

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## This Is Not a Game

*Dear Brethren,*

There are only two explanations for our existence. Either life is the result of blind evolutionary forces—a cosmic accident—or it is the product of a supreme Being who possesses knowledge, wisdom, and power beyond our comprehension. Evolutionists agree that there are no other options. How did it all begin?

The attraction of evolution is that if there is no God, we are left to ourselves to determine right and wrong. It leaves us with an “anything goes” society. However, if we are the result of an all-powerful and all-knowing Creator, there is Someone who can hold us accountable for the choices we make.

There is another fundamental and profound difference between these alternatives. One gives us purpose, meaning, and hope. The other cannot provide a lasting purpose, but leads us to the blackness of darkness forever, as if we had never been. There can be no life beyond the here and now if there is no God. With death would come the end of consciousness, never knowing what comes after. We would be no greater in importance than a small ant crawling across your kitchen floor, about to be accidentally squashed by your shoe. And if evolution is true, creating an imaginary God in our minds does not change that reality.

Thankfully, we have reason to believe in God and a more encouraging reality. Even scientists admit that the universe had a beginning—though they try to find an alternative to the evidence—and a beginning requires a *cause* for that beginning. Furthermore, evolutionary scientists also agree that the universe is so fine-tuned and life so complex that it is difficult to imagine it all happening by chance. Still, most hold to blind faith rather than admit the obvious!

### Who or What Is God?

Many millions have lived and died believing in a god or gods, but reason tells us that a belief in *all* gods cannot be correct. What, therefore, makes us think that what we believe is correct? I have asked myself this question many times and am not afraid to ask it again. The evidence does not change, and the answer stays the same for anyone who has proven that God exists and that the Bible is His word—and who humbly searches the Scriptures to learn His will.

We rightly understand, however, that things are a bit more complicated than that. The true God is not discovered by human reason. He is not understood through intellect, but by the weak and base of the world whom He specially chooses (1 Corinthians 1:26–29). It is by His Spirit that spiritual knowledge is imparted (2:6–11).

God—through His Spirit and His inspired instruction manual—reveals a most incredible plan for mankind, a plan hidden in plain sight from all but a very few. When we obey the words of the Bible and observe the Holy Days and Festivals revealed within them, we come to understand a profound plan found nowhere else. That understanding does not arise from a simple intellectual exercise but from obediently keeping holy the time that God has designated: His weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days.

### Is This Legalism?

We in the Church of God are often accused of *legalism* because we obey God’s commands. While that accusation is generally false, we *can* be guilty of legalism if we think that all we need to do is keep God’s laws and statutes apart from growing within their intended purpose. The Jews of Jesus’ day testify to this

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fact. They kept the Sabbath and even attached many additional man-made regulations that they thought would help them keep it, but they totally missed God's intent—to convert the physical mind into one that fully embraces His way.

Just as there are only two explanations of how the universe and life came to be, there are only two ways and outcomes of life found in the word of God. Those contrasting ways are symbolized by the two trees in the Garden of Eden, and they were later spelled out for us in the sharpest terms:

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them (Deuteronomy 30:19–20).

God's laws are the foundation of an orderly society, but physical man without God's Spirit does not have the heart to obey and comes up short (Deuteronomy 5:29; Romans 3:23). It is only when God's Spirit is imparted to us by the laying on of hands following baptism that a complete change may begin. Then we no longer obey those laws *only* out of fear of consequences for disobedience, but as God's sons and daughters we can embrace them in our hearts and minds. Our natural hostility to the law of God is removed (Romans 8:6–9).

The Feast of Pentecost reminds us of this great transformation that must take place. The Spirit of God unites with our human spirit to begin a new life, just as a sperm and an ovum begin a new human life. But that fertilized ovum—a zygote—must implant, be nourished, and grow. We dare not remain as an unplanted and unnourished zygote. We must allow God's Spirit to guide us in putting to death the old man. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:13–14).

The “once saved, always saved” doctrine of mainstream Christianity is easily disproved (Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26–31). Therefore, we are told, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (v. 23). Note that this warning is in the context of those who forsake assembling together: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (vv. 24–25). The overwhelming majority of us came out of COVID-19 assembling as we always did, but a few have failed to return to their previous pattern of regular Sabbath attendance, thinking they can sit at home and take part online—or, worse, not at all!

### A Dim Mirror

Pentecost also reminds us that God is only calling a select few. Those of us so blessed have entered a child-parent relationship that extends far beyond our few years in fleshly bodies. “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:15–17).

It is difficult to fully grasp what that means, and we are not alone in that difficulty, as Paul explained: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Let us meditate on these things. Life is no accident. We were created for a purpose. This is not a game we are playing. Those of us called now have been given a privilege beyond anything we could imagine or deserve. Let us be diligent to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10)!



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## Courtesy, Compassion, and Kindness

**W**illiam Bennett was United States Secretary of Education under President Ronald Reagan, and he recognized that, while there always would be different religious and political perspectives in his country, there should still be common values upon which everyone could agree. He put together *The Book of Virtues*, a compilation of short stories addressing ten values with which all people ought to agree, such as compassion, courage, honesty, and friendship.

Of these stories, “Grandmother’s Table” is one of my favorites and one that I read every few years to campers and staff during Evening Reflection at our Living Youth Camps. I am always struck by the profound point it makes about compassion and how others see our behavior, especially the very young.

The story tells of an elderly widow who lives with her only relatives: her son, his wife, and their young daughter. The widow’s sight and hearing are diminishing, and her hands often tremble violently, spilling her food as she eats. This irritates her son and daughter-in-law to the point where they eventually tell her to eat her meals alone, at a smaller table by a closet. As she eats by herself, she gazes in sadness at her son and his family, who barely speak to her unless chastising her for dropping something—until the widow’s granddaughter reveals a painful truth.

One evening just before dinner, the little girl was busy playing on the floor with her building blocks, and her father asked her what she was making. “I’m building a little table for you and mother,” she smiled, “so you can eat by yourselves in the corner someday when I get big.”

Her parents sat staring at her for some time and then suddenly both began to cry. That night they led the old woman back to her place at the big table. From then on she ate with the rest of the family, and her son and his wife never seemed to mind a bit when she spilled something every now and then (1993, pp. 143–144).

Children teach us many lessons, and the above story, although fictitious, is strengthened by its believability—we can easily imagine it happening. Many profound

insights come from the minds of small children, whether they intend to provide them or not. As David wrote, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger” (Psalm 8:2). Jesus quoted this to the chief priests and scribes who criticized Him for not rebuking the children who cried out to praise Him (Matthew 21:15–16).

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that “in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Timothy 3:1). Paul went on to explain that people would lack gratitude, would be unloving, and would be unwilling to forgive. “Grandmother’s Table” demonstrates how the widow’s son and daughter-in-law only came to understand their own lack of compassion and kindness when it was brought to their attention by the actions of their little girl.

### The Effect of Pentecost

God’s grace toward us is partly expressed by His showering great kindness upon us. “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)... that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4–7; also see Titus 3:4). And our own character must also be expressed by tender mercies, patience (longsuffering), and kindness. “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12). Paul explained that his ministry sometimes involved showing great patience and kindness (2 Corinthians 6:6). We read often of Jesus expressing compassion for those He encountered during His earthly pilgrimage—giving of His time to heal (Matthew 20:29–34), to teach (Mark 6:34), and even to raise the dead (Luke 7:11–15).

Longsuffering and kindness are two traits listed as fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Indeed, they must be written in our hearts and become part of our very being if we are to rule in the Kingdom of God. Is this not the message of Pentecost and the New Covenant? “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).

God changes us through His Spirit, but we must be responsive to His working on our conscience.

We know that Jesus' parables of the Kingdom were not intended to be understood by those not called, but some of His other short stories were meant to make a point to His hearers. The story of the good Samaritan is one of the best-known in the Bible, and Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* even retells it. It is so well known that I need not repeat it here, and its point is that the command to love one's neighbor involves having compassion enough to show kindness to a stranger in need (Luke 10:25–37).

The parable of the unforgiving servant is another case in point for showing compassion, part of which involves forgiving one another. When the Apostle Peter wanted to know how many times he should forgive, Jesus used this short

As children grow, they begin to think about what this all means. Over time, children—sometimes on their own, sometimes with guidance—learn to connect how they ought to treat others with how they like to be treated. They discover that there is an internal reward when sharing with a friend, and thus they awaken to the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). **However, there is still a desire to put the self first, and the struggle between outgoing concern and selfish desire is a battle we fight throughout our entire lives.**

story to illustrate the point. The parable explains how, when a king's servant was called upon to pay a very large debt that he owed, he begged his king for forgiveness and for more time to try to collect the staggering amount. “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt” (Matthew 18:27). However, the servant later went out and harshly treated a man who owed him far less. When the king heard about this, he was not pleased, and he rebuked his servant, asking a simple question in verse 33: “Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”

### Words and Actions

Compassion and kindness may be shown by both our words and our actions. You were probably told as a child, “Sticks and

stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This mantra was taught by well-meaning parents, teachers, and others to toughen us up against the unkind words that inevitably come our way—but the truth is that words do hurt, and they hurt even after we become adults.

