Pastor's Panel

(28 blog posts by CGI pastors in the 2002-2003 timeframe … Still applicable today?)

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[Gr.= petros = 'small stone'] and upon this rock [Gr.= petra = 'rock'] I will build my church [Gr.= ekklesia= 'called out from']; and the gates of hell [Gr.= hades= 'the grave'] shall not prevail against it." In other words, Jesus started a movement that would, as Gamaliel stated in Acts 5:39, not be overthrown. However large or small it might become, a "body of believers" would be His Church.

It should be noted that this revelatory statement by Jesus is made after Peter's formal confession that Jesus was "the Christ and the Son of the living God" (verse16). Peter was handpicked, as were the other eleven disciples. As a group of devoted followers they interacted as primus inter pares ("first among equals"). It was on the foundations of such men that Jesus built His Church. That process continues to this day.

The last few decades have taught us to be careful about what we believe and why we believe it. Throughout the majority of the last century, the modern-day body of believers became a casualty to the same ravages that elevated and decimated the early church. In Matthew 24:32, Jesus begins the parable of the fig tree. The logic of this seasonal lesson allows us to consider the interval between the "putting forth of leaves" to the final harvest.

The early Church began with impressive growth. Acts 2:1-4 tells us that 3,000 souls were added to the church in one day. Acts 4:1-4 tells us that number of men who believed was 5,000. And Acts 16:4-5 confirms that churches were established in the faith, and "increased in number daily." What happened to all those thousands of souls? It was that generation that started the church. The buds of most things in the church's history appeared in that age: gospel preaching, heresies, schisms, and apostasies.

It would be fascinating to actually be able to look back at the ebb and flow of "the Body" since its inception in the early A.D. 30s. If it could be graphed, there would be elevated peaks of development and equally disturbing valleys of decline. The book of Acts and the New Testament letters reveal concerns with the stability of the church. Paul instructed the elders of Ephesus to "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock…for I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you …to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

In the second and third chapters of Revelation, John mentions seven churches, each one having its own set of problems. The visual imagery of these chapters is stunning! In verse 1 of Revelation 2, John saw "one holding the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the middle of the seven golden candlesticks." This pictures Jesus Christ actively concerned with these seven churches, all of whom were the offshoots of the Church He began. What we see among the "body of believers" is very disturbing. And make no mistake about it-even though these were "His" churches, He was displeased with some of their works. Of the Ephesus and Pergamos churches He said, "I have somewhat [a few things] against you." If this happened to them at the end of the first century you can't help but wonder if it's happening today as we begin the twenty-first century.

Three to four decades into the development of the Church, we find this warning in 2 Peter 2:1-2: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And MANY [my emphasis] shall follow their pernicious

[sexually immoral; shameful] ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandize of you…"

These verses in 2 Peter tell us that MANY people follow false teachers. It's interesting to consider that these "prophets" may have falsely claimed for themselves their "office" or they preached things that were false. Today there are those who fit both descriptions, and yet they have a following. Does their following legitimize their claims? Not in God's sight. Many people can easily be misled. Many can even represent more than the legitimate numbers of faithful disciples.

As a matter of interest, have you wondered how large a church would grow if it in fact experienced 30 percent growth for 10 years…20 years….or 30 years? If you take a calculator and run the numbers, here's what you will find based on a beginning congregation of 1000. With a 30 percent increase the first year you will have 1,300 people, the second 1690, the third 2197, and on you go until the tenth year, when there will be 10,604 people. If you carry that out to 20 years, you will have 179,928 people. In 30 years you will have 2,480,468 people in church!

Did the Church that Jesus started in His day reach two million five hundred thousand converts by the time of the apostle John's death? There's no evidence to support that idea. I guess that means the churches that John wrote to were not "God's true churches," for they were in decline! Although growth can be good (but not always), it is not the only sign of the Church that Jesus built. That needs to be understood.

Too many people are told that "an increase" is verification of God's favor. If that's true, then all we have to do is join the church or churches that are growing the fastest, even though they are preaching false doctrines and worshipping idols!

Let's consider what was promised to the early disciples who comprised the Church. Were they promised unprecedented growth? Did they expect the Church to grow 30 percent per year? Matthew 16:18 offered one promise for the "ekklesia" that Jesus would build: "the gates of hell would not prevail against it." The emphasis was on survival and continuity. Resisting the temptation to speak where the Scripture is silent, you have to wonder if Jesus thought his Church would ever be very large.

There was no mention of year after year of sustained growth with claims of immense achievement. There were, however, references to a "harvest" that was "plenteous," and because there were FEW laborers the disciples were to pray for more. The disciples performed a remarkable work, but it was affected by the general rejection of the life, example, and testimony of Christ. Because He was persecuted, the disciples were told to expect the same (John 15:20). God's truth faces the same rejection today as it did then.

One of the Church of God International's underlying principles is a determination to represent Christ honorably and honestly. We try to do that with our lives, our profession of Christ, and our support of the preaching of the GOOD NEWS. If we are persecuted for that, then so be it. In 1 Peter 4:14 we sense that there is no shame in suffering as a (true) Christian.

The point of all this is fairly simple. The Church of God should not base its existence on concerns that were not important to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul acknowledges that he was a "wise

master builder," having laid a foundation upon which another would build. He makes it clear that the foundation to build upon is Jesus Christ. A warning comes with verse 10: "But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon." For what some men build will be less than others…some of gold, some of silver, some of precious stones, some of wood, some of hay and some of stubble. Verse 13 says, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it…" Our recent history has proven this true.

Our membership is concerned with doing a work that brings no undeserved shame to the name of Christ. There has been enough of that through the centuries. Thankfully, Christ has remained faithful to the statement He made early on to Peter. There is a body of believers who He sees as His own. Their identity is not found just in their numbers; their identity is found in the favor of His continued blessing. There's no doubt that Christ has preserved this "body of believers" (the Church of God International) against the gates of hell. We accept His guidance and will trust Him for "the increase," however great or small.

Those who are looking for a body of believers will find them in the membership of our fellowship.

Charles Groce, Minister

Dear Web Site Visitor:

December 13, 2002

We are so happy that you have taken time to look over our CGI web site. We know you will gain a greater "connectedness" to the work God has put in our hands to perform for His glory.

Speaking of "connectedness," I hope you are coming to realize the commitment the Church of God International is making to awake in its membership the importance of staying connected to each other. We believe it will engender growth in each of us towards deeper spirituality with God and each other.

I have believed and taught that we must not see ourselves as isolated from others in the Body of Christ, nor should we neglect strengthening our bonds within our fellowship. To this end, the Ministerial Council of the CGI has made a commitment to take some innovative initiatives for promoting growth in the people we serve. You can hear more about these programs through letters offered in the "Pastor's Panel."

As a result of my personal ministry and ideas circulated in the Ministerial Council, I would like to encourage the ministry with one goal we can achieve, and by doing so we will be better connected THROUGHOUT the CGI.

One of the prime ways to avoid isolationism is to have our ministry share pulpits from time to time. We in the ministry can easily become territorial and narrow in our focus. The best remedy for that is to invite our colleagues to visit and preach with a fresh voice to those for whom we are responsible. We all experience speaker's block or a certain degree of stagnation. It is amazing to see

revival within the ministry and congregation when a fellow servant pays a visit to a neighboring congregation.

As I labor in Detroit, I can access or be accessed by the ministers in Chicago, IL; Indianapolis, IN; and Toledo, Cleveland, and Middletown, OH; and in Ontario, Canada. With this in mind, Mr. Duane Nicol of the Chicagoland congregation will host me on December 21. Duane will visit Detroit on January 11, 2003. In future months I am looking for opportunities to become more closely connected to the other areas mentioned.

The CGI web site is a valuable resource for information. It represents an effective way for us to be connected. If ministers are visiting various congregations, then "get the word out." Place the information on the web site so our members will be informed of those occasional visits. You can also look to the web site for information concerning local churches, pastors, special activities, youth education, audio sermons, and festival information. Christ has given us the commission to PREACH and PUBLISH the GOOD NEWS. And what a resource computers, e-mails, and web sites provide. To stay better connected, we want to use every means available to our membership.

If you are ever traveling in the Detroit area, I hope you will come by and visit. Our congregation wants to be connected to you.

Till next time, may God give you greater connection to Him and His people.

