuals. I certainly feel that overload from time to time.

But how much of the knowledge mankind gains every day is **true** knowledge? And how much is simply information that distracts us from our purpose? On the one hand, science and technology have brought great convenience to our lives. I heard one expert say that technology has brought the equivalent of 90 servants

into a typical household, considering all of the electrical gadgets and equipment that we have. On the other hand, I like to tell our *Tomorrow's World* viewers about the "Doomsday Clock" from the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Earlier this year, they moved the clock's second hand to 100 seconds before "midnight"—with "midnight" as their symbol of a nuclear apocalypse ("Closer than ever: It is now 100 seconds to midnight," *The Bulletin.org*, January 23, 2020). These aren't wild-eyed religious fanatics. These are very sober scientists who look at the world's political and governmental situation—and at the reality of military weaponry—and realize, "Yes, we are 100 seconds to midnight." When has mankind ever created a destructive technology he has failed to use? Knowledge can benefit humanity or be misused to destroy all life on Earth. Still, God wants us to have true knowledge.

As a society, we have sent probes into the vast reaches of space, and twelve astronauts have actually walked on the Moon. The human race seems to have mastered amazing power—even the power of nuclear energy. But have we really mastered it? We cannot forget Christ's words: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21–22).

Seek the Truth

God gave this stark assessment of the tribes of ancient Israel, ancestors of many of today's Western nations: "Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land'" (Hosea 4:1).

Scripture warns us of what happens when a nation stops seeking the truth. Anciently, God told the prophet Jeremiah to warn the nation of Judah, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, 'As the LORD lives,' surely they swear falsely" (Jeremiah 5:1–2). What happened as a result? Jeremiah found no one

seeking the truth, so God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to invade the nation, and in 586 BC the temple was destroyed.

Are our modern nations seeking the truth? The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* featured this headline on January 11, 2012: “Tel Aviv Declared World’s Best Gay Travel Destination.” The world is becoming more and more accepting of conduct condemned in your Bible. The Guttmacher Institute reported that from 2010 to 2014, the annual abortion rate for women aged 15–44 was estimated at 35 per 1,000 (“Induced Abortion Worldwide,” *Guttmacher.org*, March 2018). Though abortion rates have declined in the U.S. in recent years, more than 850,000 abortions were performed in the U.S. in 2017 (“Induced Abortion in the United States,” September 2019). Abortion isn’t something new. What is new is that modern technology has made it much safer for the mother, and that much of the world encourages, even welcomes, the procedure. Is this a right use of knowledge? We read that “to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:6–7).

True Education

Today, if you are a parent of a college-age student, you probably know about the secularism and political radicalism that is so common at American universities. It is easy to forget that many of our nation’s top-ranked universities were originally established as Bible colleges or governed with biblical principles in mind. In the founding charter of Yale University, established in 1701, Connecticut legislators describe the school as a place “wherein Youth may be instructed in the Arts & Sciences who through the blessing of Almighty God may be fitted for Publick employment both in Church & Civil State” (*Act for Liberty to Erect a Collegiate School*, p. 1). What was expected of its students? As Yale president Thomas Clap wrote in 1754, “All scholars shall live religious, godly, and blameless lives according to the rules of God’s Word, diligently reading the Holy Scriptures, the fountain of light and truth; and constantly attend upon all the duties of religion, both in public and secret” (“Yale University,” *U-S-History.com*).

Certainly, Yale has moved away from its founding emphasis on living a religious and virtuous life. Yet we should not fear that the pursuit of knowledge is incompatible with godly righteousness and character. As our predecessor in this Work, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, wrote, “God intended for man to produce additional knowledge.... He gave us awesome minds with which to think” (*Why Were You Born?*, 1972, p. 18). Today, we in the Living Church of God are pleased to be able to offer what we now call “Living Education”—a program that doesn’t try to duplicate the errors or bureaucracies that this world’s educational establishment thinks of as essential, but instead focuses on developing the

Christian character of its students, who are seeking knowledge. As Dr. Roderick C. Meredith wrote several years ago, we feel that true education “should include not only developing a personal understanding of the underlying purpose and meaning of human life, but a mastery of needed secular knowledge and development of critical thinking skills as well. The foundation to do so, however, necessitates internalizing the worthwhile values, wisdom and understanding embedded in the Bible—the missing dimension in education.” He wrote that for Living University, but it applies just as much to Living Education today, and it should be the goal even of Church youth and young adults pursuing education in secular high schools and universities. Even if you never attended Ambassador College or Living University, you can still live by the motto of those institutions: “The word of God is the foundation of knowledge.”

We serve a God “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Knowledge and truth are not in opposition. In fact, unless we have God’s truth, there will be a dimension absent from our knowledge. What did ancient King Solomon say? “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

The Limits of Science

If we have the fear of the LORD, we will not fear science. True science is totally in harmony with the creation. It magnifies our sense of beauty and harmony and helps us to see the magnificent laws in the design of all kinds of creatures, flora, and fauna. It’s absolutely amazing! Every time I look up at the beautiful Carolina blue skies and see those cumulus clouds, I just think, “Isn’t the formation of those clouds absolutely beautiful?”

When we look into the intricacies of DNA and RNA and their operation within the human body—how they replicate—we find that modern theories of evolution cannot explain them. But science has shown us those kinds of operations and so many others of wondrous complexity, which help us understand the glories and the magnificence of God’s design, creation, and laws.

And yet we know that science has abused technology. Former U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower said in his first inaugural address, “Science seems ready to confer upon us, as its final gift, the power to erase human life from this planet” (January 20, 1953). Well, science isn’t wrong in and of itself—the problem is the misuse of science. Sir John Eccles, winner of the 1963 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, stated this: “We need to discredit the belief held by many scientists that science will ultimately deliver the final truth about everything. Science does not deliver the truth. What it provides are hypotheses in an attempt to get nearer to truth. But scientists

must never claim to know more than that. The scientific concepts that we have are always going to be changed as science progresses” (“Science Can’t Explain ‘Who Am I? Why Am I Here?’,” *U.S. News & World Report*, December 10, 1984).

No, science doesn’t have all the answers. It cannot deliver the final truth, as Sir John Eccles said. Yet it is laudable that some scientists want to know the answers to these questions, and honest scientists realize the implications of knowing those answers. As the late Cambridge astrophysicist Stephen Hawking wrote in *The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe*, “If we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall be able to take part in the discussion of why the universe exists. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason. For then we would know the mind of God” (2005, p. 136).

As hard as it is for the world to accept this, even a great scientist such as Hawking was blinded from knowing the

What an amazing gift we have been given! Unlike Hawking and other very knowledgeable scientists, you and I know why the universe exists!

mind of God. Yet most of you reading this article are not blinded! God is opening your eyes and mind to His truth, a truth that is indeed “understandable in broad principle by everyone”—everyone, that is, who has a humble and teachable heart called by our Savior! To earn a Ph.D. in astrophysics is not a bad accomplishment. It requires much study, diligence, and mastery of a great body of knowledge. But God reveals Himself not to the world’s experts, but to humble, converted Christians who seek Him in His word. “At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes’” (Matthew 11:25).

What an amazing gift we have been given! Unlike Hawking and other very knowledgeable scientists, you and I **know** why the universe exists! God is creating in us His very own holy and righteous character—something He cannot do by fiat. God can create a galaxy through His own power, but He cannot create His character in us unless we cooperate!

True Knowledge

Though the world around us wants to confuse and deceive us with false knowledge, we must maintain a teachable heart. Why? We are learning in this life the lessons that will help us serve as kings and priests in the Millennium. In that day, we will be teaching the whole world true knowledge. “For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no

more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers” (Isaiah 30:19–20).

Yes, all of God’s people who are faithful will be teachers in tomorrow’s world. We’ll be those kings and priests. During the Millennium, today’s firstfruits will play an active role in helping people stay on the right path of true knowledge. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (v. 21). The responsibility of a priest is to intercede for someone else, but also to teach. And we’re learning that way of life so we can teach it to others. We learn painful lessons so that we can help those who are also experiencing painful lessons.