Jesus often rebuked hardheaded and hypocritical people, including the scribes and the Pharisees. Rebuke, when needed, is a form of love, but a godly rebuke must be spoken with grace, compassion, and kindness—all of which, of course, Jesus used consistently, even if His message had to be forceful on occasion. It is recorded that, when He was on a visit to His hometown of Nazareth, “all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, ‘Is this not Joseph's son?’” (Luke 4:22).

We are told that “the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious” (Ecclesiastes 10:12). And then there is that beautiful statement regarding a virtuous woman: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26). Sadly, many women have a cruel, backbiting tongue, engage in gossip, and subtly cut one another down. But when it comes to cruelty, men can be just as guilty. In fact, male cruelty may more readily go beyond words and enter the realm of violent actions.

Nevertheless, both men and women—even without God's Spirit—are capable of showing compassion and kindness. We see this in how the people of Malta behaved toward those shipwrecked on their island during a cold rain. They built what must have been a very large fire to warm the 276 seaweary strangers who had been cast upon their shore. “And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold” (Acts 28:2). And one of the leading citizens on the island “received us and entertained us courteously for three days” (v. 7).

### Different Stages of Life

Courtesy, compassion, kindness, and love are learned at different stages of life. You have no doubt seen a small child selfishly hanging onto a toy, even hitting a “friend” if that friend seems likely to move in on it. Children must be taught how to treat those around them. Civil behavior begins with learning common courtesies: sharing, paying attention to others, saying “may I,” “thank you,” and “please.” Children may not

understand the reasons for these words and behaviors, but they realize that they must employ them if they hope to gain rewards and avoid corrections. They also learn the proper way to hold a fork or spoon and how to avoid talking with a full mouth. They learn deference to those who are older or are in authority—police officers, teachers, grandparents. Common courtesies, such as rising before our elders, are customary ways to show proper respect (Leviticus 19:32). God tells us that we must also care for animals: “A righteous man regards the life of his animal” (Proverbs 12:10). How we treat animals begins at an early age: “Don’t pull on the dog’s tail,” “Here is how to pick up the cat,” “Animals need animal food, not people food.”

As children grow, they begin to think about what this all means. Over time, children—sometimes on their own, sometimes with guidance—learn to connect how they ought to treat others with how they like to be treated. They discover that there is an internal reward when sharing with a friend, and thus they awaken to the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). However, there is still a desire to put the self first, and the struggle between outgoing concern and selfish desire is a battle we fight throughout our entire lives.

The ability to think, reason, and care for others will either deepen or diminish in adolescence, depending on a combination of our natural characteristics and how well we have been taught. Our character, apart from the “school of hard knocks” and God’s Spirit working in us, is mostly set by adulthood. How much easier it is to learn courtesy, compassion, and kindness at an early age.

We learn in stages, as Peter explains: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance [patience], to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:5–7). Note that knowledge must be taught, self-control must be consciously developed, perseverance is learned over time through experience, godliness precedes brotherly kindness, and love is developed through practicing kindness to others.

Those who possess God’s Spirit follow Jesus’ admonition to reach out to those with whom they do not naturally identify, such as “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:12–14). Not only will God reward us later in His Kingdom, but we often find that these are people who have much to offer in wisdom and interesting life experiences.

### **Kindness Under Stress**

Old age is an interesting stage of life. Observation informs us that, as they age, some people grow more compassionate and

show greater kindness to those around them. But aging poses many challenges—the elderly do not always feel well, they lose coordination and strength, and their ability to clearly hear often diminishes. While some couples grow in their love and appreciation for each other, others sadly become impatient, speak harshly, and lash out. How sad it is to see an older couple treat each other cruelly!

Not feeling well is no excuse for treating others inappropriately. I remember hearing of the example of a dear friend of mine who was dying from cancer. His wife was gently rubbing his hand as she sat by his bed, but even this tender action caused him pain. He could have lashed out at her, but instead he simply said in a kind voice, “Oh no, Mary, please don’t do that—it hurts.”

The Proverbs tell us, “What is desired in a man is kindness” (19:22). And it is often not the big things that we do, but the small acts of courtesy and kindness that truly matter. How often we read in our literature and hear in Sabbath services Jesus’ differentiation between sheep and goats. We learn from Scripture that compassion and kindness, caring for one another, must become ingrained in our very character to the point that we do not see an act of kindness as being a big deal; it is simply the way we conduct our lives (Matthew 25:31–46).

In the context of forgiving one another and not being judgmental, Jesus Christ tells us in one of my favorite passages of Scripture, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). In other words, not only will we be treated as we treat others, but the reward that comes back upon us will be even greater than anything we have given away. I am reminded that when you open a cereal box, the top third of the container is empty because of jostling and settling. By contrast, Jesus says good measure will be returned to us—pressed down, shaken together, and still running over.

Whether we are young, elderly, or somewhere in between, how we show courtesy, compassion, and kindness is all-important. Paul admonishes us, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31–32). And Peter’s advice agrees: “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:1–9).

Let us meditate on these things. “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established” (Proverbs 4:26). Let us go out of our way to treat one another—and even total strangers—with courtesy, compassion, and kindness. (L)



# What Will Make Us Whole?

By **Adam J. West**

**M**any people today struggle under the weight of emotional burdens, often unseen even by those closest to them. For some of those blessed with a positive and supportive upbringing, these burdens may seem obscure or unrelatable. However, for those wrestling to make sense of lingering, sometimes debilitating internal questions, the weight of these matters becomes an ongoing, pressing issue in life.

The field of psychology holds out the promise of wellness, wholeness, and meaning. It becomes, for many, a preferred avenue for seeking much-needed healing. But what principles, knowledge, and wisdom should we pursue as our primary source of healing and understanding? What will make us truly whole?

The ancient Greeks were renowned for exalting human wisdom and rational inquiry. Their philosophical systems—rooted in figures like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—laid much of the groundwork for modern Western thought, including fields such as philosophy and psychology. Many today turn eagerly to modern voices and intellectual figures who have spent their lives in pursuit of “the Greek mind.”

Yet Scripture warns us to guard our convictions from corrupting influences. While as disciples of Christ we rightly avoid polluting Christ’s truth with doctrines of different religions, we may be less discerning when the source of a compelling idea is a respected thought leader, whether ancient or contemporary. But the danger remains the same: allowing the wisdom of man to blur, compete with, or become blended into the divine revelation of God. Popular thinkers such as Jordan Peterson, Robert Greene, or the various modern Stoic teachers often articulate observations that sound helpful or even parallel biblical principles in part—but such ideas only serve us well when filtered carefully through God’s word. Without that spiritual sifting, even what may seem wise has the potential to deceive us or lead us astray.

Even the word “psychology” comes from the Greek word *psuché*—meaning “soul” or “mind.” In practice, most psychological models try to understand the mind strictly through human observation and reasoning, apart from the counsel of the

Creator who made the human mind. Ancient Greek thought exalted the mind as the supreme instrument of truth, a concept that flies in the face of Scripture’s clear teaching (John 17:17).

The philosophies and theories of this world come from the same tree that mankind first reached for—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They may contain elements that appear wise or beneficial, but, apart from God’s Spirit and revealed word, even the “good” lacks the moral and spiritual grounding that only God’s revelation provides. Sadly, just as Adam and Eve desired wisdom apart from God, humanity continues to seek understanding without submission to Him—and, in doing so, remains incomplete.

## **The Danger of Human Reason**

It is true that many principles or observations from human philosophy or psychology can hold some degree of value. Some insights can reflect valid observations about human behavior and practical living. The problem lies in their foundation and purpose. Apart from God’s revelation, drawing from the knowledge of good and evil will yield only partially effective results at best, and can become harmful when elevated to the level of God’s Truth. We must recognize God’s word as the foundation of knowledge and then properly discern, testing which ideas align with His word while discarding what does not (1 Thessalonians 5:21). True wisdom discerns. The point is not that we should reject all secular knowledge, but rather that we must ensure it never becomes our greatest source of spiritual identity, meaning, or healing.

Studying the Bible is how we come to know God, having “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18). The Apostle Paul noted the dangerous secular mindset in the first century AD. To the Corinthian brethren—whose city was steeped in Greek philosophy and exaltation of human intellect—Paul emphasized that true wisdom does not originate in the human mind but is from God.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the

wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1 Corinthians 1:18–25).

The Greeks searched for truth through debate and speculation, but Paul preached plainly that transformation, healing, and wholeness are only possible through the Gospel. All necessary change is possible with God’s Holy Spirit. Human wisdom and reasoning on their own cannot reconcile us to God or heal our hearts and minds. True wholeness is not found in “finding ourselves,” but rather in surrendering the self to Christ and His way of life. The Gospel that Christ brought—the very message many call “foolishness”—is the key to renewal and wholeness.

Human reasoning cannot grasp the full truth of God because spiritual discernment is solely made possible by God’s Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11–14). To the Greeks, God’s Truth was foolishness. Similarly, many today reject the Creator God and lean instead on rational thought and human reasoning alone. Only through God’s calling to build a relationship with Him are the profound truths contained in Scripture revealed to us.

As Paul warned the brethren in Colossae, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). There is a simplicity in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13)—the fact that He is our Savior if we accept Him as such and that He will work internally, with our cooperation, to bring about the necessary changes to prepare us for eternal life in the Family of God.