-Bronson T. James, Minster

What's the MOST IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT you have for next year?

December 20, 2002

As we come to the close of 2002 and look forward to a new year it is well to stop and see what we have scheduled on our 2003 calendar. Do we have all of our appointments listed for our important check-ups? Let's see - doctors, eyes, dental, and a complete physical. Now, what else? Oh yes! The car needs to be checked. It has been a little hard to start lately.

Appointments are scheduled obligations we don't want to forget. They are reminders of important matters that affect us and our families whether it's a vacation or the myriad of other activities that fill up a calendar year. But wait! - There's one essential and very important appointment we must not forget to include. And that's an appointment for a "spiritual" check up. The apostle Paul gives us a reminder of this in I Corinthians 11:28. He emphasizes the need to examine ourselves, especially with the Passover coming in April. To be ready for the Passover we need to be working on a "spiritual" examination now.

Paul repeats his admonition for self-examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5… "Examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified."

Each of us knows that self-examination can be a little uncomfortable. But the wisdom of doing so helps us learn what we need to do in this life to be spiritually alive and well. So, what are we looking for? Paul gives us some virtues to consider. Philippians, chapter four and verse 8, says: "Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."

Don't forget! While you are getting together your schedule for the coming year, be sure to make the most important appointment you can have - an appointment for self-examination. Don't put it off. ---- Ken Register/ Minister

SO YOU WANT TO BE A KING?

December 27, 2002

That is a most worthy goal. But there are things you need to do to acquire that goal. You must prepare now. Don't ever lose sight of your goal.

Here are some things you need to do. You must overcome the pulls of this flesh. Christ said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Revelation 3:21). Remember, rulership with Christ is given only to those that overcome.

The goal of a true Christian is to rule with Christ on this earth, making it a beautiful, happy, peaceful place for our children and grandchildren who will live over into God's Kingdom.

You must build the character of a king. The one who overcomes, having developed character through discipline, is the one God will use as an instrument under Christ to rule in His kingdom. But how do we really overcome? Here are some keys for <u>BUILDING THE CHARACTER OF A KING.</u>

1. **YOU MUST DEVELOP HUMILITY AND THE FEAR OF GOD.**

To have a lasting and prosperous reign any king, ruler, or leader must learn the lesson of humility. The Bible says, "When pride comes, then *comes shame..."* (Proverbs 11:2). Also, "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). By contrast, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). One who comes to have a deep awe and respect for God is just beginning to acquire the basis for making real wise decisions.

Think of yourself as a servant. Jesus said, *"...whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he* that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). The apostle Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to b equal with God: but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, an was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

2. **LIVE BY GOD'S STANDARD OF RIGHT AND WRONG.**

God says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways death"(Proverbs 14:12). The way that seems right to human reason usually leads man to his own destruction. What is God's way, His character, His love? First John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and His commandments are not grievous." God's definition of "right" is keeping His commandments. But what then is "wrong"? Sin is wrong. First John 3:4 says, "Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of th law." True character is based on obedience to God's law.

3. **ALWAYS BE IMPARTIAL IN YOUR JUDGMENTS.**

Any king or leader will be watched by his followers as to his fairness and impartiality in his judgments. He must not be a respecter of persons. Learn to get all the facts. Get wise counsel. Learn to admit your own mistakes.

4. **YOU MUST HAVE PATIENCE AND MERCY.**

Anyone who deals with the lives of others needs a great deal of patience. They must also show mercy, be slow to anger, and extend forgiveness.

5. **HAVE LOVE FOR GOD AND YOUR FELLOW MAN.**

Outgoing concern and love for others is an absolute must in the character of anyone who would be a real leader or king.

Christ said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another"(John 13:35).

If you would truly build God's kind of character, then ask, seek, and yield yourself to exercise this kind of love in your life and relations with others and God.

YOU CAN BE A KING. DON'T EVER LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR GOAL.

Bob Tackett, Minister

How long, oh Lord? How much worse can it get?

It's incredible! We have entered the year 2003. Who would have thought mankind would still be contending this long in the quagmire of issues that threaten our very existence? By now many of us are wondering, "How long, oh Lord? How much worse can it get?" I'm sure some of us can hardly believe we are facing the prospect and peril of another year in the twenty-first century.

I can't help but think back on all the doomsayers' warnings of the impending social calamities that were expected at the turn of the century. Remember the many books prognosticating the economic, social, and political disasters that were to happen during the Y2K transition? But it never occurred, did it? In retrospect, it was quite seamless.

I think many of us learned valuable lessons concerning "prophetic pop culture." The barometer of "public media spin" can sometimes be misleading, at best. It's quite obvious that caution and selective acceptance of "media slant" need to be seriously considered.

Let's face it, there are many self-serving individuals and unseen factors that often drive the forces behind the economic, social, military, and political trends-especially today, when there are large sums of money to be paid by advertisers based on media ratings and numbers of readership.

When you consider these factors and the possibilities of hidden or ulterior agendas being worked for self-serving, self-promoting, and self-enhancing purposes, dishonesty is heightened. Call me a cynic, but there is good reason to be suspicious of what we see and hear because of the larger "spiritual" scheme being orchestrated. Deception and misinformation, distraction, and manipulation are the ways of the world. We don't need to be reminded that "the whole world is deceived" (Revelation 12:9).

For many of us who are beginning to see more clearly, another year offers us additional opportunities to improve our relationship with our Father and Jesus Christ, and prepare for the joyous task of serving as kings and priests in His coming Kingdom. It's quite obvious the world needs the leadership of Jesus Christ and His world-ruling administration.

So as this year commences, all of us would do well to reconsider our degree of dedication in "seeking the kingdom first." Many of us think we're serving well, but are we? "Take heed lest we fall." Remember, our calling is something we should be very serious about. Especially since our Father expects leadership based on relationships. Therefore, a cogent self-analysis on how we manage our relationships is appropriate from time to time. Certainly, this time of year is as good as any.

So, how are we doing with our families, friends, coworkers, and fellow Christians? Can we enhance our relationships? Are we in regular attendance with a congregation when it is possible? Are we talking with God enough? Is there a sense of commitment in our Christian walk? And by the way, where is our treasure? Because that's really where our heart is!

This week on the Armor of God program, this very subject is presented: dedicating one's life to change direction when and where it's needed. Drawing a line in the sand and becoming a more dedicated Christian should be the objective for every one of us who claim this way of life.

Just short of some 2000 years ago, Jesus drew some lines in the sand. He was confronted by a group of religious leaders who had caught a woman in the act of adultery. He bent down and drew some lines in the sand for the benefit of her and her accusers. When it was all said and done, He simply rose up and affirmatively said, "Go and sin no more."

Perhaps it's a good time for us to consider "drawing some lines in the sand" and pondering those words in light of how our life is or isn't progressing. Asking oneself what adjustments need to be made can be the beginning of a life-changing event. But when one considers what our life's potential is-eternal life in the Kingdom of God-I am sure we're agreed that "it's our reasonable service" (Romans 12:1-3).

Minister… Bill Watson

Millennium

Almost everyone is familiar with the word since we have recently lived through the end of the second millennium, A.D., and the beginning of the third. A millennium is a thousand years.

To a true Christian, the phrase "The Millennium" is much more profound. To him or her, it brings to mind the particular thousand-year period that begins with the Second Coming of Jesus and the most dramatic reversal of direction this world will ever experience.

Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace. During His thousand-year reign on this earth, He will establish peace through a just government, with the Ten Commandments as the basic law, and Himself as King of kings (Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 17:14). He came the first time to make this announcement and to show the way to life without sin, as well as give that sinless life to pay for the past sins of all who choose to repent and follow His example. This coming Kingdom is the Gospel (Good News) that He brought from the Father. In a prayer to the Father just before He was crucified, Jesus said, "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8). He revealed that He is the great "I AM" that dealt with Moses and others throughout history. He stated that the "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He was talking about Old Testament Scripture, for the New Testament had not been written.

At no time did Jesus disagree with His Heavenly Father. "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31).

Good News! How good? "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). News so good that the human mind can barely begin to comprehend it! Since our spiritual understanding is so limited and we can easily understand the physical I will put emphasis on the latter.