But what about religious knowledge? So many religions of this world are not even convincing counterfeits of God’s true religion. In them, we find violence, deception, and the acceptance of evil as if it were good. Most of the world’s religion today is under the sway of the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4)—Satan the devil. Yet the presence of a lie does not mean there is no truth. True religion gives us the missing dimension in knowledge. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). What do we do with that truth? “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’” (v. 31). We must **abide** in the truth! What is that truth? “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). We must not become contaminated by the world’s values, and we must practice outflowing concern for others.

If we have received true knowledge, we will be found acting on it, not just knowing it. Christianity is a way of life. In fact, that’s what Christianity was called before it was called Christianity: “But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings” (Acts 24:22). The Apostle Paul wrote, “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). That phrase, “the Way,” occurs three other times in Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23).

Tremble at His Word

We eat food. We drink water. We breathe air. But are we taking in the spiritual nutrition we need—God’s word? What should our attitude be toward the Bible? “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where

is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word'" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

If you have ever experienced an earthquake, you know how it humbles you. I remember standing in the doorway of our little wood-frame house in Pasadena, California, trembling in an earthquake! It was just like a ship moving back and forth, and my knees were weak. When we think of the awesome majesty of God, how can we *not* tremble at His word? What is the most awe-inspiring knowledge we can have? That God reigns supreme! That should humble us and keep us trembling at His word!

To make sure we are living the missing dimension in knowledge, we must be living by God's truth. We must exam-

Do you believe that God exists, or do you know that God exists? With so many skeptics around us and so many arguments, how can anyone truly know that God exists?

ine ourselves and make sure that we're not hypocrites who say we like God's word and that we agree with it, but fail to *act on* it. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness *the implanted word*, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). We must hear God's word, but that is not enough. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

Have you ever deceived yourself? I've deceived myself. But when you actually practice God's way of life, you can understand the truth, live the truth, and actually share the truth with others. "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1:23-24).

What kind of man or woman are you? Are you following the example Jesus set when He was battling Satan and said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4)? Righteousness is more than knowledge—it is what we practice. "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). And "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (v. 10). We can know the truth by practicing—living by—God's word.

Do you *believe* that God exists, or do you *know* that God exists? With so many skeptics around us and so many argu-

ments, how can anyone truly know that God exists? Scripture tells us, "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. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:3-5). The Apostle John uses the expression "by this we know" quite a few times in Scripture.

Also, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:2-3).

The Greek word for knowledge is *epignósis*. *Epignósis*, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, "denotes 'exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition'... expressing a fuller or a full 'knowledge,' a greater participation by the 'knower' in the object 'known'" ("Know, Known, Knowledge, Unknown"). John had to battle the philosophy of Gnosticism, which promoted the idea that the God of the Bible was not the true God, and that only those with special, secret knowledge could escape from the God of the Bible and reach perfection. No, dear readers, the missing dimension in knowledge is right in the open, in the pages of your Bible—but it is hidden from those whom Satan has blinded.

True Knowledge Is Spiritually Discerned

The world professes to have *gnosis*, or knowledge, but God has revealed to us the missing dimension in knowledge. As we saw earlier, He said that "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). And He gives us this wonderful revelation:

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

God created the universe as an environment where human beings could discover who He is—and how powerful and how great He is. As we gain true knowledge, we will grow in our fear of God, and we will tremble in awe at His

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What Does Pentecost Mean to You?



By **Douglas S. Winnail**

In the second chapter of Acts, we read the account of the New Testament Church beginning on the Day of Pentecost in 31 AD. It began when 3,000 people made a baptismal commitment after witnessing the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit and listening to the inspired preaching of Jesus' disciples. But did these 3,000 people merely decide on the spot to "give their hearts to the Lord"? Or was there something more—something unique and profound—going on? Do we really understand what God was doing on that day when the New Testament Church began? Were those events related to God's previous actions in history? And how do the events on Pentecost relate to you and to the Church of God today?

A Special Calling

It is instructive to notice that when Jesus began His ministry, He did not stand on street corners and invite just anyone to become His disciples. Jesus called specific individuals to become His first disciples (Matthew 4:18–22). Later, as He trained His disciples, He explained to them, "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [those not called by God] it has not been given" (Matthew 13:10–11). Jesus explained that only a few would initially be called to follow Him, and that those not called would be

blinded to understanding the true Gospel. Jesus then told His disciples, "blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly... many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it" (Matthew 13:16–17). In other words, Jesus' disciples were called and given a special understanding of the plan of God, which others were not yet given.

On another occasion, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Jesus then began a spiritual discussion about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which many in His audience did not understand. Jesus then repeated His earlier statement that "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:65). At that point, those who did not grasp Jesus' meaning ceased to follow Him—and Jesus did not pursue them. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He told God in a prayer, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world" (John 17:6). Some years later, the Apostle Paul wrote to Church members in Corinth, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). James called those called into the Church at this time the "firstfruits" in God's plan (James 1:18).

From these verses, we learn that people do not decide on their own to become Christians, and that God is not now calling everyone into His Church. He is calling a few individuals to become “firstfruits” who will reign with Christ when He returns to set up the Kingdom of God on the earth (see Revelation 5:10; 14:4; 20:4–6). Jesus said that a calling to be His disciple is a unique opportunity and very special privilege that would only be offered to a few in this age. What happened on the Day of Pentecost in 31 AD was according to God’s plan, and something very profound was occurring. The people who made baptismal commitments on that day did not just decide on the spot to “give their hearts to the Lord.” Rather, God had called them and given them a special opportunity to become part of His Church. He gave them the ability to understand the meaning and significance of what they had seen and the

One of the most insidious of these “lawless” teachings is that, because of Jesus’ sacrifice, Christians should not strive to keep God’s law with the help of the Holy Spirit, and can continue in their sinful ways with God’s approval.

message they heard from the disciples Jesus had called and trained. What happened on Pentecost in 31 AD was part of the plan of God that has important implications for each of us and for the Church of God today.

Admonitions and Warnings

The Apostle Paul admonished the ministry of God’s Church, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:1–4). Paul’s admonition to provide instruction fit for the season would imply that messages given on the Holy Days should communicate the meaning of those days, so the Church would not lose or forget their understanding of what those days picture. Sadly, as Paul also warned, many would leave the Truth to follow false religious teachings and practices in the context of the “last days” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

Paul also warned that, before Christ’s return, a “man of sin”—a “lawless one”—would appear on the world scene to deceive many with miraculous signs and false doctrines, and implored true Christians to “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–15). One of the most insidious of these “lawless” teachings is that, because of Jesus’ sacrifice, Christians should not strive to keep God’s law with the help of the Holy Spirit, and can continue in their sinful ways with God’s approval.

Of course, this idea does not agree with the teaching or example of Jesus, who said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus came to “magnify the law” (Isaiah 42:21, *KJV*) and to show that the letter of the law (e.g. Exodus 20:13–14, forbidding murder and adultery) also has a spiritual dimension (e.g. Matthew 5:21–28, about anger and lust). Scripture shows plainly that Jesus kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days and taught others to follow His example (Luke 4:16; John 7:1–10).

The Apostle Paul warned that false teachers would preach about another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:3–4). Today, most professing Christians worship an effeminate, law-breaking individual whose birth is celebrated on December 25. Paul warned that false teachers would preach a different gospel

(such as the idea that you can be saved merely by “giving your heart to the Lord” and that your reward for doing so will be to spend a leisurely eternity in Heaven). These false teachers would be led by a different spirit that promotes lies and fables instead of the Truth and

turns a blind eye to the facts of history. This is why the Apostle Jude warned Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Jude was writing sometime around 70 AD, when men had entered the Church with an agenda of “turning the grace of our God into lewdness” (Jude 4).