It can be tempting to seek answers, meaning, and comfort through readily available sources such as books, videos, and podcasts that offer the hope of wholeness through hidden knowledge—through analyzing the inner workings of the mind. But while these sources provide various roadmaps of meaning, the search for the elusive “why” becomes an endless analytical pursuit. It will never fully satisfy us or make us whole. Only the solutions Christ offers us can do that—our hope is future glorification through Christ living His obedient life within us (Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20). Gnosticism was a first-century problem that led some, even in God’s

Church, into apostasy through its deceptive arguments, secret knowledge, and vain intellectual allure. Such pulls remain a danger for our time as well.

### **The Effects of a False Foundation**

Do you and I believe that God’s word is the source we should go to for healing, wellness, wholeness, and the lifesaving principles empowering us to overcome? Do we truly believe that God’s word provides the answers to how we are to grow as Christ’s servants—and the means for doing so?

Philosophizing over matters better left for God to sort out—things of a divine origin and nature—is a slippery slope. The dangers of being deceived—either by others or oneself—abound. “‘The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?’ says the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:28). God’s word is the wheat. We must discern the chaff by continually guarding our hearts and minds. Paul described the faithful use of and approach to God’s word: “But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Giving man’s thoughts credence that equals or exceeds what we give the pure word of God is ruinous. God’s word is the instruction manual for mankind. He has given us His thoughts—the “manifestation of the truth”—preserved to bring us to wholeness, and they are more effective and beneficial than anything man can express (Isaiah 55:8–9).

King Solomon summarized the matter: “And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:12–13). Fearing God and keeping His commandments is the key to wholeness.

All humanly devised systems of thought will vanish when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom. Until then, how has humanity been affected by developing its own paradigms of thought in its efforts to solve its spiritual, mental, and emotional maladies? From the first family—Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel—to our time today, humanity has lacked the sound-mindedness offered only by God through the power of His Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:7). That first departure from God’s revealed way has been a tremendous source of sorrow.

Adam and Eve chose their own will and their own morality, deciding for themselves what would constitute right and wrong. In doing so, they brought upon themselves curses, and mankind has lived under those consequences ever since (Genesis 3:16–19). Who today can truly say they had an ideal upbringing, raised perfect children, or enjoyed a flawless relationship with their parents? History is filled with broken fam-

ilies lacking a relationship with God and His loving, perfect law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12). Broken families reflect the broken reasoning of a world estranged from its Creator.

To some degree, we all carry insecurity—guilt for what we have done or pain from wrongs suffered. Even after baptism, some continue to feel the weight of the failures of the “old man”—failures that a loving Father mercifully forgives when repented of sincerely. People search for the “why” of past actions or failures, yet the answer often eludes them.

Many look to philosophy or psychology as a kind of “savior,” hoping these systems can explain the inner person and supply an intellectual framework for healing. While philosophy and psychology may offer useful observations about human behavior, they remain limited—built on human reasoning apart from God’s revealed purpose. They cannot restore the heart or reconcile us to our Creator.

Jesus said that “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Do we truly believe that? Or do we still lean on human solutions as our primary source of healing? Paul urges us to submit our thoughts to Christ and reject ideas that falsely appear wise or enlightened (2 Corinthians 10:5), and Psalm 119:130 confirms, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” Proverbs 14:12 agrees.

Through His word, God offers the promise of healing (Exodus 15:26; Jeremiah 3:22; Jeremiah 33:6). When we accept the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the burden of guilt is lifted, and we are set free from the shame of the past (Romans 6:22). Shame is a deeply rooted sense of unworthiness before God—feeling unworthy of His love, forgiveness, or grace. Many continue carrying that weight long after God has forgiven them. But how do we receive God’s promise of true healing?

### Conversion and Renewal

The formula provided in Acts 3:18–21 makes it clear that repentance and conversion bring times of refreshing and renewal. If guilt continues to overshadow our joy after baptism, it is not because God withholds forgiveness, but because our will is not yet fully surrendered. Our old ways of thinking resurface, and we continue to identify with the “old man” and his corrupt ways. Our true identity is found only in Jesus Christ, who sanctifies us and provides our security.

Still, many struggle, fearing that others may hurt or reject them, so they selfishly withdraw and isolate themselves (Proverbs 18:1). But Paul directs “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

With a renewed attitude of seeking God above all things and accepting His word as His revealed truth, those who once

struggled can experience their greatest healing. They will no longer see themselves in a shameful manner—they will “put on the new man” and put off the old one (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). They will begin to reject the lie that they are unworthy of love, forgiveness, and God’s blessings.

Through conversion and the renewing of our mind through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, these false beliefs are replaced with convictions founded in truth. This releases those burdened by past sins and the weight of shame. Guilt and shame should no longer be constricting or obstructing factors for repentant Christians.

How many struggle with a deep self-disdain, as if they stand outside the universe looking in? Conversely, how many believe they stand at the center of the universe—grasping for attention and putting on an air of superiority? These are two extremes of the same problem—pride. In the middle is the balance of humility.

When we have contempt for ourselves, what we really have is pride that is disguising itself as humility to us; we believe our failings are *superior* to the failings of others. We may even, however subtly, blame God for our past, our circumstances, or our struggle to overcome. We may believe, for example, that if God were truly loving, He would just take the pain away. But if we blame God, we fail to give Him our reverence and love, for in blaming Him we make Him responsible for our pain. How can we go to God seeking happiness and the solution to our problems if we blame Him for causing our unhappiness?

If we are to be blameless, we must refrain from *blaming*. Personal responsibility, forgiveness, peace, and the lifting of the burden of guilt and shame come through our surrender to God the Father and Jesus Christ and our uncompromising trust in Them. We put our trust in knowing that “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

Resisting the path of our first parents and their blame game (Genesis 3:12–13), we must accept our past rather than run from it. We do not find true wholeness in understanding the elusive “why” of our pain, but in knowing the “who” that heals us of it. This points us to the One who can make us whole—our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ.

God will provide the help we need if we trust in Him, but our attitude must be right (James 4:6–10; Romans 12:3). Only through humility can we clearly see our problems—and our responsibility for them. And we have Christ’s perfect example of humility to guide our thinking (Philippians 2:3–8). He was willing to set aside everything to become servant of all. He relied entirely on the Father to provide. Do we do the same?

### The Path to Wholeness

In Acts 4:9–10 we read of a powerful healing and the Apostles’ proclamation of its source: “If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been

made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.”

It is through Jesus Christ that true wholeness is possible—whether physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Healing comes through Him. He can and will act on our behalf when we trust Him and make the knowledge and love of the truth paramount in our lives. The late Dr. Roderick C. Meredith often exhorted the Church to “feed on Christ,” and we must.

God will not share equal authority in our minds and hearts with humanly devised ideas and concepts. The word of God must be the true foundation for our knowledge. Any other knowledge must take a lower seat in our thought-life. God’s wisdom tells us, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). Again, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

There are many “pollutions of the world” from which we must escape (2 Peter 2:20–21). We see them listed in Galatians 5:19–21, where Paul names the “works of the flesh,” and in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, where he warns us not to be deceived. God calls us to protect our hearts and minds from these many spiritual pollutants. This means not putting trust in man’s wisdom, man’s thoughts, and the general course and direction of the world around us. We must seek God’s wisdom and righteousness with our whole heart: “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:7).

The powerful miracles of Jesus were a witness to the masses. We read that “the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:31). Jesus Christ repeatedly made people whole, and He can do the same for us. God is our Healer.

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:3–5).

Peter reminds us of this truth: that we were healed by the stripes of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:24). That healing is complete. We ask for it, and God provides it—in His timing

and according to His will. We must be thankful for the access we have to God the Father and Jesus Christ through our relationship with Them. We should value it highly along with the revelation of truth They offer to us. Through the name of Jesus Christ and the prayer of God’s ministry, healing is possible—according to His will and perfect timing (James 5:13–15). Christ gave Himself as an unblemished sacrifice so we could become whole. He also promised that we could have life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The blessings extended to us through God’s Church and our part in it are numerous. God has provided for our equipping and edifying through the ministry of Christ, by which...

... we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [whole, complete] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:13–16).

Through the Body of Christ, through His ministry, and through the revealed wisdom and knowledge of God’s word, the Holy Bible, we can become whole. Our peace is made possible through the sacrifice of Christ—His powerful shed blood atoning for our sins and lifting the burden of guilt and shame from our lives. Paul provides this encouragement: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

We can learn profitably from various sources, but we must filter those sources through the word of God, in the fear of God, and in surrender to the mind of Christ. We read that “we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. *This is the true God and eternal life*” (1 John 5:20). Wholeness does not come through rational inquiry or intellectual mastery, but through a restored relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ—to be realized fully at the resurrection, but available in part to us now if we obey Him and look to His word.

As Pentecost approaches, let us recommit to allowing God, through His indwelling Spirit, to make us whole as only He can. (LW)



# Power, Love, and a Sound Mind

By **Wallace G. Smith**

**A**s the Day of Pentecost approaches, we are reminded of a wonderful, hope-giving truth. Yes, by God's mercy we have a significant role to play in our salvation, as we celebrated during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul tells us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). But why fear and trembling? Because "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (v. 13).

So, He is working in us, accomplishing the transformation He seeks.

But just *what* is He accomplishing in us in this transformation? What difference is the possession of God's Spirit making in our lives? If we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), what changes should we expect? Teachers in God's Church have long pointed to the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22–23 as a helpful focus of meditation in this regard, and it would be a mistake to let Pentecost pass without reviewing it.