When Jesus returns all who have died in the faith will be resurrected and joined by the living faithful to rise and meet Him in the clouds. Among those resurrected will be Moses and Elijah. Three of the apostles, Peter, James, and John saw them in a vision along with Jesus in His Kingdom. Jesus had promised them that they would see this before they died (Luke 9:27-32). David will again be king over all twelve tribes of Israel (Ezekiel 34:23-28). The twelve apostles will each be king over one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Others who have been persecuted, even murdered, because they believed and upheld these truths will also be kings and priests on this earth for a thousand years-the Millennium.All these will then be spirit, having eternal life. They will make up the government and the educational system that will gradually take control of this entire world (Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6). No separation of church and state!

Jesus is coming to destroy those who are destroying the earth (Revelation 11:18). God's Spirit will be available to all still living as physical human beings to lead them to appreciate the perfect law of liberty, the way to peace (Joel 2:27-29; James 1:25; Luke 1:78-79).

Early on, a temple will be built just north of Jerusalem. It is described in detail, as Ezekiel saw it and the surrounding area in vision and described it in Ezekiel 40 through 48. This will house the very throne of God. A stream from under the temple will rapidly become a large river and flow into the Dead Sea. Water will be abundant and so pure that it will heal the formerly polluted areas where it flows. It will be teaming with fish. The banks will be lined with many trees bearing a different kind of fruit each month of the year, so much that it can never all be consumed (Ezekiel 47:12). A beautification program will be implemented for the entire region. Deserts will be reforested. Descendants of those who persecuted God's servants will come to bow down in submission to God's way (Isaiah 60:13-14). Wastelands shall become like Eden (Isaiah 51:3).

All will dwell in safety with nothing to make anyone afraid (Ezekiel 34:28). Those with handicaps will be healed routinely. The blind will receive good vision. The deaf will gain the ability to hear well. The lame shall leap for joy and the dumb will sing praises to the God who is love (Isaiah 35:5-6; 1 John 4:16). Kings and important leaders will come from all points of the earth to serve and learn the system that produced this paradise and will work to spread it around the world (Isaiah 49:22-23). There will be an exodus to Jerusalem of the sons and daughters of those in the first resurrection from all parts of the earth where they were at the return of Christ. It will make the exodus from Egypt insignificant by comparison (Jeremiah 23:7-8).

Satan will be bound and unable to deceive anyone for this thousand-year period (Revelation 20:2). During this millennium, the earth will be restored to a paradise condition equal to the original Garden of Eden.

But this is not the end of the Gospel, the good news.

The first resurrection is spoken of as the "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35), but there is a larger resurrection at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:5). This is a resurrection to a mortal flesh-and-blood life, and will include all who have died and were not in the first resurrection. God's Spirit will be available to them also, to enable them to understand His promises and to help them to learn the way to peace (Ezekiel 37). When they see how the earth has been transformed into a paradise, nearly all will repent and prove that they will live the way that brings such wonderful results. Only then will they be changed to spirit and be given eternal life.

This resurrection and time depicted as the "last day" by Jesus will include all who died before they really had a chance to learn about this Gospel of the Kingdom. Isn't it wonderful that those who died in an automobile accident on graduation night without being converted will yet have their first chance? Isn't it wonderful that the beautiful, young, "good and decent" female, who had never accepted Jesus as her Savior but was raped and murdered by a deceived man who had been taught by his church that it was not necessary to keep God's commandments, will have a first chance? What about all the others that have been deceived by a counterfeit "gospel"? Could a loving God condemn them when they never heard about this Gospel of the Kingdom?

Those coming up in a second resurrection will have a period of time (perhaps 100 years) to choose God's Kingdom or the second death, which is permanent. After seeing how the earth has been transformed to look like the Garden of Eden, who would reject it? God is not willing that any should be lost (2 Peter 3:9), and He has provided a plan where few will.

Next in God's plan is to bring a New Jerusalem down from heaven to this earth. God the Father and Jesus Christ will make their permanent home here. This is a systematic, detailed plan but most have believed "another gospel" about going to heaven. Jesus said that no man has gone there except the One that came from there (John 3:13). He followed up by saying all who believe this shall be saved (John 3:16). He nowhere promised that those who reject His words and adopt a counterfeit "gospel" would be saved. God is not responsible for teaching the hijackers of 9-11-01 that they can go to heaven if they only obey their human spiritual leaders.

Those who think they are going to heaven know absolutely nothing about what they will be doing there for eternity. They don't know because the Bible doesn't say anything about it. Many think there are streets of gold and pearly gates with Saint Peter sitting there to send most folks to hell as soon as they arrive. They get the streets of gold and the pearly gates from the Bible description of the New Jerusalem that will descend to this earth (Revelation 21:21). That will fulfill Jesus' promise: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). He did that, and there is a place prepared for you in the house of God, but not if you reject it for a counterfeit "gospel" with no details.

Satan will then be cast out of this world. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Satan is called the prince of this world in different places in the Bible because he deceived the whole world after being cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:9). To finally be cast out of this world means to be cast into the heavens, perhaps a black hole in outer space. Satan knows his fate and he wants you to share it, but you won't. You will be in God's wonderful Kingdom unless you choose the way that leads to death, and death never means living somewhere else. "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The story about where Jesus went and what He did is history. I am telling you the good news that He brought, the Gospel of the Kingdom. Compare it to airline pilots and automobile drivers being raptured and their passengers being left to die in a horrible crash or to be burned alive in the resulting fires. Compare it to rejoicing in heaven while your beautiful young daughter writhes in pain in a burning hell that never ends. Compare it to a promise of going to heaven if you will only ignore God's commandments and obey those who deceitfully claim to serve Him. Compare and decide which is the plan of a loving Creator God. Compare and check out your own Bible to see which is taught there. If you wish to understand, obey what you know of what the Bible actually teaches. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:10).

Those who do not know what will take place on this earth during the thousand years after the Second Coming of Christ have not heard the true Gospel. If you wish to know more, you will find an abundance of material at this web site. If you would like to have someone to talk to about God's plan, there are ministers scattered throughout the United States and in other parts of the world that

love to talk about the great love and mercy of the only true God and the plan He has for us. Usually we can visit when asked. Always we can correspond by e-mail, phone, or parcel post, but you must make the request. E-mail: info@cgi.org. My prayer is that you, too, will share in God's Kingdom.

Orville Bumgardner, Minister

Making Vows (Resolutions)

Christmastime is past, with all the lights and music and people scurrying all over to spend money on things that will either be taken back the day after the holiday, or be cast aside inside of a week.

It is a time people seem to take leave of their senses, and overspend, overeat, overdrink, and do things that later they are sorry for having done (or not done). Of course we have had, in the Church, many sermons on the pagan roots of Christmas, so for now we don't need to go into that. But here is another holiday-New Year's Day-that can affect people in so many different ways. Many people take this holiday as another excuse for all kinds of debauchery and celebration, but there is something else that many do, and yet, do not really take seriously. A lot of people will take the "New Year" as a time to make "resolutions," or vows-promises that they know they cannot, or will not, be able to keep. Some people vow to quit smoking, or to stop swearing, or to cut down on spending-and on and on it goes. By the end of January, or sooner, they have forgotten all about their promise, or vow, or resolution.

Even in the Church, so many will take that time to make resolutions. One of the most common is to "read the Bible through in a year." We have had different charts on ways to read the Bible in a year, and that is not bad; they do work. But if we make a vow to do it, then we stick with it until the task is accomplished. Unfortunately, many people make vows, but later they are sorry for having done it, or perhaps just give up and drop their resolutions altogether. Some will vow to study more, fast more, visit the sick more, and on and on it can go. But God has something to say about vowing.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 states, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."

This is very plain. I think most everyone can understand it. Say you have made a resolution to read the entire Bible next year-but by February, you have fallen behind three or four chapters, and by March, you have just put it aside "for another year." "I can do that next year," or, "I really just don't have the time." Well, perhaps at the time you made the resolution, you prayed to God for help in attaining your goal for the year, making a vow to God to do it. God warns us about such foolishness.

Deuteronomy 23:23 states, "That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promise with thy mouth."

What we promise, if it is not wicked or impracticable, we should be very careful to do: it is better not to promise, than to promise and not perform.

We are now into a new year according to our calendar, and as we may think of making promises to God for the year-and it isn't wrong to do so-we should proceed cautiously in making them. Instead of promising God something we may not be able to keep, should we not focus on what HE, God, wants from us? We can please Him without vows, promises, or resolutions.