Such misleading ideas were promoted by Gnostics who used Jesus’ name but called God’s law a burden (contrary to 1 John 5:3). Many Gnostic teachers, though calling themselves Christians, told people that it was acceptable to keep other religions’ holidays to honor Jesus, and that they could choose their own day of worship instead of the seventh day. These false Gnostic ideas were absorbed by the Roman Catholic Church and were later transmitted into Protestant churches where they are still believed today. This is why Catholics and Protestants have lost sight of the Holy Days and their meanings, and why they do not understand the truth about the plan of God.

Holy Days: Commanded Assemblies

What is the purpose of keeping the Holy Days? What truths does God intend them to convey? What lessons can we learn—especially about Pentecost—that are relevant to Christians today? Scripture states that the Sabbath and the Holy Days are not the feasts of Moses or the Jews, but “the feasts of the LORD” (Leviticus 23:2). These festivals are also called “holy convocations”—they are commanded assemblies that were established to be kept “forever” (Leviticus 23:4, 14, 21, 31, 41).

God did not establish His Sabbath and Holy Days as nice options for us to observe out of the goodness of our hearts if we are so inclined. Rather, He commanded His people to observe the Festivals He established. We are told in three different Old Testament passages, “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year”—in the spring at the Days of Unleavened Bread, in early summer at Pentecost, and in the autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deuteronomy 16:16). It is interesting that the idea of “firstfruits” is closely associated with the Feast of Pentecost in these passages, yet this idea is not fully explained in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul mentions that the Festivals of God provide “a shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:16–17), and it is in the New Testament that we learn the real significance of “firstfruits” in relation to God’s plan and the events that occurred on Pentecost in 31 AD.

But what instructions did God give to the ancient nation of Israel? How do those instructions relate to Christians today? In Deuteronomy 4, Moses reviewed the conditions of the covenant God had made with the nation of Israel. He explained that God gave them His laws—including the Sabbaths and Holy Days—for their benefit, and that they were neither to add to, nor take away from, any of His commandments. This would include not rejecting the Holy Days and

Moses reviewed the conditions of the covenant God had made with the nation of Israel. **He explained that God gave them His laws—including the Sabbaths and Holy Days—for their benefit, and that they were neither to add to, nor take away from, any of His commandments.**

not replacing them with pagan holidays. Moses explained that God gave Israel His laws to set them apart from other nations, so they could be an example to the world of a wise and understanding people—an example that the peoples of the world would want to emulate when they saw the blessings the Israelites received. Jesus gave similar instructions to His disciples when He told them to keep His commandments and be lights to the world (John 14:15; Matthew 5:14–16).

Moses also instructed the Israelites to teach the laws of God to their children and grandchildren, so they would not forget the covenant they made with God, nor how God dealt with their nation. Yet, despite these warnings, Moses perceived that these instructions would be forgotten (Deuteronomy 4:25–28). Moses reminded the Israelites that God chose them and raised them up from humble origins to be His “spe-

cial” people—to be blessed and be an example of holiness to the world if they would obey His instructions (Deuteronomy 7:6–26). God gave the Israelites His Sabbath and Holy Days as a sign to set them apart from the nations of the world, and to keep them mindful of His great plan (Exodus 31:12–18). This also applies to those whom God is calling into His Church today (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Sadly, the ancient Israelites forgot God’s instructions, rejected His laws, and failed to observe His Sabbaths and Holy Days. They lost sight of their special mission, corrupted themselves, went into captivity, and lost their national identity (see Deuteronomy 31:26–29; 2 Kings 17:18; Ezekiel 20). Those whom God has called in our present day to become part of His Church—to be lights to the world—must be alert to these lessons of history and must not repeat the mistakes of the past!

New Testament Pentecost

As we have seen, Jesus did not come to do away with the laws of God. Jesus kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days all His life and taught His disciples to follow His example (Luke 4:16; 22:14–16; John 7:8–10, 37). Jesus’ disciples taught the early New Testament Church to do likewise (Acts 17:2; 18:21; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 11:1).

In the days after His resurrection, Jesus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–8). It was on the Day of Pentecost—a Holy Day that God’s people have been commanded to observe forever (Leviticus 23:21)—when God poured out His Spirit and began the New Testament Church of God (Acts 2). We are told that God gives His Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). Because they were following His commandments and instructions, God poured out His Spirit on Jesus’ disciples in a dramatic and visible way, enabling them

to speak in many languages to those who had come together at Pentecost, so these people could understand the Gospel (Acts 2:1–12).

This sudden capacity to speak in a different language was not—as most professing Christians assume—a personal ecstatic experience in which participants babble a series of unrecognizable syllables. Rather, God supernaturally gave the disciples the ability to communicate with each listener in his or her own language, so the Gospel message could be understood and spread. This miraculous sign of speaking in another tongue is also mentioned in Acts 10:44–48 and Acts 19:1–6. In each case, the ability to speak in a different language was a sign that God was leading His Church, not a personal ecstatic experience meant to give the speaker some enhanced personal sense of spirituality.

Scripture shows how God began His Church—and added to it—by calling individuals out of this world, to whom He gave the Holy Spirit to guide them into understanding His truth and His plan. On several occasions, Jesus said that to receive God’s calling and the capacity to understand His truth is a unique opportunity and a special privilege. Those who made a baptismal commitment on the Day of Pentecost took advantage of that opportunity to become part of the New Testament Church. If God has called you and given you the capacity to understand His Truth, you, too, have been given this same unique opportunity and special privilege to become part of His Church and play a role as a “firstfruit” in God’s plan of salvation that will change the whole world. The Day of Pentecost should be a sobering and exciting reminder of that special calling.



Gifts of the Spirit

Those whom God called to be part of His Church on Pentecost in 31 AD were told that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit if they would repent and be baptized, accepting Jesus Christ’s sacrifice to pay for their sins (Acts 2:38). Repentance involves changing our lives and coming ever closer to God by living ever more fully according to His laws. Remember, Jesus told His disciples to keep His commandments, and taught that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). We also learn from Scripture that God imparts the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by God’s ministers after baptism (Acts 8:14–18).

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” and said that the world “cannot receive” that Spirit, which it neither sees nor knows (John 14:16–17). Scripture plainly states that people are not truly *Christians*—and will not receive the Holy Spirit—unless they are called by God, repent, accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for their sins, and at baptism (which means full immersion in water, not a ritual sprinkling) make a commitment to obey God (Romans 8:9)—a commitment an infant cannot yet make.

Jesus also said that God’s Spirit will lead Christians and His Church “into all truth” (John 16:13). This is why the Church of God understands the meaning of the Holy Days and how these days picture the plan of God. This is also why the Church of God understands the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11), and why the Church is able to have a “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19–21, *KJV*). God makes these gifts available to His Church so it can accomplish the mission He gave it.

The gift of the Holy Spirit comes with a responsibility. Once we receive the Holy Spirit, we must nourish that Spirit by daily prayer, Bible study, and meditation on the things of God (2 Corinthians 4:16). Jesus told His disciples that we glorify the

Another visible fruit of the Holy Spirit is unity—that those being renewed and led by God’s Spirit **will be able to work together in harmony because they share the same mind and the same judgment.**

Father when we bear much fruit (John 15:8). Scripture describes that fruit. Those whom God calls to be Christian must be distinguished by genuine outgoing love and concern for others (John 13:35; 15:12–13). They must strive to develop the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). They must become peaceable, easily entreated, full of mercy, and without hypocrisy (James 3:13–18). The Apostle Paul explained that when we are plagued with doubts we are not using or being led by God’s Spirit. However, those who are continually being renewed and led by God’s Spirit are confident about what they believe and can discern where and how God is working (2 Timothy 1:6–7). Another visible fruit of the Holy Spirit is unity—that those being led by God’s Spirit will be able to work together in harmony because they share the same mind and the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1–3).