There is also another, shorter list that deserves our attention—one that describes fundamental characteristics of the Spirit within us. We see it in Paul's comment of 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Let's examine each of those three attributes and consider what it means to have a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind, and what we can do to increase the expression of God's Spirit in our lives in these three areas.

## **The Spirit of Power**

Scripture gives us profound encouragement concerning God's power: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever" (Ephesians 3:20–21).

What a wondrous point this is. Imagine all you could ever ask of God. Then imagine His ability to do *above* all you can ask. Then *abundantly above* all you could ask. Then *exceedingly and abundantly above* all you could ever ask. Then, finally, *exceedingly and abundantly above* all you could ever

ask or *think!* The extent of God's power is far above even the limits of our imaginations.

However, God's ability to do big, showy miracles is not Paul's main point. His main point is that this very same power—capable of more than we can ever imagine—is the power that "works *in us*." That power is *in us*, and by it our Creator and our Savior are *working within us* to change us, shape us, and form us from within, bringing us closer and closer to Their own image on the *inside*, just as we reflect it on the *outside*.

If we have been baptized and had hands laid upon us by God's ministers, we have been given God's Spirit of power—through which we can address our shortcomings with confidence of growing success.

How does that power express itself within us? Of course, miracles and healings are expressions of this dramatic power, and we should thank Him for such interventions in the lives of others and in our own. But obvious, external, physical miracles are not ultimately where we should be focused as we seek for the Spirit of power to be expressed in us.

We read that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3). It is in this arena where we see the power of the Spirit in its most vital and needed expression. As we struggle in this life to follow Christ's example, we need not do so by our own power. If the strength of the flesh is our *only* strength, we are doomed. Jesus is speaking to every one of us when He says that "without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

We then read that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God" (2 Corinthians 10:4). But for what end? To experience miracles? Healings? Other divine interventions? To be sure. But those aren't the manifestations of God's power in us that Paul has in mind here. He tells us that God's power is mighty in us "for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled" (vv. 4–6).

When will our obedience be fulfilled? When we meet Christ in the air. That's when we will be ready to "punish all disobedience." But *now* is the time of seeking to grow in our *own* obedience.

The strongholds on Paul's mind are not literal, but the broken mindsets, addictive habits, and sinful patterns in our lives that we have constructed and fortified over the years—justified in ourselves, defended pridefully, and clung to even as God continues to tell us in a thousand different ways that we need to *change*. But God's power, he says, is *mighty* for pulling those strongholds down. And to what extent? “[B]ringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (v. 5). Those words—“*every thought*”—can be intimidating. If that task were entirely up to us, it would be a depressing and disheartening expectation. But it is *not* just up to us—Christ Himself, who has conquered every sin and defeated every temptation, is working in us by His power. In a real sense, our struggle in life is to step out of His way to allow Him to do that work. Paul reminds us that we are to put to death the deeds of the flesh, but *how* does He say we are to put them to death? *By the Spirit* (Romans 8:13).

This does not and will not happen immediately in every area of our lives. Conversion is a *process*, as we grow in righteous character. Romans 7 does not excuse sin, but reading it should encourage us as we see that Paul—who we should have no doubt will be in the Kingdom of God—saw his life as a continuing struggle against sin. He wrote, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18). Yet he knew that, by seeking to walk in the Spirit, his struggle would be rewarded. He knew to continue fighting and allow Christ in him to continue wielding these weapons that are not carnal but mighty in His power.

Remember that God says of the New Covenant made with us at baptism, “I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them” (Hebrews 10:16). And, thus, we are rightfully focused on our need to change in our hearts and minds. But how often do we forget the all-important subject of those verbs? “*I will put... I will write...*” We are not writing His laws on our own hearts. *God* is writing them, by the power of His Spirit. Our task is to give Him the room to do that writing.

Our faith that God is keeping His word and that His own power is working in us should give us *courage* to charge against the inner shortcomings that scare us, the ones we think we'll never be able to change. Jesus Christ promises us that—no matter how impossible it feels, and no matter how many times you have failed before—He is with us, His Father is with us, and Their Spirit of power is in us. So *move forward*.

### **The Spirit of Love**

We are also told in 2 Timothy 1:7 that God's Spirit is a spirit of love. As the end of His earthly mission approached, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35).

It is easy to miss the significance of this command. After all, the Old Testament taught the Israelites to love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18)—that isn't new. So, what made Christ's commandment new? It was that He set a new bar: to love each other not just as we love ourselves, but *the way Jesus Christ loves us*. That is a supernatural level of love—a self-sacrificial love that is only truly and fully accessible when we are partakers of the very nature of God. We read that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). We have access to a supernatural source of love, to the very Spirit that dwelt within Jesus Christ Himself when He chose to sacrifice Himself so completely and fully for us. We should ask Him to use that Spirit to help us love others in the same way in our daily lives.

The Father and Son love others—have an outflowing concern for others—to such an incomprehensible extent that the Apostle John wrote simply, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8, 16). Possessing love to that degree, loving others the way Jesus loves us, is the highest of bars. Mastering such outgoing concern is the project of an entire lifetime. Yet God's own Spirit of love dwells within us—so there is no need to be disheartened or discouraged. Every one of us who has God's Spirit has the ability to tap into the greatest source of love we could ever imagine. We just have to want to grow in that love.

If we do want the love of God perfected in us, we must seek to walk humbly in the manner He commands of us, for “whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5). Keeping God's commandments is not merely an exercise in checking off items in a list—it is part and parcel of His purpose of reproducing Himself in us, including His perfectly loving nature. Paul's first letter to Timothy highlights the purpose of our obedience: “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). There is a connection between obedience and love.

Thus, if we want to love God more, we should examine ourselves concerning obedience to God's commands: Are we fully taking advantage of the Sabbath, seeking to set that time apart for God? Have we examined the idols or false gods in our lives—looked for things that we haven't even realized we're putting before God? Are we truthful to others? Honoring of our parents? Generous or covetous?

Going further, if our goal is to love others more—to grow in Christ's own outgoing concern for them—then we can examine our obedience with that in mind. Consider the Sabbath, for example. Do we seek to make it a delight for others, including those in the congregation with whom we don't normally fellowship as much? Or ever? Maybe this is the time to risk the awkward silences. Outside of services, do we consider asking others over to fellowship at our home? Do we

do anything to bring cheer to those who are unable to attend services due to illness or infirmity? Jesus did not obey God's commands purely for His own benefit. He was focused on the benefit of others.

Consider further: We already read that John wrote "whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him," and "His word" is more than just the Ten Commandments. The four gospels record more than Jesus' teachings, but also His example. And in the very next verse, John tells us that we should "walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

For instance, when Christ and the disciples were hungry and exhausted and sought rest, He still gave when people needed more from Him (Mark 6:31-34). When there were those in society no one would come near due to their unclean-

We need to remember that "His word" is more than just the Ten Commandments—it includes the example of Jesus Christ. The books devoted to the physical life of Jesus Christ were given to us not just because of His teachings, but also because of His example. **When Christ was exhausted and sought rest, He still gave when people needed more from Him.**

ness, such as the ten lepers of Luke 17 or the "sinner" who anointed His feet in Luke 7, He addressed them and treated them as people whom God loved as much as anyone else.

Many of us have our own "lepers" in our lives—those against whom we bear grudges, or those who have hurt us and have never truly apologized. Christ told us to love those individuals the way He has loved us—and He forgave even His persecutors and murderers as they were torturously executing Him (Luke 23:34). In fact, the very reason He was suffering and dying was *for them*.

Such levels of self-sacrificial, supernatural love may seem impossible to achieve. And, humanly, they are. But we have been given a spirit of love, God's own Spirit. The Spirit that animated and empowered Jesus' love for others is *available to all* who have been baptized and had hands laid upon them by a minister of Christ. But we must seek it—asking our Father for it daily, proving the sincerity of our request with real effort, and believing, in faith, that our Father will provide as He promises He will (Luke 11:13).

### A Spirit of a Sound Mind

Finally, the Spirit in us is called the spirit of a sound mind. Sometimes we may *think* we have a sound mind—so logical, so refined—but even a rock-solid argument can be unsound,

depending on the assumptions upon which it rests. God sometimes shatters us by revealing where we have made flawlessly logical arguments that, in the end, have no value—because they are based on false assumptions. So, if we want the sound mind His Spirit offers, we will allow Him not only to help us think more clearly, but also to show us the flaws in the assumptions we have made.

Consider: What is the condition of even the finest minds in the world apart from God's Spirit? Paul described people who, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:28). It is easy for us to write that off as not applying in any way to us, but we should pause and weigh the possibilities.

Surely none of us refuse to "retain God in [our] knowledge," but we can, at times, sort of ask Him to leave the room, as it were, for a time. After all, the Creator was probably, in many ways, more real to Adam and Eve, who spoke with Him directly in the Garden of Eden, than He is to us. But when the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) entered the calculations, suddenly their knowledge of God didn't factor into their thinking like

it should. And, as a result, they did something very unfitting. Even a "small" amount of sin debases the mind and corrupts sound thinking and judgment.

How do we gain a sound mind? We start from the foundation—with the *fear of God* as the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). That "fear" is an *awe* of God—a reverent respect for who He is and what He represents.