Isaiah 66:2 states, "For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, sait the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

No vows or resolutions needed, as we trust God to supply our needs.

Frank Denman, Minister

HEAVEN OR GOD'S KINGDOM

January 24th, 2003

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

King David asked this question of God: (Psalm 8:3-6) "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet."

In these scriptures David asks God WHY He thinks about mankind, mere man. WHY does He care for him? David reiterates God's appointment of man over everything including the entire universe He created.

The apostle Paul also offered this insight into God's sovereignty and His plan for man. In Hebrews 2:7-8 we are told, (vs. 8) "…there is not anything created by God that was not placed under ***man's dominion; BUT NOT YET.***" Paul wrote this about 60 AD. If the time for everything in creation to be under man's dominion hadn't happened yet, then when was it going to happen? And just what was Paul talking about?

THE UNIVERSE IS A VERY LARGE PLACE!

Since I was a small child I have imagined being among the stars. David was inspired to write the eighth Psalm (song) after gazing into the heavens and realizing they – the moon and stars, were also included in that dominion. The universe is of infinite expanse where time and space are relative in our human realm. Our human travel is limited by the speed of light. Even at the speed of light,man can barely get to the nearest star system in a lifetime. And that's just the nearest one! We know, through the latest scientific data acquired by the Hubble Space Telescope, there are galaxies and stars some 15 billion light years in any direction. That means, traveling at the speed of light for one year (six trillion miles), it would take man 15 billion years to reach them if he could travel at the speed of light, which he can't!

So, how does God travel in the universe? How does He get around? We know there is no place He cannot be. That's impossible for man but plausible for God. He is able to occupy space and time as only "spirit" can. His Spirit permeates the wholeness of the universe in a way utterly beyond man's present capabilities. As David expressed it, (Psalm 139:7-8) "Where shall I go from thy spirit? Or where shall I go from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there."

The concept of an infinite universe is beyond our human grasp. How then will man have dominion over the universe when we are limited in time and distance? To do that wouldn't we have to be like God?

JESUS' EXAMPLE

We can partly understand this if we consider what Jesus was able to do, AFTER His resurrection. His example illustrates what can be done as a "spirit" being with the appearance of a physical man. He was able to travel to heaven and back to earth as He ascended to the Father and returned to be among his disciples! With His new "body" He was able to appear and disappear at will. While "appearing" in His fleshly body He was even **able to eat** physical food. These are just a few of the things He could do after His resurrection.

Christ is the ONLY man to have died and be resurrected. He experienced what awaits those yet to be transformed from flesh to spirit. Remember, Christ was the first of the first fruits! There remains therefore a dramatic change for those who qualify to "put off mortality and put on immortality."

I Corinthians 15:19-28 says, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end (of this age) will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ***he 'has put everything*** under his feet." Now *when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this* does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."

WE ARE TRUE CHILDREN OF GOD

The apostle John writes that we are children of God and shall be like God, for we shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2). The apostle Peter writes that Jesus Christ is now in heaven at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him (I Peter 3:22). John also writes that those in the first resurrection will reign with Christ one thousand years on this earth (Revelation 20:6).

Notice what these two verses indicate will happen when Christ returns to this earth:

- Revelation 20:6… "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

- Zechariah 14:4… "On that day (Christ's return to this earth) his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."

On that "great day of the Lord," Jesus Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives and He will begin ruling this earth. His direct involvement with this world will begin changing everything as we know. It will be a remarkable time leading up to an absolutely unfathomable event!

GOD'S THRONE TO BE ON EARTH

The apostle John writes (Revelation 21 & 22) that the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God comes down from heaven (to this earth) and God speaks out of heaven saying: "Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be their God."

So, in this round about way we can see that man will not go to heaven, rather God Himself will come down to this earth!

Here's a little more "revelation" and admonition from the apostle John:

In Revelation 22, we find that Jesus Christ says (verse 7), "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the word of the prophecy in this book." Continuing in verses 12-14: "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed

are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

These few verses show very clearly that the saved man or woman will "NOT go to heaven when they die" Heaven is not the reward of the saved! The reward of the saved is eternal life with Jesus Christ as a part of the family of God…on this earth!

May God help us to not only obey His word…but believe in His promises. He's going to keep his word. Are we going to keep it as well?

Mr. James Pollitte – minister

SIMPLE STUFF

January 31, 2003

American humorist and author Garrison Keillor has for many years, hosted a weekly radio show called the Prairie Home Companion. Woven between the eclectic music, off the wall skits, and zany commercials for non-existent products and services, is his satirical perspective of life growing up in and around a small town in Minnesota. In the "Lake Wobegon" (his mythical hometown) segment of the program, Mr. Keillor delivers a folksy anecdote poking fun at some religious ritual, colloquial celebration, or some of their social mores that he has experienced.

In one particular narration there had been a confirmation ceremony at the local church, followed by dinner at Pastor and Mrs. Inkvest's home – chuck roast, potatoes and gravy, green beans, Jell-O with Miracle Whip, and a bottomless cup of coffee. After dinner the thirteen fourteen year olds were questioned on the deepest questions of the Faith which had, and have, troubled theologians down through the centuries. And they answered readily from memory with little difficulty.

Garrison mused at the simplicity of the youths' answers, when the scholars have wrestled with such difficulty, and come away with only more and more questions than answers. While he was being facetious in his assessment, actually he had stumbled upon a godly truism.

Down through the millennia as God inspired the handbook of life – the HOLY BIBLE – to be written, He intentionally crafted the content and language to be easily understood by submissive children on their Daddy's knee; yet withholding it from the disobedient and rebellious who think they know more than their Father.

God inspired Paul to write to the church at Corinth, "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world (the less privileged and overlooked) and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which

are not, to bring to nothing things that are: [**WHY?**] That no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

SIMPLISTIC for the simple minded – by the world's standards. COMPLICATED and COMPLEX for educated scholars – by God's standards.

In Jesus' brief ministry He viewed the actions of most educated Pharisees and Sadducees as hypocritical. He recognized their knowledge of the scriptures and even acknowledged their authority to teach and enforce the Law, but He excoriated their behavior. "…the scribes and *Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:* All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not you after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:2, 3).

In contrast to the works of the Pharisees, Jesus counseled the people to embrace the simple innocence of little children. "…Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Those willing to come to God in a submissive, child-like (not childish) attitude were offered a simplistic formula for success: Foundation, Identification, Time Frame, Evaluation, and Reward.

Every building, business, project or endeavor of any sort requires a staring point. God inspired David to write in Psalm 111:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: His praise endures for ever." SIMPLE STUFF.

The military and athletes wear uniforms, government workers and many others wear identification badges; everyone has some card or form of ID to identify their citizenship. And in a similar way God has signs to distinguish His people….and those signs are quite basic. "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a **sign** between me and the children of Israel for ever…" (Exodus 31:16, 17). This Sabbath sign, along with love for one another and obedience to all of God's commandments identifies Christ's disciples.

The night before Jesus was to become the sacrifice for all mankind he had a final meal with the disciples. During that time He spoke about the love He expected from those who followed Him. *"If you love me, keep my commandments…He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me…If a man loves me, he will keep my words…If you keep my commandments,* you shall abide in my love; even as I *have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love…This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have love you…These things I* command you, that you love one another" (John 14:15,21,23; 15:10,12,17). SIMPLE STUFF.

The Holy bible was written from the geographic perspective of the agrarian society in the Middle Eastern part of the world. So, in that time frame, everyone understood about planting, farming, and harvesting.

In Palestine there were three harvest seasons. Similarly God's plan of salvation comes in three phases. The early harvest was barley, ready as early as March; then the spring grain harvest two months or so later; and then the great fall harvest. Not so coincidentally, God's order of calling and

resurrections comes in three phases. Notice what Paul reveals in I Corinthians 15:20, 21, and 23: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Jesus) *came also the resurrection of the dead…b*ut every man in his order: Christ the first fruits -- phase one; *afterward they that are Christ's at His coming*" -- phase two. The early harvest – Christ, pictured in the Passover, then those resurrected at His coming, pictured at Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets, and finally the masses born and brought to salvation during Christ's millennial reign – phase 3, pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles. SIMPLE STUFF.