When we observe the Day of Pentecost, we should remember these important concepts. We are commanded to remember and observe a day that pictures an important step in the plan of God. It reminds us that God is calling a few to become the firstfruits of what will ultimately become a great harvest. It is a reminder that God is calling a few into His Church now, to be educated and trained to teach others God’s way of life during the Millennial reign of Christ. God is giving His Spirit to those He calls so that we can develop the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which will enable us to become more like Him and eventually be born into His Family. As we observe the Day of Pentecost, let us remember and deeply appreciate this unique opportunity and very special calling! (LN)

The Gift of a Truly Sound Mind

Paul describes God's Holy Spirit as the spirit of a sound mind.

What is a sound mind?

And how do we nourish and cultivate this gift of God?

By **Wallace G. Smith**

During the Pentecost season, we celebrate the gift of God's Holy Spirit to the Church, awed by the fact that He has made us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)—a privilege none of us have earned.

That Spirit conveys many benefits, some of which Paul listed in a letter to Timothy, encouraging the young evangelist to make the most of what he'd been given: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

Power, love, and a sound mind are each worthy topics of consideration. But, for this article, let's focus on soundness of mind. Sound thinking is vital to Christian living, but in very short supply in our world these days. Why is that?

The answer explains a lot about our world and demonstrates what a wonderful gift sound thinking is—a gift not to be taken for granted.

Let's look more closely at soundness of mind, understanding why truly sound thinking *requires* God's Spirit and how we can develop and refine it in our own lives.

Mind Damage

Humanity is made in God's image (Genesis 1:26–27). While this certainly indicates that our form reflects His in a very meaningful way (see "In God's Image" in the January-February 2016 *Living Church News*), it also means much more.

When we carefully read the account of man's creation, we see that humanity reflects God in *many* ways. Mankind was given dominion over the world's creatures (Genesis 1:26, 28), just as God reigns in the larger sense over creation (Psalm 24:1). Man was expected to multiply his own kind (Genesis 1:28), just as God is expanding His own family (2 Corinthians 6:18). And Genesis 2 and 3 illustrate that man is a thinking, reasoning, accountable being within God's creation—unlike any of the animals. However limited we may be, when we look at man's design we see a sort of intimate self-portrait of God and His Son.

This is why the Eternal can extend the invitation, "let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18)—because He created us with a mind capable of reason and rational thought.

But sin ruins everything—including our ability to think rationally.

In the Garden of Eden, man chose to sin—an abuse of God-given free will—and that choice corrupted him, marring his capacity to reflect his Creator. Of course, we all have made the exact same choice in our own ways (Romans 3:23) and have experienced that corruption. Our spirit suffers, our bodies suffer, *and our minds suffer* the effects of sin.

Sin's corruption includes a degradation of our capacity to draw accurate conclusions about the world and ourselves. Such corruption is inevitable when we fail to give God His rightful place at the center of reality: "The fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7).

Many scriptures illustrate how sin damages our ability to be truly rational. Consider the current state of the one formerly called Lucifer, now Satan the Devil. Lucifer was created "full of wisdom" (Ezekiel 28:12). Yet God tells him that "you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor" (v. 17), and Paul says that pride led to the Devil's condemnation (1 Timothy 3:6).

Satan's sin damaged his mind such that—even with his *first-hand experience* of God's majesty and power—he is now fiercely devoted to opposing Him. Such mind damage—wrought by sin—is rampant among the demons, who know who God is (James 2:19) yet persist in a rebellion destined to end terribly for them.

The human realm fares little better, as the Bible frequently shows. Jesus chastised the Pharisees and the Sadducees for being unwilling to draw correct conclusions from readily available facts (Matthew 12:1–4). A man Jesus had healed marveled at the Pharisees' inability to accept the truth staring them in the face (John 9:30). Paul speaks of individuals "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" who are "men of corrupt minds" (2 Timothy 3:6–8). And he describes pagan intellectuals as "futile in their thoughts" and given over to a "debased mind" because of their unwillingness to "retain God in their knowledge" (Romans 1:21, 28).

And of course, in our day, we are surrounded by so *many* unsound minds devoid of God's Spirit. If you follow any "discussion" of current issues, you know that reason and logic rarely rule the day. The language of Twitter, Facebook, and the like is often that of passionate but irrational thinking. Rationality is clearly *not* the spirit of the age.

Even when language *seems* rational, applying closer scrutiny often reveals mistaken assumptions at best and cherry-picked facts at worst. How many who scream “Listen to the science!” concerning their claims about evolution or climate change also *ignore* the science concerning transgender confusion, sexual immorality, and other cultural issues?

And if we are willing to be honest with ourselves, God can help us see evidence of mind damage in our *own* thinking. How much self-justification do we allow ourselves in order to have our way or excuse our behavior? How often do our own Facebook posts and comments, for instance, look like those of political partisans—contentious, proud, and striving over matters of worldly concern, far removed from the Gospel of the Kingdom? How often do brothers and sisters in Christ seek to “win the debate” or put someone in his or her place, rather than show respect for each other’s point of view?

Such contentions and disputes are of the *flesh*, not God’s Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:20; Titus 3:9). These patterns of thinking and behavior reveal mind damage, as well.

Healing Available

But God has not abandoned us! As we noted at the start, He has given us a spirit of sound-mindedness—in fact, His very *own* Spirit (2 Timothy 1:7).

But the full healing of our minds doesn’t happen immediately at baptism. If only it did! Rather, it takes time, and we have a role to play. Paul admonished Timothy to “stir up the gift” (v. 6), meaning Timothy had a responsibility to value and nurture what he had been given.

As we strive to use the Spirit of God to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), developing His gracious gift of a sound mind should be one of our goals. If our Father has given us the opportunity to possess a *truly* sound mind amidst a world lacking one, we must not neglect it! We are obliged to make the most of that opportunity.

Here are seven principles to help us do so.

1. Acknowledge God as God.

As we saw above, Paul warned Roman Christians about the dangers of failing to acknowledge our Creator *as God*. Although the academically intelligent people he described “knew God, they did not glorify Him *as God*, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21).

When you truly understand *who God is*, His existence *demand*s utter devotion and wholehearted worship. Jesus taught that the “first and great” commandment of God’s law is “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37) and that *nothing else* can come first in our lives. Our devo-

tion to Christ, His Father, and the Kingdom He is bringing must supersede all other concerns and desires (Luke 14:26; Matthew 6:33).

To commit less than *everything* to God is to fail to acknowledge who He truly is. Yet, if our perspective does not hold God in His proper place, that perspective becomes increasingly distorted and perverted. As noted earlier, mere *awareness* of God is not enough. It is the *fear* of God—regarding Him with a profound, life-changing reverence and sense of awe—that is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). It was only as his fear of God went to the “next level” that Job’s perspective on *himself* became right and sound (Job 42:5–6).

Just as dancers and figure skaters focus on one fixed point to maintain their orientation as they perform dizzying spins, the fear of God is a fixed point that orients our understanding of ourselves and our surroundings, our relationship to others, and the meaning of our lives.

To maintain and develop a sound mind, we must recognize and increasingly accept the proper role the Almighty God plays in our lives and in the world’s affairs. If we do, our actions and choices will show it.

2. Pursue humility.

The Apostle Paul made a simple but vital observation: “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1). This is not an indictment against knowledge; Peter notes that growing in knowledge is expected of Christians (2 Peter 1:5–7). Paul’s statement simply recognizes that the more

To think that pride cannot warp our minds as it did Satan’s is foolishness at best, madness at worst.

knowledge we acquire, the greater the temptation to think of ourselves—and *our personal conclusions and opinions*—more highly than we should.

The Bible gravely warns those who consider themselves wise and prudent (e.g., Isaiah 5:21; Proverbs 26:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12). To think that pride cannot warp *our* minds as it did Satan’s is foolishness at best, madness at worst.

Philippians tells us, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (2:3) and tells us that this humility characterizes Jesus Christ’s mind (vv. 5–8).