For most of us, it is not simply that we *do* fear Him or *don't* fear Him, as if there are only two possibilities, like a light switch. Think of the father who asked Christ to cast a demon out of his son, saying, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Human beings are complex and complicated creatures. We can fear God to some extent, even to a great extent, while still needing to *grow* in that fear.

"Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5). Here, "things of the flesh" means more than just the disgusting or the debauched. Paul is speaking of setting our minds, our focuses, and our primary cares on the things of the physical world around us, rather than on the things of God and the Spirit. As he says in a parallel statement, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). The world is filled with very smart men and women—scientists, leaders of nations,

educators—who lack a truly sound mind because their thinking is only on the things of this physical world. They do not fear God, so their minds are not primarily focused on those things He cares about. Yet, as we grow in the fear of God, the things of God become more and more important to us.

How important? Jesus tells us: “Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59–60). That is a *strong* statement. Of course, we’re quick to point out that Christ didn’t mean we can’t go to funerals or that we shouldn’t honor our duties to our families. But what *did* He mean?

Think of the things it’s easy for us to get caught up in, like world news and politics. We could obsessively spend all our time focused on such events, claiming we’re simply “watching world events” but not noticing that we’re replacing the things of God with the things of this world, bit by bit. There are many examples we could name—in fact, if we want to see what things of the world risk taking over our thinking, taking a look at our social media feeds is a good place to start, since the algorithms that run them already know our obsessions and respond by feeding us more of them. Yet who is arguing about these things on Facebook? Who’s sharing all those YouTube videos? In Christ’s clarifying words, *the dead*. The dead are setting their minds on those things. And He told us we have larger priorities.

We should not devote a great deal of brainpower toward what the presidents of the United States or France should do or what the prime ministers of Great Britain or Israel should do on the political stage. While the spiritually dead work out their own problems their own way, we have a more important task.

The only thing in this world that can bring the dead to life is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Why indulge in the things of the dead, participating in their decay, when we have the secret to life? A dead mind is never a sound one. Instead, we must devote ourselves to the priorities of our Creator. We must start with the things of God as our foundation. It is the fear of God—the awe of Him that puts His things first—that lays within us the foundation needed for a sound mind.

Jesus Christ is living within us. We can say, with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *King James Version*). Christ has a desire for us. He has a purpose. He longs to express His own life in our lives. He longs to devote Himself to the things of God in our lives. He longs to empower our minds to think His thoughts—to help us fulfill the admonition, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

If we want a sound mind—and the only truly sound mind is a godly mind—having that mind means putting His things first: in our marriages, in our families, in our practice of the four spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, meditation, and fasting. And that soundness of mind isn’t something we ever stop developing. We can always grow, and the moment we think our minds are fully sound, incapable of error, is perhaps the moment we’re in greatest danger of losing that soundness (1 Corinthians 10:12).

### **He Will Complete His Work**

As Christ’s disciples, we have a date with destiny. Jesus Christ will meet us in the air, and we will be rewarded according to our works. This may seem discouraging sometimes, because our works often don’t satisfy us. It can seem as though the closer we come to God, the more we are disappointed in ourselves—the more we learn about His goodness, the more we realize how far we fall short of it.

Similarly, the more we examine the Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind, the more we might think, *Is there any hope for me to have that kind of power in me to overcome? Is there any hope for me to have that kind of love? Is there any hope for me to have that kind of mind—to truly put the things of God before all other things?*

So, let us never forget what Paul wrote to our Philippian brethren. First, He told them, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3–5). That “from the first day” is important. He found joy in them from the moment their walk with God began—and, of course, Christ did, too. And he continued to rejoice in them as their walk continued.

And what was Paul’s confidence? That the Philippians, themselves, would complete the work of self-transformation? No. Rather, he was “confident of this very thing, that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it* until the day of Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

If it were dependent only on *us* to develop the power of God in overcoming, the love of God in how we look upon other people, and a sound mind in how we think and see the world, our lives would be hopeless. But they are *not* hopeless—because we have access to God’s Holy Spirit. We are *not* alone in the work of transformation. God the Father and Jesus Christ are personally at work within us through the Holy Spirit to achieve the growth They long to see.

But we must long to see that growth in us, as well, and humbly commit ourselves into Their hands. To the extent we do so, we can expect to see Their Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind expressed more and more fully in our lives. (LW)

# The Spirit of Peace



By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

**E**veryone talks about peace, but—more and more—peace seems like a mirage in the desert, moving farther and farther away as mankind staggers toward it. Will peace ever come? What if someone credibly announced that peace is coming to the whole world? Do you realize that this announcement has already been made? And we are continuing to announce it today. Of course, God’s people need to know what it means and must trust in it.

The English word “gospel” comes from the Old English *gōdspel*, which is a literal translation of the Greek word used in the New Testament, *euaggelion*—from *eu*, “good,” and *aggello*, “message.” We get our word “angel” from the Greek word *aggelos*, for “messenger.” Christ indeed brought a good message—good news for the whole world!

God said through the prophet Isaiah, “The way of peace they have not known” (Isaiah 59:8). For centuries upon centuries, generation after generation has seen wars. So, how will this promised peace come about? The Apostle Paul wrote that we are to have our feet shod “with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). What did he mean by that? How are we to travel through life prepared with this good news—this Gospel of peace?

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and He brings peace for His set-apart people in this evil age. He also has promised peace for the whole world in the age to come. We can be very encouraged that the peace Christ offers His holy people in this age is only a foretaste of the peace He will bring through His holy mountain, His government over the whole world in the next age. And there can be no world peace apart from God’s Kingdom. The good news of the Kingdom of God includes the good news of peace!

## Personal Peace

But how can we have peace these days when we are beset with so many personal trials? First, it is important to remember that we are still in Satan’s world in an evil age, and Christ said that it would be difficult for God’s people. This is because when God sets His children apart—makes them holy—He necessarily puts a difference between them and others in this world and age.

At Jesus’ birth, angels relayed God’s promise of peace on earth, goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14). But Jesus said this about our trials:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth [now, in this age]. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to “set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”; and “a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.” He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:34–38).

This is not a contradiction. In this age, the world does not like the difference Christ makes in His people—and Satan will attack at every opportunity.

Our obedience to God means that we had to make some difficult choices. Christ and His Apostles taught that we must repent of our sins when we come to Him (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38), and we cannot repent of sin and break God’s commandments at the same time (1 John 3:4). After we are baptized for the remission of sins and receive the Holy Spirit, we continue to make vital choices throughout our lives as to whether or not we will obey God and keep His divine law as our way of life. God’s people recognize that He defines right and wrong, and this puts a difference between them and the rest of the world. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

What we do changes us, and we must overcome throughout our lives, demonstrating living faith (James 2:14–17). Jesus told His disciples, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). Being set apart by God means something! For one thing, it means enduring. Jesus said that we “will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

But even when our Lord warned us of coming trials and difficulties, He encouraged us with a promise of peace: “These

things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

### **Fruit of the Spirit**

God’s Holy Spirit brings peace, for “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23). The order of those fruits is instructive. On Passover, we remember that just before He died, Jesus told His disciples, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). At Passover, we remember that greatest love, and Passover is characterized by the spiritual fruit of love. John the Baptist declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Christ, our Passover, did that by dying for us.

We should also note that the Scriptures often associate the Days of Unleavened Bread with the spiritual fruit of joy. By the shed blood of Jesus Christ, we are washed of the guilt of our sins and are “completely clean” (John 13:10). Like the Israelites coming out of Egypt—which typified coming out of sin—God’s spiritual Israel has great gladness over being cleansed of the guilt of past sins and freed from the bondage of that guilt.

For example, when King Hezekiah returned the Kingdom of Judah to serving God after a period of national idolatry, the nation then kept the spring Holy Days with great joy: “So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness.... Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness.... So there was great joy in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 30:21–26).

Similarly, when Judah returned from captivity, they joyfully returned to keeping the spring Holy Days in Jerusalem. “And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.... And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful” (Ezra 6:19–22).

Love, joy—and then peace. The Holy Day of Pentecost pictures, among other things, the giving of the Holy Spirit, which brings great peace to God’s people. “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Our Father is “the God of peace” (Philippians 4:9) and Christ “preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:17–18). God’s peace is something we remember in a special way every year at Pentecost.

Jesus said that “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name... will teach you all things, and

bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:26–27).

Paul wrote to the Roman brethren that “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Those who walk with God understand that they have an infinitely powerful Father who will cause all things to work together for their benefit if they love, obey, and trust Him. When we know these things, we can be “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). This confidence brings great peace of mind to God’s begotten children.

Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), and He is zealous for His Church. Paul encouraged the brethren in Rome, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life... nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35–39).

We do not need to take anxious thought about whether Christ will perform in us what He said He would. He has both the will and the power to do all He promised!

Christ’s Apostles preached the peace that He brings through His indwelling Spirit. “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). It is Christ who dwells in us through that Spirit, and we have His peace. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by [the] faith [of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). That is why Christ said, “My peace I give to you.”

Paul spoke of a peace that combines trust in God, a sure hope of eternal life in His Kingdom, and a quietness of mind that is brought on by the indwelling of Christ in us. Jesus Christ’s indwelling enables us to be spiritually minded, like-minded with Him. This results in an inner peace for God’s people regardless of the trials we endure. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

The peace of Christ is not just something we feel and experience emotionally—it is something we live and do. Paul wrote that if we live in this peace, “the God of love and peace” will be with us (2 Corinthians 13:11). Peace for God’s people is not only a feeling; it is a *fact*.