Most companies, businesses, and sports venues have a probationary period to evaluate the talent and ability of potential hires. They want to make sure they have selected the right people for the intended job. God is no different. However His requirements are not based upon intellectual ability, physical strength, or technological adroitness. Rather, He looks upon the heart, the character, and the spirit. God sees whether or not a person's life mirrors what is seen in Him and Jesus Christ.

God knows if His potential heirs live their temporary lives by His principles and can be entrusted with eternal life. He even denotes acceptable and unacceptable conduct contrasting the nature of mere sheep and goats. The sheep is seen as a creature of submission, obedience, and gentleness; the goat is seen as headstrong, rebellious, and self-serving.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus went into great detail delineating sheep and goat behavior in humanity. The sheep on the right hand were concerned about the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of others, while the goats on the left exhibited just the opposite interest. The sheep inherit life eternal; the goats are condemned to the lake of fire (Matthew 25:31-46). SIMPLE STUFF.

Almighty God established marriage and family among human beings because it exemplified, on a simple plane, the magnificent tapestry of His plan of salvation. The Word, Jesus Christ, is the bridegroom, His people – His church – is the bride. The Old Testament is replete with examples of the "bride" committing whoredoms, deserting her "husband," and behaving so vulgarly and indecently that the Word divorced the congregation of Israel, or the church.

We, in the world today, are sadly all too familiar with adultery, fornication, and divorce. In metaphor, Hosea, chapter 2, paints an apt description of the unfaithful wife. But God intended and desires a greater husband/wife relationship and inspired Paul to write to the church at Ephesus His will in marriage. This represents the most important marriage of all time for it will last an eternity!

Paul wrote these words in Ephesians 5:22-33: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourished and cherished it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of

His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

Notice what the book of Revelation reveals about "the marriage of the Lamb." "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. *And he said unto me, Write, "Blessed are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are the true sayings of God." (Revelations 19:7-9).

And just as a loving physical marriage produces children, this most holy marriage will result in billions and billion of children. "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son (or child)" – Revelation 21:7. SIMPLE STUFF.

In these selected words of inspired teaching, the Bible provides simple straight forward answers to questions, speculations, and suppositions not found in tens of thousands of books. Paul warned in his letter to the Romans that the vain, the arrogant, and those that complicate the truths of God because of **their** wisdom became fools (Romans 1:16-25). But, if we remain childlike as Jesus told us we must, we will not fall prey to that which Paul feared in Corinth. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the SIMPLICITY that is in Christ" (Second Corinthians 11:3).

Submitted by Bob Swimm…minister

Change of Nature

Before God created man He knew man was going to need help governing himself. The knowledge of how to do that would be revealed as God worked with man and his descendents. But what God did give Adam and Eve from the beginning was the unique endowment to know right from wrong and then choose which way to live.

The Genesis story reveals the first man and woman made a wrong choice early on. They gave themselves over to the allure of something that appealed to their reasoning rather than doing as God had directed. Through the Biblical story there is a sense that they were somewhat overwhelmed and inexperienced with temptations. And, at this early time in their existence they had no past experiences to educate them on the forces set in motion through disobedience. This same pattern has been repeated through the ages as mankind has reacted to similar temptations and choices offered to our first parents. Intellect and reasoning have superceded God's directions.

By the time Noah came along people had become so wicked, God decided to destroy "both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air." Man had become so violent and rebellious he couldn't be used to accomplish what God had planned from the beginning. So, God destroyed every human being except the eight that survived on the ark.

Following the flood, man continued making wrong choices. He leaned to his own understanding and lived his "own way" which eventually led to the worship of idolatrous gods. Man turned from the one true God and

began to worship the created rather than the Creator. But there was, in the midst of this disobedience, one man who believed in the true God. His name was Abram.

Abram's life elicited God's favor. God saw in him a man who had a heart to obey Him, one who would serve Him as the one true God. So God instructed Abram to leave the land of false gods and pagan worship. This is what God said to Abram: "… *Get out of your country from your family, and from your father's house, to a land* that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3). This promise revealed God's intention to work through Abram's family and demonstrated how obedience affects a man's relationship with God. God remembered his promise to Abram and continued this blessing through his progeny.

Genesis 17:1-7 discloses the covenant God made with Abram. God changed Abram's name to Abraham. In Genesis 26:2-3 the same covenant was made with Isaac, Abraham's son. In like fashion Genesis 28:13-14 reveals this same covenant was made with Jacob, Abraham's grandson. So God's covenant with Abram was honored through Isaac and Jacob. As a result of this agreement or covenant God continued his plan which held redemption and promise for mankind.

In Genesis 49 we find Jacob had grown old and was about to die. Verse one tells us he "…called to his sons, *and said, 'Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that wh*ich shall befall you in the last days." He blessed them and pronounced their destiny. Notice the blessing given to Judah.

Genesis 49:8-10… "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your *enemies; your father'*s children shall bow down before you. *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, you* have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? Now notice verse 10. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." This scepter represents Kingship or a Princely order. Through Judah the law was to be preserved until one came bearing that Kingship to whom obedience would be required.

Second Kings 18:11 tells us that Israel was taken into captivity and verse 12 gives the reason. They rebelled against God and broke their covenant. And in verse 13 Judah went into captivity because they too rebelled against God. Even so, they remained insolent and determined in their disobedience. God then sent Jeremiah to them with His message which was a warning. But, rather than yield themselves to God's instruction they persisted in their entrenched attitude of rebellion.

Here is what God said to his servant Jeremiah: "*Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause* you to hear my words." Jeremiah obeyed and "…*went down to the potter's house and there he (the potter) was* making something at the wheel." (Jeremiah 18:1-3). Jeremiah found the potter using a wheel placed flat on a table. Through a spindle the potter would raise the wheel just high enough off the table so it would freely turn without rubbing the table as it moved. The clay on the potter's wheel would have been soft and pliable allowing for thoughtful pressure to mould the clay as desired. If for some reason or through some oversight the clay collapsed then the potter would have to begin over by rolling the clay into a useable ball. Once again he would spin the wheel and knead the clay through his trained hands. The clay was in his hands and under his control. Any defects were in the clay, not the hand of the potter.

In this example, and as often happened in the daily life of a potter, the clay did not turn out right. (Vs.4) "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again into another vessel *it seemed good to the potter to make."* God used this experience to teach a vital lesson. Notice what God says in verse 6 – "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter? *Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so* are you in my hand, O house of Israel!" God wanted Judah to change the way they lived and worshipped. If they would turn to him again, He would bless them.

Even though Judah faced God's wrath they were offered the opportunity to repent and conform to His purpose. Repentance can always change God's decrees and judgment. Through Jeremiah, God said to Judah, (Vs. 11) "Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

What was Judah's answer to this plea for repentance? Incredibly, they refused God! They said, "That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our plans, and we will everyone obey the dictates of his evil heart" (Vs. 12). Judah chose to remain obstinate and disobedient. Their insolence carried with it the penalty of God's punishment.

In the latter verses of Ezekiel 20 and the early verses of Ezekiel 21, God announces and describes his judgment against Judah through four messages (Ezek. 20:45; 21:1,8,18). The messages revealed the comprehensive judgment that would come upon Judah. Each person would be affected by His fury. The effects of God's wrath on Judah would be devastating.

The people of Judah had been tested and found wanting. It seemed there was no immediate hope for Judah even in the promises of Genesis 49, for God was going to exercise His justice in discipline on Judah and her current ruler. But the ultimate "scepter of Judah," the Messiah would not be extinguished. This was Judah's only hope in the midst of their current judgment.

In Ezekiel 21:18-21, Ezekiel draws a map on which he indicated a road from Babylonia toward Canaan. Where the road forked a signpost was placed, one branch leading toward Rabbath-Ammon, the capital of Ammon, and the other branch descending to Jerusalem. A road was opened into Judah.

True to God's wrath and his promises, the priesthood and the kingship of Judah were removed. Ezekiel 21:26-27 tells us God said, "Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same: exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him." These messianic overtones stress that the kingship (and priesthood) would be removed in judgment but ultimately returned in the Messiah's (Jesus Christ's) coming as promised in Genesis 49:10.

With the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27) the Messiah was come! God chose Mary to give physical life to His own Son. She was highly favored and blessed among women. Jesus' birth represented hope for all mankind and fulfilled the promise made by Jacob to Judah before he (Jacob) died.