Selfish ambition and being wise in our own eyes are faults that work against sound thinking. If we want to think clearly, we must ask God to help us embrace a humble outlook on ourselves. The more enamored we become of our own reasoning, the more we risk the mind damage that pride always brings.

3. Feed your spiritual understanding.

Some have claimed that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong completely condemned science and the scientific method. He did not! He recognized the wondrous knowledge scientific endeavors have brought to mankind, and he acknowledged the many facets of life they have improved. But he did condemn the rejection of *divine revelation*, which too often distorts the work of scientists. In this issue's Editorial on page 3, Mr. Richard F. Ames discusses this vital understanding in more detail.

Without input from God, full soundness of mind will elude us, as some truths must be spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). If we want to grow in our ability to think, reason, and discern soundly, we must seek to equip our minds fully with His word's eternal truths.

How blessed we are to live at a time when the Bible is readily available to so many! King David knew the value of making God's revealed knowledge a deep part of who we are, writing in Psalm 119, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (v. 11). God's word was his meditation throughout the day (v. 97) and it brought him understanding that others did not have (vv. 98–100). In fact, a foundational purpose of the New Covenant is the *writing of God's laws and ways in our very hearts and minds* so that they become part of how we think and reason (Hebrews 10:16).

Are we working regularly with God as He seeks to write His word in our hearts? To be fully sound, a mind *needs* ready access to the truths of God!

If we want to rationally understand the world—correctly evaluating ideas, opportunities, situations, and circumstances—we will be faithfully and regularly feeding on God's revealed word as a source of needed information that is available nowhere else.

4. Train your discernment and practice acting on it.

Scripture praises good discernment and describes it as very valuable (e.g., Proverbs 2:3; Philippians 1:9). But discernment doesn't develop quickly. It is acquired and honed over years of use: "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment *trained by constant practice* to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14, *English Standard Version*).

Discernment requires practice—actively attempting to distinguish good from evil in the world and in the choices presented to us and, upon discerning, *choosing the good*.

It is no coincidence that the *NAS Greek New Testament* explains that the word translated "sound mind" in 2 Timothy 1:7 also bears the meaning of "self-control"—the two are inseparable. Every time we allow ourselves to choose or behave as if there were no difference between the good and the bad or the wise and the foolish, we dull our senses to the distinctions between them.

While there is much pleasure in what is good, there can be much pleasure of a sort in sin, as well—though sinful pleasures are *temporary* (Hebrews 11:25), leading *always* to deep regret at a later time, if not immediately. Merely relying on what "feels right" in the moment may very well be a big mistake. If we want a sound mind, it is important that we *exercise* it regularly by actively seeking to discern the good. Moments when what is right seems "obvious" are often the very moments when mature discernment is needed! *Why* is it so obvious? What *principles of God* tell us that? Are there biblical principles that might argue *against* the "obvious" conclusion?

If following our instincts led to good discernment, there would be no need to exercise our senses in the manner Hebrews 5:14 describes. It takes work and experience, but the result—clear-headed, rational, godly thinking—is worth the investment.

5. Dedicate yourself to truth over falsehood.

Warning: This advice may sound easier than it actually is.

If we want a sound mind, we need to commit ourselves to truth and desire to see things as they *truly are*. This isn't just about seeking true facts from trusted sources, though that is vitally important. It also includes refusing to settle for the falsehoods we often tell *ourselves*.

Sin corrupts us such that truly and deeply desiring truth is not our natural state: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Self-deception is *remarkably* natural to each of us, and as many (including Mr. Armstrong and Dr. Roderick C. Meredith) have said in the past, *Those who are deceived do not know they are deceived!*—a warning that includes *self*-deception. And our astonishing (and frequently unrecognized) willingness to lie to ourselves and justify the things we really want to have or believe is powerfully corrosive to sound-mindedness.

God wove a commitment to truth into His Ten Commandments: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). And *you* are your closest neighbor!

Every "little" lie we settle for, whether a lie about the world around us or about ourselves, distorts our understanding of reality to some degree and makes the truth harder and harder to perceive. Clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson once told an audience, "If you tell enough lies, often enough, the truth will become entirely hidden from you—and then you are in hell."

We cannot retain a sound mind without a determined willingness to live in *reality*, however painful it can sometimes be. That means we must be willing to sacrifice all our illusions, even our favorites.

6. Seek wise counsel.

Counsel helps us to go beyond the limits of our point of view and life experience—limits we all possess. It is a vital aid to

sound thinking, and the man or woman of understanding will put in the effort necessary to diligently seek the advice and guidance of others (Proverbs 20:5). On the opposite end are those who are satisfied with their *own* counsel: “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment” (Proverbs 18:1).

However, if we want to truly increase soundness of mind, we need to seek counsel *properly*. Sometimes we misuse proverbs about seeking a “multitude of counselors” (e.g., Proverbs 11:14) as a pretense for “shopping” until we find a “counselor” who will justify what we really want to do or believe. It is a prophesied characteristic of this age that people will tend to “heap up for themselves teachers,” looking for someone to tell them what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear (2 Timothy 4:3–4). Such an approach helps us to justify ourselves—either to others or in our own minds—but it is not in the spirit of the Bible’s admonitions.

Truly seeking counsel requires more than putting on a show and more than reaching out only to those who will predictably echo our own desires. It requires seeking out those most qualified to give us the advice we need and willing to disagree with us if need be.

Many in the world live their lives without considering real, substantial counsel. Many, too, are so enamored by their own positions, research, and conclusions that they are ready at the drop of a hat to *give* counsel, whether asked for or not. Many on Facebook and other social media platforms regularly and forcefully declare to the world their personal conclusions on medical advice, vaccinations, nutrition, politics, biblical doctrine, prophecy—you name it.

The Bible warns, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). However, social media has handed us digital soapboxes and megaphones that have tempted many to cast that good advice aside far too readily.

Cultivating a sound mind involves being far more interested in *obtaining* counsel than dispensing it. In fact, the counsel of James is exactly this, that “every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19).

7. Be careful of your sources.

One of my favorite math-related stories involves a professor who warned his students that if they began with false information or a false premise, such as assuming “two equals one,” they could “prove” almost anything.

A student then challenged him: “Okay, then start with that and prove you’re the pope!”

After some thought, he responded, “Well, the pope is one person and I am one person—so I and the pope are two. Therefore, since two equals one, *I and the pope are one.*”

I like that story because it emphasizes something important about logic and reasoning: All reasoning is vulnerable to bad assumptions and bad input. When it comes to thinking, the old maxim applies: *Garbage in, garbage out.*

Life is complicated, and we often need information we don’t have. Whether we are making nutritional decisions for our family, seeking to understand a difficult passage of Scripture, or trying to make sense of a relationship challenge, it is vital that we feed our minds with solid information from reliable sources.

Regrettably, the Internet has become a veritable Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Too many of us see it as our first stop, and sometimes our only stop, for information—even in our personal Bible study—and forget two important facts: Any fool can post a webpage or YouTube video (and many fools do!), and there is no “truth filter” on the Internet.

God tells us to consider our sources *carefully*. Paul tells Timothy that “you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, *knowing from whom you have learned them*” (2 Timothy 3:14). At a time when prophecy foretells that our informational landscape will be *rife* with false teachers and false prophets (e.g., 2 Peter 2:1), sound thinking demands not a *loosening* of our standards for sources, but a *tightening!*

If you are looking into spiritual matters, are you looking to those whom God has appointed to shepherd you—individuals He holds personally accountable concerning your benefit (Hebrews 13:17)? Or do you look to those who show no sign of godly wisdom and none of the fruits to which Christ pointed us (Matthew 7:15–20)? If you are looking into health matters, are you investigating proven, time-tested resources for information, or do you rely on fringe websites and videos that simply align with tempting ideas you would like to believe?

Life is hard enough to figure out *without* bad information. If we seek to develop a sound mind and to honor God with our reasoning and conclusions, we will hold our sources to a high standard.