We not only have peace within ourselves and with our fellow man—Christ has removed the barrier of our sins between us and the Father. God’s people, made holy by His Spirit, are no longer profaned by the guilt of their sins. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Can we fully comprehend the peace of God? Paul told the brethren in Philippi, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” who lives in us (Philippians 4:6–7). It is good news indeed that God’s Holy Spirit can bring us such peace!

### World Peace Is Coming

Paul described quite well the scene we see around the world today. “‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’” (Romans 3:15–18). But this world cannot see that it is in bondage to an invisible ruler: “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). Christ called him “the ruler of this world” who “will be cast out” (John 12:31). The world is under Satan’s government, which produces rebellion, destruction, and violence. It is important to remember that this age is ruled for now by Satan’s kingdom, to which Jesus referred in Matthew 12:25–26: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”

Jesus Christ is not coming to reform Satan’s kingdom. He is coming to *destroy* it and *replace* it with Christ’s righteous government. The prophet Daniel foretold how Satan’s government will be blown away. Describing the great Babylonish system that currently fills the whole earth, he wrote the following scene:

You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome.... You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone [Christ, the chief cornerstone] that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:31–35).

That “great mountain” is the Holy Mountain of God—His perfect government. God described Satan’s profane government as a mountain that will be leveled. “‘Not by might [worldly militaries] nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel [a type of the Messiah] you shall become a plain’” (Zechariah 4:6–7).

Satan’s government and kingdom will be *flattened*, and the King of kings will then establish His righteous government on earth. Isaiah tells us what that kingdom will be like. After Satan’s violent, profane mountain is destroyed, it will be replaced with God’s Holy Mountain—which will be characterized by peace:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:9).

Why will they “not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain”? For one thing, the King of kings will not allow war or destruction in His Kingdom. He is “Melchizedek... first being translated ‘king of righteousness,’ and then also king of Salem, meaning ‘king of peace’” (Hebrews 7:1–3).

And there is another reason—because “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea”! It will be the job of the children of God to teach the people of the world the way to peace, because they certainly do not know it now. That is why we must learn to live in peace today. Jesus was looking forward to that great day when He said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Regarding peace, Paul exhorted the Ephesian brethren “to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3).

Paul’s benediction at the end of Hebrews is an apt blessing for all of God’s people as we approach the Holy Day of Pentecost: “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20–21). Christ’s Gospel of peace is good news indeed! <sup>LN</sup>

# From Living Education: Student Forum Summary

By **David Markopoulos**

*One valuable experience students have as part of Living Education–Charlotte is listening to Forum presentations each week, for which each speaker is encouraged to address the topic of his choice. The essay below was selected from a section of LCGEducation.org where David Markopoulos, an alumnus of Living Education–Charlotte who now serves the program full-time, summarizes these Forum messages. We hope you enjoy this sample of what our students are hearing! —Editorial Staff*

## **Roots of the Church**

In a recent Forum delivered to this year’s Living Education students, evangelist Dr. Douglas Winnail, who serves as our Director of the Church Administration Department, spent time relating the history of God’s Church through the ages. As a longtime minister who has been CAD Director since 2005, Dr. Winnail presented a full and comprehensive view of the Church’s history and emphasized how important it is that we understand what we are part of.

The heritage of the Church goes back long before the time of Christ. Scripture states, referring to ancient Israel, that they “all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:3–4). What became the Church of God started with the ancient nation of Israel.

Dr. Winnail pointed out that the laws God gave His people laid the groundwork for a unique culture. God’s law reflects the value of human life, the importance and role of women, and principles of love, mercy, and justice, which were absent in most pagan cultures. These principles and laws, on which the Old Covenant was based, were also the groundwork for the New Covenant established by Christ. While the pagans around them practiced debauched rituals, the Israelites were meant to be different—and their Scriptures taught laws and ideas that changed the world.

Jesus stated in Matthew 16:18 that “the gates of Hades” would not prevail against His Church—in other words, it would continue to exist despite challenges. The New Testament has preserved the fundamental doctrines of the early Church in detail, and as we attempt to trace the Church through the ages, we are able to identify important characteristics. The New Testament calls it “the Church of God”—a consistent moniker. The Church believes in the coming Kingdom of God, the Messiahship of Jesus, Sabbath-keeping, and

the validity of God’s commandments, and it has a mission to preach the Gospel and share a warning message to the Israelite nations.

We know from Jesus’ own words that the Church would continue to exist—so why does its history become so murky after the first century AD? As the Ephesian Era ended toward the end of the first century, heresy was beginning to creep in. With the death of the early Apostles and the transition to the Smyrna Era, God allowed the Church to drift toward apostasy and experience persecution. The end of the Smyrna Era saw the beginnings of Catholicism become the dominant religion of the Roman Empire.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman church consistently persecuted the scattered remnants of the Church that held to the truth. Across Europe and elsewhere, there are historical reports of Sabbath-keeping groups who were persecuted viciously—among the Vaudois, Paulicians, Bogomils, Waldensians, and others. The eras of the Church laid out in Revelation can be recognized in specific periods of recorded history.

After the Middle Ages, Sabbath-keepers in Western Europe and Britain began to migrate to the United States, founding congregations, schools, and communities. This was the time of the Sardis Era, which in turn set the stage for the impactful Philadelphia Era. As Sabbath-keepers moved west across the United States, they brought with them important doctrines.

It was during this era that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong encountered members of God’s Church in Oregon. He was later ordained an elder, and as time went on he came to understand much about the Bible that had not been taught for many centuries. Recognizing the importance of Christ’s command to preach the Gospel to the world, Mr. Armstrong began to preach on the radio. This was the beginning of the Radio Church of God—later the Worldwide Church of God. The Church grew substantially during this era, and it was evident that Jesus Christ was blessing His Work. As the time of the Philadelphia Era ended after Mr. Armstrong’s death, God again allowed apostasy to creep in, making the Church much smaller in scale, yet the Church is continuing to do the Work to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Dr. Winnail exhorted the students to learn more about the history of the Church and to fully appreciate the heritage we are part of. The Church has been preserved under Christ’s leadership throughout history and is continuing to do the Work today. As the Church continues to grow, it is important that we understand where we have come from and why we are here. (L)



# The Advantages of Adversity

By **Richard Franz**

“A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor” is an African proverb quoted by United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt, reminding us that the “bumps” of life are what make us compassionate, resilient, and dynamic. If we have the right perspective, adversity can have many positive effects on us.

When adversity strikes, our true spiritual maturity comes to the surface, and our feelings about God come out in the questions we ask, the attitudes we have, and the actions we take. This tells us a lot about what we really believe, and no doubt that is why God allows adversity to strike us from time to time: Adversity displays the accurate measure of our growth and the true nature of our relationship with Him. It can make us stronger, help us to develop new perspectives, and give us greater appreciation for what we have.

When facing a difficult situation, we should remember that it may be just what we need to help us reach our full potential. If we assume our trial is an unfair judgment from God, it indicates that we thought we were in a *quid pro quo* relationship with Him—based on our “rights” rather than on His grace. As we recognize and correct that attitude, the adversity can develop our character and help us draw closer to God.

When we search Scripture for encouragement in times of adversity, we find this reality: adversity is *inevitable*, *invaluable*, and *not invincible*. Let’s explore each of these points and see the benefits adversity can bring us.

## **Adversity Is Inevitable**

Jesus, in Luke’s gospel, taught, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:23–24). We are subjected to adversity daily, and we must accommodate ourselves to it and accept the will of God in it as we learn to endure.

Jesus, during the Sermon on the Mount, essentially said that we are to be at His sovereign disposal—that all who live a godly life in Christ will suffer. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate

and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13–14). Our duty as His disciples is to take up our cross. Struggle builds strength in the same manner that muscle size increases when challenged by resistance.

Jesus graciously prepared us in advance to expect adversity, and He told us how to meet it. “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Our position as sheep is often precarious and uncomfortable. Christ reminds us, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Scripture plainly and fully informs us that adversity is inevitable, but we need not let this discourage us, because...

## **Adversity Is Invaluable**

The best things in life sometimes emerge out of suffering. Before flowers can beautify our gardens, we must break up soil and pull weeds. Before the body can enjoy fitness, it must apply the labor of exercise. Before graduation, one must undertake years of study.

Adversity is invaluable to building godly character: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psalm 119:71). And adversity not only helps us to learn God’s word, but also to obey it: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word” (Psalm 119:67).

God will permit trouble in our lives to draw us back to Him. King David recognized this when he wrote, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands” (Psalm 138:7–8). It is in the midst of calamity that God revives us.

The Apostle Peter shows us some of the remarkable results God can bring out of suffering. “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10). We are to live with the understanding that, for God’s purposes to be realized in the future, some adversity must occur in the present. God uses adversity to

bring us to maturity and to fully equip us as His soldiers. “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:5).