Through an "earthly lineage" Jesus was born. His birth established a "Godly lineage." Through Christ we can, at the resurrection, put off mortality and put on immortality. Man can be divested of his "earthy" limitations and bear the heavenly image. Man can be like God. John 1:11-13 says, "He came to His own and his own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name: Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The apostle Paul also described this new linage. Gal.3:26-29 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed*, and heirs according to the promise." Those who have been called and accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior have been given a tremendous opportunity. Through baptism, a person receives the Holy Spirit. That indwelling Spirit increases according to the "nourishment" it's given through regular prayer and study. People are converted and they grow spiritually

"who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). Like Adam and Eve, choices have to be made every day.

God the Father and Jesus the Savior have a special concern in each converted person. That person has an earnest of the Holy Spirit which makes them part of the "God family." Here's what Peter said in 1Peter 2:9-10… "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." This sets apart the people of God from the rest of the world and gives them access to a "family inheritance" which includes all things, even the universe. The apostle Paul verified the Christian's inheritance in Rom.8:16-17… "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."

In Christ we find no spiritual significance in blood lines; all people who accept Christ and receive the Holy Spirit can have access to God's promises. What's required? A person has to change their direction in life, and control their natural impulses. They have to change the way they think. The apostle Paul put it this way:

- Philippians 3:15… "Therefore let us as many are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you."
- Hebrews 10:16… "This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them."
- Second Peter 3:1-2… "Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle [in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder], that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

How can you change the way you think and reason? How do you become more "spiritual," more like Jesus Christ?

In Galatians chapter five the apostle Paul provides a clear cut way to overcome our nature. He begins by identifying the works of the flesh…the very issues that man has struggled with since the temptation in the Garden of Eden. These are man's mental and physical tendencies to pull away from God. Notice what is said in verses 19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like, of which I tell you before hand, just as I told you time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

The works of the flesh pertain to the mind as well as physical actions. More often than not man commits sins that are not seen but they are nonetheless still sins. Sins of "the mind" are so easily committed. Consider the illustration given by Jesus in Matthew 5:28: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Just because "no one knows" about a sinful thought doesn't mean the "sin" goes unnoticed! No sin escapes God's attention.

Now let's consider what Paul describes as the "fruit of the Spirit." In Galatians chapter five, verse 22 continues: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law." Those are the things we need to have at work in our lives. There is no law against them!

But, we might ask, "How do we replace the wrong things that enter into our thoughts with the fruits of God's spirit?" The answer is found in Philippians 4:8… "Finally, brethren, whatever

things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is any thing praiseworthy, MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS."

You get bad things out of your mind by putting in those things that are good. It isn't easy, but it can be done. Every wrong thought should be ejected from your mind immediately and replaced with a fruit of the spirit. Those who don't have God's spirit will struggle to overcome the pulls of this flesh. Those who have God's Spirit will overcome if they do those things they know they ought to do, finding spiritual strength to make right choices.

From the very beginning God wanted a "family." He chose a unique way to bring that about. As the Bible reveals He promised Abraham that his descendents would be as the stars of heaven. Personally, I like to think there will be a star for each descendant. I realize that may be a little "far out," but who of us really knows the mind of God? Most likely we're going to be surprised with the inheritance yet to be received.

God has given us instructions for living in this life. He tells us to repent, to change our ways and our thoughts. We need to think like He thinks and live like He wants us to. The Father gave us His Son and the Son gave us His life. The Son of God became a sacrifice for our short-comings and our sins. What more could be given from a Father and Son to their family?

Jesus and the disciples tell us we can overcome and live by the "spirit." We can change how we think and choose in this life. We have to work at being better people…but we can succeed. Awaiting our inheritance, we have every reason to work harder at doing those things which please God. Like Adam and Eve, we have to make wise choices every day of our lives. We must resist temptations and control our thoughts and actions.

If you have an inordinate struggle with the "works of the flesh," there is hope. Comfort and strength come through our Savior, Jesus Christ. He has been tempted, even as you are tempted today. He knows how "weak" we can be and yet He still believes in us. You can inherit all things; you can be in the family of God. It begins with a remarkable change. You have to receive the mind of Christ to think differently. You need to have His thoughts be your thoughts. Paul put it this way: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

…. by Ferrell Vincent

TIES TO JERUSALEM

One way to prove there is an all-wise Creator God is by fulfilled prophecy. Either God's Word is true or it isn't. I truly believe God's Word is true and has stood the test of time and never failed. We who have tried our best to follow God faithfully after being called and chosen, having repented of our sins, been baptized, and had the laying on of hands to receive God's Holy Spirit, have not been left to ourselves. God shares His plan of salvation with His servants, showing them those things He's going to do before it happens, thereby strengthening the faith of His servants when they see those things come to pass. Amos 3:7 states, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). God's Holy Spirit shows us things to come (John 16:13). Jesus Christ called His followers friends, and reveals the Father and what He's doing (John 15:15).

In Ezekiel 5:5, Jerusalem seems central to God and in the earth. There is a time of great tribulation coming with much focus on Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-22). Thanks to God, those days will be shortened (see also Mark 13:19-20).

Could a great superpower as the United States not be mentioned in God's Word? The shocking truth is that the U.S. is mentioned more than any nation. The U.S. along with the British Commonwealth of nations make up the House of Israel, the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, sons of Joseph, the son of Israel. Our people and culture have forgotten who they are, because they have cast away the true God and His laws and forsaken His ways (read Hosea 4:6). For an in-depth study of our people and culture send for our study tapes, "Biblical Origins of the United States and British Commonwealth."

Knowing our identity in God's Word is one of the keys to unlocking many prophecies. Realizing who we are and that the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19; Luke 21:23) is also called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:3-22) make these scriptures more urgent, more real. Read Genesis 49:1, 22-26, and notice the great blessings prophesied to be poured upon us, noting what is said of the tribe of Joseph, whose sons were Ephraim and Manasseh, who were given the name of Israel (Genesis 48:8-20). Joseph and his sons were given the birthright (1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Another account of tremendous blessings given to us is in Deuteronomy 33:13-17. We have enjoyed these great blessings, but have used them for Baal worship (Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Sunday observance, all pagan practices -- see Hosea 2:8-23). God will use the Assyrian to break our nations, but will deliver us by the return of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 10:5-25, 27). Israel will have been warned (Hosea 5:9-12).

A chilling scripture that puts us on notice as Jerusalem comes under siege is Ezekiel 4:1-2. This siege of Jerusalem is a sign to the House of Israel. This relates to Luke 21:20, 23-24 and Zechariah 12:2. Jesus Christ will defend Jerusalem and fight for His people Israel (Zechariah 12:3-9; 14:1-5, 9). In that day, He will gather His saints and stand on the Mount of Olives. God's truth and His laws will go out from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:9). Israel and Judah will be regathered (Isaiah 11:11-12, 15-16; Ezekiel 37:21-28). The reunification of Israel and Judah coincides with the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints, including David, who will be king over all the children of Israel. Under the righteous reign of Jesus Christ, Israel and Judah will be given everlasting peace and safety, and will be able to prosper (Jeremiah 23:5-8).

Another great example of restoration is shown in Isaiah 41:8-20. Jesus Christ, at His return, will rule on the throne of David, over the House of Israel. The Kingdom of God and His peace will increase without end, with Jesus Christ ruling on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). The coming tribulation will be horrible, but God will save His people out of it (Jeremiah 30:7-11). Scripture depicts a glorious future for Israel, including an opportunity for all Israel to receive God's Spirit (Jeremiah 31:1-21, 27-37). God's mercy does endure forever! Indeed, we have ties to Jerusalem.

Marvin Wyke, Minister

DEVELOPING OUR CHILDREN

By Loren Chamberlain

Lacking faith, the old generation of Israelites wandered for 40 years and died in the wilderness. What a disappointment this must have been, having come so far out of Egypt and yet never enter the promised land. Now they were on the east bank of the Jordan River, and Moses is preparing the sons and daughters of that faithless generation to possess the "promised land."

What do you suppose would be one of the most important responsibilities and privileges God would give these people? "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of they life: *but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;* Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, *and that they may teach their children"* (Deuteronomy 4:9-10). Notice again how God admonished them. "And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).

God reviewed His laws for the people. The legal contract between God and His people had to be renewed by the new generation about to enter the Promised Land. Moses wanted to make sure that the people did not forget all they had seen God do. Therefore, he urged them to tell their children about God's great miracles. This accomplished two important things. First, this would help the parents remember God's faithfulness, and it would also provide the means for passing on from one generation to the next the stories recounting God's great acts.