The Mind of Christ

In the end, having a sound mind is part of a much larger goal: having the mind of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5). We can only have true soundness of mind to the extent that we allow Christ to live within us. It is a lifelong journey—one that takes effort. But it is also a journey in which our vision of the landscape becomes clearer, more accurate, and more vibrant the further along the path we go.

As we thank our Father this Pentecost for the gift of His Spirit, let’s add a word of thanks for one product of that Spirit: the opportunity to escape the confusion and irrationality of this world by developing a truly sound mind. (LN)

Daily, Living Education: Parental Perspectives

In many respects, “Living Education” extends beyond Charlotte, and even beyond *LCGEducation.org*, where God’s people of nearly all ages can learn from a wide variety of online material. Actually, it happens almost anywhere God’s people are, as parents in His Church convey His way of life to their children. To glimpse this vital part of education in God’s Church, we talked to a few parents here at our headquarters in Charlotte, each working to rear the next generation of Christians.

Adults think *very* differently from little children, which creates a unique challenge. As one experienced parent told us, “There’s a whole big, exciting plan, and children are living in their little world of their little home and parents. So, it’s a challenge to put it on their level, and the most effective moments for us were daily, unplanned teaching opportunities. The Bible is a very intimate book, talking about so many details of our lives.”

That’s what makes God’s word so applicable to daily situations, and taking advantage of them brings children closer both to their physical parents *and* to their heavenly Father. Lori Lyons, who serves in Record Information Services and whose daughter now has a family of her own, offered advice from her own experience: “Honestly, the most helpful thing was just talking, having conversations—showing God’s hand to our daughter throughout the day, and explaining to her, ‘This is what we do, and this is why we do it this way.’ Even when we would watch things on TV, I would explain, ‘This is right,’ or ‘This is wrong, and this is why it’s wrong.’ We would have constant conversations tying into biblical things.”

Teaching in Everyday Life

Video and audio editor Dylan King heartily concurred. Relating how he and his wife approach their daughter and son, he said, “It’s important that we point out day-to-day, *practical* examples of His way of life. It doesn’t even have to relate directly to the Bible stories themselves; it’s more about relating to the character God wants to develop in us.”

He continued, “It’s more important to teach your kids *how* to think, how to process, how to recognize wise and unwise choices, than it is to just teach them the order of every book in the Bible, every story, every character. It’s more important that they process when their day-to-day lives go well and when they don’t, so they really see God working in their own lives. When our kids make poor decisions, we try to help them see something within those decisions that will help them not make those choices again. When they make decisions that correspond to the fruit of the Spirit, we try to help them see where they’re being blessed for that.”

“It’s easy to think that teaching your children is a formal, school-like process,” noted Mr. John Robinson, Managing Editor of Church publications, ordained elder, and father of two daughters. “But Deuteronomy 6:7 encapsulates it perfectly—it’s just as you go through your day. Throughout the course of the day, situations naturally arise as great opportunities to elaborate on things for the kids.”

Mr. Robinson continued, “Kids begin to realize that when they want to understand something, you will usually take the time to answer their questions. I think one of the worst things we can do as parents or teachers is treat kids like they’re asking a dumb question. It’s easy to do that without meaning to, just by being dismissive: ‘This isn’t a good time, we’re busy.’ You in no way intend to make them feel foolish, but they feel like you just don’t have time—like their question is too insignificant, too trivial. The more they feel like you’re interested and *aren’t* dismissive, the more likely they are to ask.”

“That starts *very* early in the bonding with your children,” he pointed out, “when they learn that if there’s trouble, if they get hurt, they can come to you—you’re going to help them solve their problems or feel better. When they feel like they can ask you questions and you’ll care enough to answer them, they’re far more likely to want to learn from you.”

Resources You Can Trust

Mrs. Lyons mentioned one obstacle she experienced when her daughter was a child. “The biggest challenge we faced in teaching the Bible to our daughter as she was growing up was the lack of resources. We didn’t have the Internet back then, and even in the ‘Christian’ bookstores, everything is so syrupy and Protestantized—just not worth the cost. Looking back and thinking about it, one of the challenges was just that there really wasn’t anything *for children*.”

If, like Mrs. Lyons, you lament the scarcity of biblical, child-focused material, the Children’s Bible Lessons at the *LCGEducation.org* website offer learning opportunities tailored for ages 6–11. These original Living Church of God lessons are free of “Protestantization” and can reveal even more daily opportunities to teach your children the true way of life. Those behind them hope to be of assistance as you heed Deuteronomy 6:6–7: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

You can find the Children’s Bible Lessons on *LCGEducation.org* at the “Children” link in the top menu. And for time-tested advice for raising godly children, read our in-depth booklet *Successful Parenting: God’s Way*.

—Editorial Staff

Woman to Woman

What Is Her Secret?

By **Amber Leonard**

There we were, standing against the wall. Some of the girls giggled nervously as the boys scanned us from the opposite wall. We were about to be selected as dance partners for our camp dance class. Our hearts pounded as we anxiously waited to be asked to dance. The instructor gave the word, and the boys walked across the floor to offer their arm to a girl of their choosing. Quickly, our attention was drawn to a few of the boys arguing over who would partner a certain girl from my dorm.

As we all stood watching this happen, I wondered what was so special about this girl that all those boys wanted to partner her on the dance floor. She was not the prettiest girl in our dorm, so why was she so popular with these boys? She was small and delicate, and had her shiny brown hair nicely tied with a cute, very feminine red bandana, but she was wearing the exact same uniform as the rest of us. She was smiling genuinely, sweet and shy, at the boy who won her hand for the dance. As she danced, she had a sparkle in her eye and lightness in her step. I observed her closely as we were dancing around the room, wondering what exactly had drawn the boys' attention. Years passed before I understood her secret.

Concern for Others Is True Beauty

Proverbs 31:30: Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

It has often been said that a woman's inward beauty shines through to the outside. When you encounter a lady who is physically beautiful on the outside, but speaking to her reveals that she is selfish or has a bad attitude, you tend to think of her less positively in the future.

By contrast, you know from spending time with an inwardly beautiful woman that she is a genuinely good-hearted, caring person. It is not just her outward appearance that leads you to this conclusion, but also the way she carries herself with a godly confidence. A truly beautiful woman shines with

a peaceful, gentle, and quiet spirit from within. It is reflected not just in her appearance, but also in her actions and her concern for others. She takes care to look her best, but that is not what concerns her most. She is kind to all, esteems others better than herself, and has no ulterior motive in befriending others. She is genuinely happy when others succeed, and she will give compliments from the heart. She does not parade herself or draw undue attention to herself by dressing immodestly.

Appearance Is a Personal Advertisement

1 Timothy 2:8-10: I desire therefore... that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

What is the first detail we notice about another person? When we see homeless people on the street, their appearance shows us their condition: what they are wearing, how clean they are, and perhaps a "help" sign in their hands. Likewise, if we see a businessman on the street, we know he is so because of his suit, tie, and briefcase. We recognize a police officer or nurse because of a uniform. The same goes for many circumstances in life. Our clothing introduces us to other people before we ever even talk to them. What we wear shows others how we view ourselves and what our aspirations for the future are. You may say that it is not fair for people to judge a book by its cover, and we should certainly judge righteously (John 7:24). Yet, for those of us with the freedom to make our own choices, how we choose to present ourselves does communicate something about us!

Some women are under the mistaken impression that it is *only* up to a man to control his desires and where he looks. While men certainly do have that responsibility, that shouldn't prevent us from considering our own choices. Imagine walking by a beautiful window display done up with vibrant colors and tasteful decorations surrounding something you would like to have. Your eye will naturally be drawn to such a lovely display. When marketers advertise their



wares, they intentionally put them on display attractively to entice the interested customer to buy them. The same applies to how we dress as women. If we wish to show that we are essentially “up for sale,” we will advertise that fact by drawing attention to the areas where we want the eyes to go. It is not wrong for men to appreciate a woman’s stylish but modestly displayed beauty, but it is harder for them to move on from that “window” if we give them more to see pressed up against the glass or peeking out from underneath the curtain.