Job, who went through anguish that most of us can scarcely imagine, gives us a wonderful illustration of the spiritually transformative power of suffering. “He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

If you were to visit a gold mine, you would likely notice small cars on tracks, loaded with stones, emerging from an opening on the hillside. The stones would be blasted, crushed, pulverized, and subjected to various chemicals. Tiny particles of gold would be separated from the rock and then submitted to fierce fires in the refining furnace. Later, the molten, shining gold would be poured into bricks worth thousands of dollars each. But these bricks would not yet be completely purified, as they would still need to endure more refining fires before emerging as pure gold.

Suppose that those stones in the mine could think and speak. They might say something like, “Why do I have to be removed from my place to be pounded, pulverized, washed in biting chemicals, and finally submitted to fiery furnaces?”

We could reply, “What use are you buried there beneath tons of debris? You have within you that which is exceedingly

Suppose that those stones in the mine could think and speak. They might say something like, **“Why do I have to be removed from my place to be pounded, pulverized, washed in biting chemicals, and finally submitted to fiery furnaces?”**

valuable, useful, and beautiful. Through this process of seeming destruction, carefully devised by an intelligence you cannot imagine, you can be separated from the impurities that keep you from the usefulness, beauty, and purity that might be yours.”

Though none of us would rather sit dormant and useless as the dull gray stones in the mine, we tend to fear the necessary suffering that God uses to polish and reveal the value that He sees in us. Should we not rather praise God that He has “blasted” us with the Gospel, the dynamite of God for our salvation? From our carnal state, He has begun the process of purification and refining so we may come forth as pure gold.

Adversity is invaluable to the development of our godly conduct. And we must never forget to compare the value of trials in this life to their reward in the Kingdom of God. “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise,

honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Yes, adversity is invaluable!

### **Adversity Is Not Invincible**

In life’s fight against adversities, Christ’s servants suffer the loss of no essential thing. As grain loses only the useless chaff by being beaten, so we lose only our hindrances and impurities by the refining processes of adversity—faith is strengthened, love is expanded, experience is deepened, and knowledge is increased.

We thus can have a weapon against adversity put into our hands by Christ Himself. That weapon in this unceasing fight against the troubles of life is found in one word that Scripture so often couples with victory over suffering: That secret weapon is *rejoicing* (Nehemiah 8:10). But notice that this rejoicing is not the mere pumped-up exuberance that the world calls joy. It is the joy of the Lord—a joy *from* God, *because of* God, and *in* God.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad

with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12–13). The joy that comes in trials is the joy that is grounded in our knowledge of the glory we now only see “in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The Apostle James, a half-brother of Jesus, knew he was writing to brethren experiencing trials, and he wanted to assure them that their trials would lead them to dedicate their lives more fully to Jesus Christ. “My brethren, count it all *joy* when you fall into various trials”

(James 1:2)! Christian joy is not incompatible with sorrow. We mourn the effects of sin on the world, but we can nevertheless rejoice that sin will not have the last word—that Jesus will set creation free from its bondage to corruption (Romans 8:18–23).

Patient endurance is a mark of a person who is “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4), being conformed to the image of Christ. Faith is *tested* through trials, not produced by them—it “comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). This gives us resolve not to neglect our Bible study, as God’s inspired word reveals the advantages of adversity: Out of Joseph’s imprisonment came the preservation of a nation, out of Paul’s chains flowed the prison epistles, and out of John’s exile emerged the book of Revelation, to name just a few examples.

Like these men, if we trust the God of the Bible during the “ups and downs” of life, we will find that although adversity is inevitable, it is invaluable and it is not invincible. We truly are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). (LN)



TITUS 2:3-5

# Woman to Woman

## *Pass It On*

By **Janth B. English**

I recently had the opportunity to enjoy a meal with extended family where four generations were represented. Everyone was enjoying the food and the conversation when some of the younger children began to run around, chasing each other as they played a game that was somewhat like tag—despite the fact that we were in a restaurant at the time.

Those of us in the oldest generation looked at each other in disbelief, and someone asked the children's great-grandmother if she was going to say anything. Her answer was that the children's parents were at the table, along with one of their grandparents, so she was going to defer to them to correct the children. This was understandable, but as I watched the others at the table, it was clear that the younger generations had no problem with what was happening. Something had gone very wrong. At some point, one generation had failed to pass on the value of what is acceptable public conduct.

I then thought about how much can be lost as one generation makes way for the next. Each generation has a responsibility to pass on crucial knowledge. What does that include, and what role do virtuous women play in disseminating the knowledge that is so vital to a civil society? Let's briefly discuss that role in this article.

### **Teaching the Basics**

There are many basic skills that parents should teach their children, such as cooking simple meals, cleaning the kitchen and bathroom, making the bed, and other chores for which one has responsibility as a member of a household. This knowledge is necessary and should be passed on. Work is an attribute of God's character (John 5:17), and all children should learn to make it a part of their lives.

There are also some finer social skills that need to be a part of every generation's culture. These include gracious manners and courtesy, respect for elders, and people skills, to name but a few. If these social skills are not learned, society will devolve into a crude and vulgar place much like we see today—and worse.

From the way people talk to the way they dress, Western society could be described as having a casual sloppiness that borders on disrespect. Generations ago, many mothers passed on to their children the importance of good manners. Most considered their children's actions, especially in public, as a reflection of their parenting skills, and to a degree this was true.

As children, we were in big trouble if an adult asked a question and we did not respond promptly and with a polite answer. "Please" and "thank you" were just common courtesies that were expected and practiced by almost everyone; today, one may be more likely to hear *please* spoken with sarcasm or annoyance than to preface a sincere, polite request. Gracious speech and courtesy are no longer inherent in our society, but they should be part of our experience within God's Church.

Part of our social training involved learning respect for adults—especially the elderly. If children were seated while adults were standing, they were expected to offer their seats to the adults without being asked. We were taught not to interrupt adults when they were talking unless there was an emergency.

When I was an instructor at a university, one of my former students came back to campus to recruit for his company. When he entered my office, I noticed that he called me by my first name, despite having never received my permission to do so. My disapproval must have showed on my face, because he then asked if it was okay for him to use my first name. I told him that he may address me as Professor English or Mrs. English. He was a little taken aback, but for me it was a matter of age and respect, just as I had been taught.

Our society portrays children as equal in authority to adults—including their parents—and the young as owing no honor to the elderly, but this is not God's way. God commands us to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12), and He considers respect for our elders very important (Leviticus 19:32). In a broader sense, we are always to esteem others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We have a duty to pass on to the next generation the importance of honoring our parents and elders and showing respect for others. True Christians should not neglect the necessity of proper decorum.

## Family Learning

Children learn social graces and what is acceptable behavior within the family structure. They are taught table manners while they eat at the dinner table with their parents. If a family never shares meals together, children may miss out on learning table etiquette and how to engage others in conversation—and a deficit in these skills could affect their ability to make and keep friends or even acquire the job opportunity they desire. There are, of course, many other important lessons taught at the dinner table, but they won't be discussed here due to the scope of this article.

With instruction, children learn what behaviors are acceptable in different situations. For example, there is nothing wrong with children running and playing—in fact, it is helpful and healthy for them to do so—but they should not be running and playing in places where doing so can lead to accidents and injuries to them, to others, or to property. These things may seem trivial, but they are not. It is important to a civil society that each generation learns about the rules and boundaries that we must respect. Society is failing in this regard, but we must not. We must pass this knowledge on.

The most important things we can pass on to the next generation are God's values and way of life. The world does not have this knowledge, so it cannot pass it on. We see the results of a society heading for disaster because its people lack the knowledge and wisdom of how to live (Hosea 4:6). God has given His Church understanding of His commandments and His value system, but this knowledge is not imparted by association only. Taking our children with us to Sabbath services is good, but it's not enough. The Bible instructs us to diligently talk to them about God's way of life (Deuteronomy 11:19).

As we interact in the world and our children observe us, we have the opportunity to demonstrate godly values in action. Going through the Holy Day seasons, we impart vital knowledge to our children as we explain to them what we are doing and why (Exodus 12:26–27), helping them to understand God's way of life. We should encourage their questions

and be prepared to tell them the reason for the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15). In doing so, we will use this valuable knowledge to edify the next generation, and our children can then use the same insight to benefit their own.

## Godly Mothers Are Teachers

So, what responsibility do we as godly women have in sharing information concerning proper behavior, social graces, and even what is right or wrong? Much, indeed! The role God has given us as the most direct caregivers for our children places us in the position of their first teachers. Of course, we cannot teach what we do not know, so it is imperative that we know and understand the way of life God has revealed to us in Scripture—which includes the right way to rear children. The study guide *Successful Parenting: God's Way* by Dr. Jeffrey Fall can be of immense help.

Mothers tend to be very soft-hearted toward their children. This is a good thing—God designed us with this tendency. However, we can't let our tender hearts interfere when instruction and discipline are required. Children are born innocent, but their nature is soon corrupted as they take on some of the characteristics of Satan's world. As the first line of defense, we should be prepared for this and teach our children to control their impulses (Proverbs 29:15). The mother is most often the one to teach social graces and foster opportunities for the family to practice them. Whether it's dinner with the entire family, entertaining guests, or some other social gathering, our children can learn from observing proper decorum from us. Demonstrating God's way of life by example is a very effective way to teach.

If you find that you're having difficulties with these responsibilities and need help, just ask. Seek help from the wise women in God's Church who have demonstrated the ability to teach the younger ones (Titus 2:3–4). Through our role as mothers in God's Church, we can be instruments in passing on proper conduct, social graces, and—most importantly—God's values and way of life to the next generation.