We have then the responsibility of remembering all we have learned about God and the responsibility of teaching our children about Him and His great acts. Today, whether or not people have children of their own, they still have a shared responsibility for the nurture and care of the children in the Church of God and in their own family lives. In the Old Testament, children are called "a heritage" and "a reward" (Psalms 127:3).

Quality teaching for our children is a very important priority in the Church of God. It is very important to pass on God's truth to future generations, especially our own children. The traditions of the Church are very important, and God also desires that all of His truth be taught to our children as well, so that it will always be in their hearts and minds. "This can be accomplished by supporting children's Bible studies in local congregations, as well as volunteering to help out in some way on the Feast Days, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles."

God cares about children, and our own responsibility extends beyond that of the children in our own families. There is always a great need in the Church of God for the healthy involvement of adults in the lives of our children as mentors, teachers, and coaches, as well as a need to support and encourage other parents.

[DEVELOPMENT FACTORS]

When we consider the growth and development of children there are several factors that affect the kind of adults they will become: (1) who God created them to be, (2) the environment in which they grow, and (3) the choices that they make.

God's Unique Creations: God created each child to be unique, with different personality traits, levels of intelligence, physical characteristics, and even differing energy and activity levels. It is quite interesting to notice that even in the same family children differ remarkably from each other from the time they're born.

In Psalms, King David writes in amazement of these God designed differences when He exclaimed, "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous- and how well I know it" (Psalm 139:13-14NLT).

The environment in which children are nurtured is vital. Therefore, the environment of the church is doubly important for them for they only experience that environment once a week on the Sabbath. It is just as important as are their God-given genetic gifts. In Proverbs 22:6, Solomon encourages parents to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It is important for children to be exposed to an environment shaped by Biblical Principles. God our Father models His love in people's lives, and they in turn have the privilege and responsibility of loving their children just as he continually loves them.

The instruction of Moses to the people of Israel to remember what they had seen and known of the Lord's goodness and to pass that knowledge on to their children was going to be a great blessing to all (Deuteronomy 4:9). It was God's desire then, and God's desire now that parents teach their children and grandchildren to hear His word and to stand in awe of their loving and merciful God.

Parents must share life experiences with their children. This is no doubt one of the primary tasks of child rearing. "Remembering what God has done in your life and passing the experiences on to the children in your life." Children growing up in such an environment having developed a close relationship with their parents and other adults will learn first hand about living a life of faith. Not only will the children's knowledge of God grow, but also they will see a strong example of the truth of God's word in action. In other words, "a living faith."

The apostle Paul gave us a wonderful model when he described himself as a father to the believers at Thessalonica. "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12). Paul deeply loved the believers, therefore, he encouraged and urged these believers to live worthy lives before God. We also are to be comforted and encouraged by these words to communicate the love of Jesus to the children in our families, congregations, and communities.

[Proficiency To Choose]

God has created every person with the ability to make choices. However, it appears God has given parents the responsibility of giving their children the proficiency necessary to make the

correct decisions in life. Everyone can make decisions, but not everyone makes the right decisions. Our children make their own choices every day, and some of those choices are life-changing. Even though children may have inherited or been given wonderful God-given gifts and abilities, and have grown up in a Godly, Christ loving home, they can still make poor choices. A major part of child development is to help children learn to make good choices, and to encourage them with love and forgiveness when they must work through the consequences of poor choices.

As children grow up and parents have less influence on their lives, the rules increase for the children and they must take on more responsibility.

There are a number of factors that will give children a better chance of making choices that will affect their lives in a very positive way as well as those of generations to come. Children must know that no matter what they are loved unconditionally. They must know that they always have the back-up of the family, and under no circumstance will God give up on them.

Children need reasonable boundaries and discipline, and it sometimes can turn into pretty tough love. If they do not get attention of this kind from their parents, they will soon understand that they are unloved.

In reality, children like to know what the boundaries are. If consistency in parenting principles and family values are neglected and allowed to deteriorate, children become disoriented, and are unsure of what is expected of them. They then begin to make their own decisions, decisions that can be life threatening.

Parents have the right to expect that children will follow their example, not just their words. That being the case, parents better be sure they are setting the proper example they want their children to follow. With children, you can't tell them to, "do as I say, not as I do." They will not buy it. Sooner or later they will do as they please, or do as they see their parents do.

Parents need to step out and make every effort to know their children. It is up to Mothers to be Mothers to their children, and up to Fathers to be Fathers to their children. Sounds simple, but how many daughters fail to ever learn how to keep a home, and care for a family. How many children are really taught the responsibility Fathers have of providing a home and all the necessary essentials that make home life possible. It is essential for children to have a healthy relationship with male and female authority figures (either Mom and Dad, or healthy grandparents, aunts, uncles, Sabbath school teachers, school teachers, coaches or other mentors).

All of these factors are consistent with what Scripture teaches and can be put into practice in our families as well as in the Church of God.

Jesus especially loved little children, and used their example to get a message across to His self-centered disciples. The disciples had become so preoccupied with the organization of Jesus earthly "kingdom," they had lost sight of what its purpose was. How hard it is for us to identify with the "little children" who are weak and dependent upon others for their care and nurturing. They have no status or influence. "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4).

"Then were there brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them

not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:13,14). It would appear that the disciples forgot what Jesus had just corrected them about (18:4-6). Jesus wanted little children to come because He loves them and because they have the kind of attitude adults must have to approach God.

We can express our love for our children by creating a safe, and consistent environment for them to grow in. We can teach them to develop Christ like lives, and we can teach them the truth of the scriptures. If our faith is real, it will usually prove itself at home, in our relationships with those who know us best. Children and parents have a responsibility to each other. Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding and unfair. Parents should care gently for their children, even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant at times. Ideally, parents and children will relate to each other with thoughtfulness and love. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4).

As our children emerge from the dependence of childhood to the interdependence of adulthood, we can continue to pray for them and to thank the Lord God for the role that He has allowed us to play in their lives.

By Loren Chamberlain

A big project can sometimes start with a little idea

It's amazing how one thought or idea may lead to another similar, and yet different, idea! It may take you into brand-new Bible study adventures. And, as we all ought to know, the Bible will always have new revelations for us if we are diligently studying God's Word.

I have had a great interest in genealogy ever since my mother showed me her work many years ago, hoping that I would take up the challenge to develop her work further. Her project piqued my curiosity, since I had a computer and an old Family Tree genealogy program gathering dust with little or no development. I took my mother's efforts, upgrading the software, and entered all her data. Then I began to add my own research. I traced one line, my fraternal grandmother's *Carpenter* family back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century in Great Britain. How exciting! Without giving it much thought, I reached the seven hundred entries level, and I said to myself, "Wow, I'm a real genealogist now!" Of course, I know I have several hundred more family members to add to this list. And I have no idea where this is going to take me. But it's fun!

Having so much data, especially on my mother's family tree, I was led to the desire to visit some of my first cousins again, particularly three women about my age whom my brother Stanley (two years younger than I) and I used to visit in San Diego, California, via bicycle many times during our pre-teen years. (Back then, we could name practically every street on our side of town! Of course, San Diego was nowhere as big as it is today.) The first one was my cousin Mary, one year older than me, now married with four of her own kids and a bunch of grandkids! My wife and I had a wonderful time visiting with her and her husband, Gary, and talking over some of the "good ol' days" and learning

what her family was doing today. One of her daughters and her husband and family live in Grants Pass, Oregon. So do my younger brother Larry and his wife and family, as well as our oldest son, Richard David Armstrong II. Small world!

Next came my desire to visit my cousin Anita, living in Bullhead City, Arizona. I arranged plans to visit with her on one of my trips to preach a sermon to our Cottonwood, Arizona, Church of God International (CGI) fellowship groups. To my pleasant surprise, Anita has been very interested in her genealogy. She has traced her *Lyte* line back many generations. A professional Web page designer and educator, she has her genealogy work on her own Web page. A real pro! When she showed me her over three thousand entries in her Mac-based genealogy, I felt like a rank amateur! We have maintained a fairly close connection ever since, via e-mails and letters. She has helped me with some of my *Chapman* line problems.