As godly women, we should show concern for our brothers and try to let modesty and purity guide us in the example we present to the world. A godly woman will dress herself in attire that is attractive but does not inappropriately draw the eye or generate, by design, inappropriate interest from anyone—and does not put a stumbling block before someone of the opposite sex by enticing him to have wrong thoughts. When we dress with modest intent, we show godly confidence in godly values, and our good character will be the ultimate draw.

Godly Confidence in a Pure Conscience

1 Peter 3:3–4: *Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

Godly confidence has an appearance. If, as God’s daughters, we are truly striving to live in Christ according to His laws, we are free from guilt. We are released from sin and can carry

ourselves uprightly with a peaceful and quiet spirit. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We can hold our heads up, put our shoulders back, and walk with lightness in our step in the assurance that we are forgiven of our sins. When we speak to others, we can look them in the eye and smile from within. We can focus on others because we are not obsessed with our own problems. We show confidence by our actions and wisdom in our words.

In contrast, if we live with a dark secret or a sin that has enslaved us, we will have a guilty conscience. This can play havoc with our outward appearance no matter how hard we try to hide it. If we are burdened by our sins and carry the weight of guilt, it will show in the way we carry ourselves. A lack of sleep from worry over being caught could give us dark circles under our eyes that even concealer will not hide. A feeling of being unworthy may add a slump to our posture. Constant thoughts of our sin might keep our eyes downcast when we talk to others. We may become snappy when our patience is thin, because our focus will be inward, on self.

If we are experiencing something like this, we must examine ourselves and reevaluate the path we are on. It is not that we should judge others who appear this way—sometimes people are tired, or show the aches and pains of age, or are

painfully shy. But we ourselves know that we want to be our best for others and uplift them by how we present ourselves in a godly manner.

So, What Is Her Secret?

Proverbs 31:25–26: *Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.*

You may have guessed the young lady’s secret by now. A woman’s true beauty is in her character. How we treat others shows them where our heart is. Whether we like it or not, what we are on the inside shows others outwardly how attractive or unattractive we *truly* are. Outward appearance plays a large part in how people perceive us, but it is our concern for others and the values by which we order our lives that truly reveal our womanly beauty. If we sin, we as daughters of our Heavenly Father must repent and ask for forgiveness, so that we can once again walk without guilt, with a godly confidence. Only then can our true beauty shine through. (LW)

The Accounting Department: An Interview with Mr. Jerry Ruddlesden

Most families have one particular member who takes responsibility for handling the bills, balancing the budget, and filing the taxes. And it's no different in the family that is the Living Church of God, where the handler of bills, balancer of budgets, and filer of taxes is the Headquarters Accounting Department. Leading that department is Mr. Jerry Ruddlesden, Accounting Manager and Financial Controller for the Living Church of God, who provided us with a fascinating interview.

Moved by God

Giving us a glimpse into his background, Mr. Ruddlesden explained, "My dad came into the Church in 1975, when I was ten years old. Our family was very devoutly Methodist, so we went to church every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday. And it's very interesting for me to look back, and kind of odd—even as a ten-year-old, I had no problem with any of the doctrines we learned when we came into the Church. I accepted the Sabbath and the Holy Days right away. It all seemed like it was right. Because, even as a ten-year-old, I would see what the Bible was saying and how it wasn't lining up with what the Methodist minister was saying."

Years later, Mr. Ruddlesden's life continued to take unexpected turns. "I started going to college for computer programming, believe it or not, but then I took an accounting class and was like, 'Oh, this is kind of how my brain thinks!' So, I got a degree in accounting instead, at Marshall University in West Virginia. As I was getting ready to graduate, my minister at the time said, 'Jerry, I think you should go to Ambassador College.' I didn't really want that—I was just about to graduate! He said, 'No, you *will* go to Ambassador College.' So, after I earned my degree in accounting, I went to Ambassador College. I went to the campus in Big Sandy, Texas, where you applied to go further after earning a two-year degree. I was accepted to go on to the third year, though I was going to be a three-year senior. The summer after my second year, they asked, 'Will you go to Puerto Rico and work for the Caribbean Office?' And it was going to be in mail processing, which was interesting."

It quickly became apparent that Mr. Ruddlesden's educational background suited him for another area entirely. "They



flew me home to visit my family—which was the first time I ever flew in an airplane—and then flew me out to California. They sent me to Pasadena, and when I got out there, they happened to look at my background, and said, 'Oh, you're not going to the Mail Processing Department, you're going into Accounting!' I went to the Caribbean Office

in 1989, and I started working in accounting there. And then we moved the office back to Florida, and the Church hired me full-time. I did not go back to Ambassador College—I already had a four-year degree in accounting, and a two-year degree from Ambassador."

Soon, as the Worldwide Church of God fell into apostasy, Mr. Ruddlesden demonstrated that his commitment to God outshone his commitment to his job. "At one point, I tried to *stop* working for the Worldwide Church of God—I decided that it was changing too much. I married my wife, Sue, and we decided to move close to her family, who were in Spokane, Washington. So, we went up to Spokane, and during that time, the Worldwide Church of God fell apart. I'd known Brian Weeks, who went to work for Dr. Meredith, and he saw that they were using QuickBooks for their accounting. And at that time, I was specializing in an accounting software package, so I came down to California because Mr. Weeks wanted me to show Dr. Meredith that software. Dr. Meredith said, 'I'll take it if you come with it!' I'd been praying about it, and it was one of several times in my life when I felt that God just put His finger on me and moved me: 'You're going to go do this. You can't escape working for the Church.' And I've been doing it ever since, and I love my job!"

Serving Behind the Scenes

Mr. Ruddlesden went on to describe one of the greatest reasons *why* he loves his job: "One of the things about working in this department that gives me the most satisfaction is the

fact that we're able to provide funds that help those who need help, like widows."

As Mr. Ruddlesden brought out, the Accounting Department truly is one of the great silent servants of the Church, having helped virtually everyone in it. "Accounting helps feed the flock in other ways, too, by doing things like paying for all the congregational meeting halls and supporting the ministry with our services. But the most fulfilling thing is being a part of helping those in need, all around the world. It's a great satisfaction to know you've had a hand in that. I love being part of the team that helps with the budgeting and the plans—it's so personally fulfilling to help others."

Members of the Accounting Department can also be encouraged to know that they are an integral part of ful-

"Mr. Weeks wanted me to show Dr. Meredith that software. Dr. Meredith said, 'I'll take it if you come with it!' I'd been praying about it, and **it was one of several times in my life when I felt that God just put His finger on me and moved me."**

filling Christ's commission. "The Accounting Department furthers the Gospel by, obviously, paying the bills for the TV stations that show the telecast, the bills for the magazine, you name it—all our programs," Mr. Ruddlesden said. "We help to faithfully keep it all going that way. I don't do the accounting anymore, necessarily—I work behind the scenes as a controller. I really concentrate on the budget, to be able to help and say, 'Hey, we have a certain amount of more dollars this year for TV programs,' or for other things. It's very encouraging!"

Protecting Our Credit

Though the mission of God's Work never changes, financial legislation does, so Mr. Ruddlesden's team works diligently to keep current. "Two of the Accounting Department's biggest challenges are keeping up with technology, and keeping up with the regulations that are changing. For example, this year, new tax law changes have made it a bit more challenging. So, we're going through that right now, and there's always something changing, so it's a challenge to make sure you're staying up with it."

And stay up with it they do—in fact, they make sure our financial reputation is as solid as possible. "I tell the other staff in the Accounting Department, 'You guys protect the Church's credit,'" Mr. Ruddlesden revealed. "Everyone has personal credit—we pay our bills and have a credit score. The Church has a credit score, too—all businesses do! The Ac-

counting team is part of protecting the Church's credit score. Those in Accounting make sure the bills always get processed on time, make sure they always get paid on time, make sure they know what bills are coming in—it's something to do! And then you have to think about all the regulations that go along with dealing with taxes—for example, we have to file Form 1099 for all the halls and all the independent contractors we have. Keeping that all going and keeping up with regulations—it can be quite challenging!"