Society has become more and more crude and vulgar, and this seems to grow worse each day. Profanity, name-calling, and general disrespect for others have become the norm, as we see by their presence in every medium of entertainment. The world is going down the wrong path, and we can't go along with it. God has called us to be different, to reflect Him in our lives. We are to be a kingdom of kings and priests (Revelation 5:10), and this calling is extended to our children (Acts 2:39).

As members of the household of God, we are to reflect His nature of lovingkindness (Psalm 36:7). Out of this nature will flow actions that are uplifting and pleasant for others to see and experience. If we, as Christian women, can teach our children lovingkindness now—if we pass it on—they can be a blessing to us and to others in the future (Proverbs 22:6). (L)



## *Weddings & Anniversaries*

**Brian McMillen** and **Cheri Rice** were united in marriage in an intimate family ceremony on November 9 in Delaware, Ohio, officiated by Pastor Phil Sena. The bride is the daughter of Mr. John Rice of the Columbus congregation, which is where the happy couple also attend. The Columbus congregation surprised the newlyweds with a congratulatory cake after services on January 3.

This past fall, the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation recognized **Mr. and Mrs.**

**Edward and Linda Miller's 60th wedding anniversary.** Married on September 4, 1965, Mr. and Mrs. Miller continue to provide a beautiful example of faithfulness to God and to each other.

**Mr. and Mrs. Ernest and Caroline Whittaker** of Fredericton, New Brunswick, in Canada, celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on December 20. They are longtime members of God's Church, baptized in the 1970s. The congregation presented them with a cake

and gifts after services. Mr. and Mrs. Whittaker met on a blind date and were married shortly after. God has blessed them, and their beautiful example of a godly marriage shines through their love for each other and for the brethren they have served for many of their 50 years together.

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## Ordinations

**Mrs. Louise McLoughlin** was ordained a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets by Pastor Michael Heykoop and Elder Gary Goebel. Mrs. McLoughlin serves in the London, Ontario, congregation in Canada.

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## Births

Mr. and Mrs. Adam and Michelle Binns of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, are happy to announce that **Samuel Theodore Binns** was born on November 13, weighing seven pounds, nine ounces, and measuring 20.75 inches long. As the name "Samuel Theodore" suggests, God certainly heard their prayers and gave them the amazing gift of their son.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton and Melissa Christal of the Russellville, Arkansas, congregation, are happy to announce the birth of their first child, **David Cooper Christal**. Arriving at eight pounds, one ounce, David has brought endless smiles and a little extra excitement to the Christal family. His parents are grateful, joyful, and enjoying every precious (and slightly sleepless) moment.

Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin and Isabell Smith of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, are happy to announce that **Luke Frederick Smith** was born on February 28, weighing seven pounds, four ounces, and measuring 20 inches long. Mom, Dad, and baby are all doing very well.

## In Loving Memory

**Mr. Gerard Caissie, 75**, of the Moncton, New Brunswick, congregation, died on November 15. A consummate entrepreneur and natural builder, he poured himself into construction and farming until God called him just a few years ago. He always had a project on the go, along with a deep curiosity and a zeal for living. He was predeceased by his two children, a son and a daughter who both tragically died very young. He will be sadly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

**Mrs. Andrea Kay Mabry Chatham, 81**, died on December 15 at her residence. Mrs. Chatham was a longtime member of the Body of Christ and attended the Ocean Springs congregation in Mississippi. She was a loving wife, mother, and sister, and she enjoyed playing games, reading, gardening, and spoiling her dog, Honey. She had a long career as a Licensed Practical Nurse and later worked as a security guard. Preceded in death by her husband, Donald Chatham; her daughter, Diana Hollis; and her brother, Glenn Mabry, she is survived by her siblings Mary Caldwell, Karen Taliancich, Leslie Webb, Gerald Mabry, Teri Neuman, Julia Quave, and Robert Mabry; numerous nieces and nephews; and her Church family.

**Mr. Donald E. Hafer, 95**, died peacefully at home on September 29 with his daughter Diane at his bedside. He was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1987, and a member of the Kalamazoo, Michigan, congregation, though homebound toward the end of his life. Born in 1930, Mr. Hafer joined the Air Force during the Korean War era and received the Air Force Commendation Medal. Later, he was employed by Whirlpool for more than 38 years until his retirement. Following retirement, Mr. Hafer was active in the Lions Club and community service through a number of volunteer positions with Lake Michigan College, AARP, and the local hospital. Mr. Hafer was preceded in death by his wife, Rose, in 2010, and he is survived by three daughters, one brother, a sister-in-law, and numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

**Mr. Alan Hart, 91**, died January 21. Mr. Hart was known for his sense of humor. He loved photography and enjoyed coin and stamp collecting. He enjoyed fishing and spending time at his family's cottage in Lake Utopia, where many wonderful memories were made with family members and Church

brethren. He will be deeply missed by his wife Nancy, his children, his extended family members, and his Church family, especially the Moncton, New Brunswick, congregation, where he attended.

**Ms. Audrey Johnson, 65**, died on November 14 after suffering from multiple health issues. Ms. Johnson was baptized on December 6, 2008, and was a faithful member of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, congregation. She will be remembered for her love of the brethren and the joy she found in sharing home-cooked entrees with them.

**Mr. Brent Knowlton, 70**, died unexpectedly on January 17 after a fall at his home a few days before. The son of longtime elder Charles Knowlton and his wife, Nadine, Mr. Knowlton was for many years a member of the Akron, Ohio, congregation. Though health problems made it difficult for him to attend weekly services during the last few years, he remained faithful to the end, listening in via the congregational telephone link every Sabbath.

**Mr. William Lemmon, 70**, died on January 7 after a lengthy battle with cancer. Mr. Lemmon was baptized into the Body of Christ in July of 1980. Known for his friendly demeanor and serving attitude, he will be missed by many, including his many friends in the Akron, Ohio, congregation.

**Mrs. Kathleen D. "Kay" Johnson-Rhodes, 84**, finished her race on Wednesday, December 31. Mrs. Johnson-Rhodes was baptized in 1969 and a longtime member of the Living Church of God in St. Louis. She lived an active and full life, became skilled in many hobbies throughout the years, and enjoyed history and travel. She was preceded in death by two husbands and is survived by five children, as well as by grandchildren, great-grandchildren, a sister, other relatives, and many friends. Her love and enthusiasm for life will be missed.

**Mr. Curtis Rowe, 92**, of the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation, died on November 17. Baptized in 1974, he faithfully served the congregation for many years until poor health kept him at home. He was a talented musician and played many a tune at gatherings and Feast of Tabernacles dances. His wife, Carol, survives him, and he will also be sadly missed by his physical family, his Church family, and all others who knew him.

## Electronic Service Requested

### “Impossible Is Nothing”

About a decade ago, when I learned of the death of famous boxer Muhammad Ali, my mind immediately began to recall some of his most famous words and victories. Though Ali did not have God’s Spirit, one of his quotes helped me both in and beyond my academic pursuits.

In my college dorm, it seemed that half of the rooms had on the wall a picture of Ali standing victorious over a defeated foe, with a caption of what he had said about doing the impossible: “Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they’ve been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It’s an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It’s a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.”

*Impossible is nothing.* This even helped in my relationship with God, as it made me think of two scriptures. Jesus Christ famously told His disciples, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). The Apostle Paul put it a bit differently when he declared, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Though Ali likely did not have those scriptures in mind, his quote pointed my mind to them, which helped me understand that impossible truly *is* nothing if we rely on God!

If we simply look at the flesh, we can say that some things *are* impossible. Can you travel to Pluto? Can you earn a doctorate in every possible field? Can you become an Olympic athlete in any and every sport? Can you save every person who is dying of cancer? Again and again, the answer is “no”—these are impossible for us. Does this mean that Ali—and, more importantly, Scripture—was wrong in saying that *impossible is*

*nothing*? No! If we let the Bible answer the Bible, we see that all things truly *will* one day be possible for Christians who draw close to God over the course of their lives, using His Holy Spirit within them to seek the true reward He offers His servants.

Interestingly, the Bible even uses boxing to deliver a very important lesson. Paul, though not advocating violence, uses the sport to show how a Christian should draw close to God by living with purpose: “So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing [wasting punches]. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should” (1 Corinthians 9:26–27, *New Living Translation*). If we, as God’s servants, imitate athletes (even boxers) in this way, God promises to reward us at the resurrection. Later, Paul tells us that the reward of the saints will be their resurrection to eternal, spiritual life—which is characterized by glory, power, and incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:42–53).

To those of us who accept Jesus Christ’s sacrifice—and pursue our walk with God with greater determination than boxers pursue their prize—will come the reward of becoming God’s kings and priests at the resurrection, tasked with healing the world (Revelation 5:10). What will happen to the “impossible”? It will all change in the twinkling of an eye! Yes, you *will* be able to travel to Pluto, master any subject, and save those who are suffering from any ailment! You will even be able to teach all of mankind about true, biblical Christianity.

Although it can be easy to focus on what is impossible for the flesh to do, if we truly draw close to God and have faith in the promises He makes in the Bible, a day is coming when we will be able to show the world that, truly, impossible is nothing.

—Mark Sandor