Striving Always for Efficiency

Advances in software technology have been a major help to the Accounting Department, as have the efforts of the Church's Information Technology Department. "Using software and working with our IT Department to integrate with the Church's databases has allowed for several improvements in efficiency," Mr. Ruddlesden said. "Otherwise, frankly, we would have to have three or four more people working for us to be as efficient as we are. For example, we recently found a tool that allows a bunch of the third tithe and hall rental payments to be made all at one time. It's improved the efficiency of that process by *many* hours. We're always looking for that kind of thing."

Ever striving for peak productivity, Mr. Ruddlesden knows there's always room for improvement. Among their challenges is creating increasingly insightful reporting in a modern world where the complicated economic environment changes fast.

"If you think about it," he says, "accounting is always looking backwards, because accounting deals with stuff that's already happened—it's a snapshot of any given period in time." Mr. Ruddlesden notes that the leaders in Charlotte need to understand what is going on "right now" to make the wisest and most efficient decisions they can for the Work, and he wants to help them do that: "We're working on that—I would just love to get over that hurdle so everyone leading the Church can have current information right at their fingertips."

"That really goes along with what we'd like it to accomplish in the future," Mr. Ruddlesden concluded. "We want to continue to be efficient. We have staff who really *want* to serve the Church behind the scenes, who want to allow us to have information at our fingertips. We want to always be on top of the changing regulations, because there are government bodies behind those, like the IRS and others. We have to always make sure we're doing what's right."

We greatly appreciate the insights Mr. Ruddlesden has shared with us, and we can all thank God for how he and all of those in the Accounting Department serve the Church!

—Editorial Staff

OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART continued from page 2

to them, and they never know it? Employers might be a bit more lenient in a high-employment environment, like the one the United States was enjoying, but what happens after COVID-19? Great economies never last forever!

One of the dangers of the Internet is what has popularly been called “fake news,” and this phenomenon has real relevancy for us. Fake news occurs when someone spreads a false rumor, either knowing it is false or sincerely believing it is true when it is not. I suppose we are all guilty of passing something along in this latter category. This happened awhile back when some young people thought the Charlotte Family Weekend was cancelled and had the idea that a petition should be started to change our minds at Headquarters.

There were two problems with this. The first is that this is not the way we make decisions in God’s Church. Sometimes our youth—and our adults as well—do not understand the reasons for things and run with their emotions. The second problem was that those who started this, though no doubt sincere, didn’t know what they were talking about: The venue for the weekend had already been booked a couple of months earlier, long before the petition even showed up. A call or email to our Charlotte office would have cleared the matter up instantly, without spreading worry or concern.

No long-term harm was caused by the incident, and it was a great “teaching moment” for any who wanted to learn. However, it illustrates how quickly misinformation and emotions can lead to poor choices—with the potential of making matters worse instead of better.

Transforming Our Thoughts

The Feast of Pentecost is coming, and that fact is relevant to this topic. As we noted at the beginning of this article, Jesus explained, “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). My friend in Ambassador Club could not hide his heart, despite deploying what he thought was a tactful

question in hopes of doing so. Who we are and what we think will be laid bare sooner or later by what we say and what we do. It is not enough to choose our words carefully. That *is* essential, but what is in our heart is even more important.

God gives us His Holy Spirit to *transform our hearts*. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10). That is why His Spirit was poured out upon the fledgling Church on the first Pentecost following Jesus’ resurrection.

Have people ever said or done something that prompts you to condemn them in your heart, only to have the thought enter your mind that you yourself were guilty of something similar? That is likely God’s Spirit *working* on your heart. It is a gentle reminder of your own need to change—to remove the beam that is in your own eye, and to be compassionate toward others.

In this present age, Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is a liar (John 8:44). He is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). He directs the course of this world (Ephesians 2:2). And, he wants to destroy the people of God. Computer technology is a wonderful benefit when used properly. We would have a hard time doing the Work today without so many modern innovations. We use social media to preach the Gospel, and with it we can go into areas of the world we could never reach without it. However, as with everything mankind creates, it can be—and *is*—used for evil, and there is a malevolent spirit being only too happy to encourage its wrong use.

The heart of that spirit being is bad, indeed.

And that is why God is transforming our innermost thoughts to be as His own—so that we, as God’s firstfruits, can replace that being, and reign in this world with hearts fashioned to match our Father’s.


THE MISSING DIMENSION IN KNOWLEDGE continued from page 6

might—yet we will also grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and in treasuring His great love for us. Yes, the earth is our inheritance, but so, too, is the universe. We will inherit all things—that’s from the Greek *ta panta* (Hebrews 2:8)—everything that is seen and unseen.

And of all those things, what is the greatest knowledge? We could answer

this in several ways. I still remember how Mr. Herbert Armstrong put it several times—that the greatest fact of all is that “God rules supreme!” And we can look to Christ’s prayer for His disciples, in which He prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

So, dear readers, *saturate* your mind with the true knowledge you find

in God’s word! Never let a day go by without studying your Bible. Pray to God for wisdom and understanding. Practice the righteousness that is taught by the knowledge you receive. As you do so, you will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, and prepare yourself for your place in tomorrow’s world, where you will be helping human beings understand the missing dimension in knowledge! (LN)

God Is Our Hiding Place

The COVID-19 pandemic has left more than a million people infected and has affected hundreds of millions with unprecedented shutdowns of “regular life” as we know it. We’re all concerned about our health and that of our friends, family members, and neighbors. And beyond health concerns, we worry, “Will my job have to be cut because of industry shutdowns? Will financial systems or other society vitals collapse, or even the production and distribution of food? Could another Great Recession (or Depression) be triggered?”

How should we respond to the chaos? Thankfully, as Christians, we have a hiding place during the storm. God tells us that we can run to Him for help at any time, but especially during difficult and frightening times like these. The psalmist wrote, “You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word” (Psalm 119:114). Yes, God is our hiding place—but what exactly does that mean?

David says God is “my lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, who subdues my people under me” (Psalm 144:2). This verse shows several ways that God is our protector, sending waves of comfort through the minds and hearts of those who trust that the Bible is true: High tower. Deliverer. Shield. Refuge. Hiding place. These verses remind us that God promises to protect us, and that His protection applies to illness, hunger, violence, and other dangers.

While the pandemic surrounds us, we should take physical precautions the very best we can. The Bible gives us many

health laws that are relevant to dealing with the coronavirus, including the principle of quarantine (Leviticus 13:4, 46). While we take physical precautions, we should earnestly ask God for protection from the virus and protection from other lasting effects that it may cause. We can read the scriptures about Him being our hiding place and enjoy that truth and comfort. We should also thank Him for all the protection He has provided for us in our lives—in times when we recognized it and times when we didn’t.

However, we still live in Satan’s world (Luke 4:6; John 14:30). God doesn’t promise that we will never experience hardship. He does protect His people physically, but He also allows trials and extreme difficulties in our lives. In Acts 14:22, the Bible says that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Trials help us build character and faith. God has a long-range plan. He wants to protect us in our physical lives, but He even more wants us to obtain eternal life (John 3:16). We can rest assured that even when trials do come, He will make a way of escape for us so we are able to bear them (1 Corinthians 10:13). That promise still stands.

As Christians, we should run to our spiritual hiding place and sincerely ask God for His protection. We should also ask Him to bring His Kingdom soon. That Kingdom, with Jesus Christ ruling as its King and Healer, is the place of **total** protection, a place where tears, pain, danger, and death are completely replaced with laughter, health, joy, safety, and life (Revelation 21:4).

In hard times like these, it is extra-important that we draw close to God.

—Josh Lyons