I visited with Anita's sister, Suzanne, and her husband Billy now living near Ft. Worth, Texas, on one of my trips down to Tyler for a Ministerial Council meeting. I had a wonderful time! Indeed, blood is much thicker than water! Not one of my greater family on my mother's side has been called to God's church yet, but I hoped that I left a good impression of friendliness, warmth, and sincerity with them. This was not the time to preach! Just open the doors to a good relationship.

Now what does this have to do with Bible study and new ideas? Being interested in genealogy, and the subject on my mind, I was researching some of Dr. Herman L. Hoeh's two-volume *Compendium of World History*, which I have had in my bookshelf for many decades, but had only glanced through it over the years. I certainly had not studied it as a textbook on world history. I was reading over the section on the life of Nimrod, great-grandson of the patriarch Noah, and Nimrod's mother-wife Semiramis, who also at one time was a wife and daughter-in-law of Asshur! Wait a minute! Here is information on one of the oldest family genealogies in existence! I was fascinated and began to study this story with a renewed interest and zeal. Dr. Hoeh's works (two volumes on his late 1950s PhT thesis) was published by Ambassador College in 1962. I sure would like to talk to Dr. Hoeh again! We both had offices on the main floor of the Ambassador College Hall of Administration in Pasadena, California, in the late 1970s and often spoke on a variety of subjects, but never about his thesis.

The results? Over the following months I began to develop six hours of Bible study material for the local CGI church in Murray, Utah. First, I introduced them to what I like to refer to as the "two N's" in the Bible, the real story behind Noah and Nimrod! With my research in Josephus, the *Companion Bible* of Bullinger, Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons,* and Internet studies on www.wyattmuseum.com and www.anchorstone.com, I began to understand some of the words and thoughts "between the lines" of Genesis 6-11. No doubt, some of my findings are a bit speculative, but nonetheless very interesting. I developed this study into two one-hour Bible studies, which I have given to practically every church and fellowship group in my area (I am currently the Area Coordinator of all continental states west of the Mississippi River, plus Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, and Louisiana). After June, I must still plan a visit to Fresno, California; Ft. Smith, Arkansas; and a group south of Shreveport, Louisiana, who are interested in contact with the CGI. And, if there is sufficient interest, we hope to serve brethren in St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri. If that works out, I'll try to visit with them at the earliest possible time.

My studies in Dr. Hoeh's *Compendium* next led me to the study of the patriarch Joseph and his life in Egypt. I easily put together another two one-hour Bible studies on this man's life and accomplishments. Just cursorily reading Genesis leaves out much of the detail found in Dr. Hoeh's book and Egyptian history. Joseph had a tremendous impact on Egypt and the entire world of his day, far more than you can glean from a quick read of the Bible! That's my late 2003 and 2004 project in the West. These studies may surprise and shock you!

Then came Moses. Well, realizing the errors in the great movie *The Ten Commandments*, by Cecil B. Demille, there is a great need to tell the *true* story of Moses. How God used him is truly amazing! That's my third series of two one-hour Bible studies that I hope to get to in 2005! It's never too early to plan ahead! Again, I hope you will be amazed and inspired at what I have found--all from a small comment by Dr. Hoeh in his text about Semiramis.

Believe me, we do not understand the entire Bible yet! Far from it. Our studies into God's Word must increase, never grow cold or uninteresting. It's alive! It's filled with so much information; we are just scratching the surface. The Bible is more than a historical textbook, or a book on science, or on any subject. It is a book on *how to live the right kind of life!* It is primarily a textbook on human nature and our relationship with God. It is His Handbook of Life for mankind. If you have been called by God to understand His great purpose, devour the Bible. Digest it. It has all the answers we need to live great, rewarding lives, and to prepare us for His Kingdom and eternal life!

I have been Chairman of the Ministerial Council now for seven years. Recently, I have come to the conclusion that I must take a breather from this chairmanship for a sabbatical rest, and to limit my travels to one trip per month in the hopes that my blood pressure will continue to fall and my peripheral neuropathy foot problem will be healed (poor circulation in my feet due to the high blood pressure), so I can continue my church visits. I need to spend some more time with my wife of forty-two years of marriage and my children. We plan to drive to Los Angeles in September to help our daughter Cat with the birth of her second girl (tentatively named Ava). Mr. Bronson James is the interim Chairman for the Ministerial Council during my year of rest. No, I am not sick. Just a bit tired and handicapped by my heart and feet problem.

But how can I give my research to the entire United States, not just to the West? If I have been successful and inspiring in my Bible studies, perhaps I can publish this material on our church's web site, www.cgi.org. Without so much travel for a while, I would like to spend some time in writing. I don't know if I have the qualifications, but in my life I have learned that most anything can be done through the power of the Holy Spirit and if you just try hard enough!

Benjamin Chapman

The Winning Hand

While watching a cable news program several weeks ago, I was introduced to excerpts from a new movie. I believe the movie title had something to do with "spring break." The outtakes revealed young adults on break from college. The content of the movie featured their daily activities during their time away from home. Some of their actions were the usual fun-in-the-sun type things -- swimming, surfing, sunbathing, and so on. Unfortunately, the movie apparently goes on to more risqué and exposed filming.

To attract viewers, these coming attractions featured young girls dancing in public places topless (their images were blurred for these promos) while others of the same sex were engaging them sensually. It makes you wonder just what was actually seen at the movies!

This lewd preview left me wondering about how these kids came to this point in their lives. I presume they were reared by some semblance of Judeo-Christian teachings. Again, I presume, if they were asked, a good number of these kids would say they believed in Jesus Christ and think they are going to be "saved." Yet, their conduct seems to say otherwise.

It makes me wonder if too many of us say we believe but then live permissively, presumably thinking Jesus' sacrifice is some kind of "trump card" to be used to justify our behavior. Sounds a little like the argument embraced by Paul when he asked, "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1). Is it spiritually safe to pursue licentious living, believing you can use remorse or embarrassment as an anticipated amelioration of disgusting behavior?

Let me embrace this concern with this question: While it is true Jesus died for our sins, is it healthy to view Jesus as an afterthought -- as someone you turn to only after you sin, rather than before? Somehow, considering the Son of God as someone to "trump" our intentional sinful behavior seems irreverent and spiritually ineffective.

John the Baptist preached to the Pharisees the necessity to bring forth fruit suitable for repentance (Matthew 3:8). Christ, in a similar pattern, came preaching repentance, saying the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mark 1:15). It's important to know that repentance does not end at baptism but is, instead, a life-long process.

Many believe that Christ did away with the law and, therefore, there is no more sin. But that just isn't true. Sin becomes reality when we deviate from the truth, by acting or thinking contrary to the laws and will of God. The apostle John tells us "*If we say that we have fellowship (a relationship, partnership) with God and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light (to shine in good behavior), as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:6-7). John further states, "*If we say we have no sin* [what is sin? Read 1 John 3:4] *we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (verses 8-10).

First Peter 2:16 cautions us not to use our freedom and liberty from the penalty of sin through Christ as "*a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God*." Paul, addressing the issue of law and grace, says that "*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" (Romans 5:20). In Romans 6:1, Paul asks, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound*? Notice his exclamatory remark in verse 2: "*God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein*?" In verse 6, Paul's thought continues, "*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*" Verse 12: "*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof*." The New English Bible translates verses 12 and 13 this way: "*As such, so sin must no longer reign in your mortal body, exacting obedience to the body's desires. You must no longer put its several parts at sin's disposal, as implements for doing wrong. No: put*

yourselves at the disposal of God, as dead men raised to life; yield your bodies to him as implements for doing good." Then, in verse 18 (back to the King James), we read, "*Being then made free from sin* [its penalty], *you became the servants of righteousness*."

In Romans 7, the apostle Paul exposes the struggle he had with his own sins. (It is the same struggle each of us has every day of our lives!) He comes to a conclusion in verse 7 when he says, "*I am carnal, sold under sin*." He goes on to reveal that he has no pleasure in sin, but hates those things he does but knows he shouldn't do (verse 15). He acknowledges his wretchedness (verse 23), confesses his sinful acts, and then acknowledges Christ as his Savior, thanking God for His forgiveness.

In Romans 8:1, Paul tells us that those who are in Christ and walk not after the flesh (struggling to overcome the flesh rather than giving ourselves over to sinful acts) but after the Spirit (trying to live according to God's commandments) are not condemned. Paul goes on to say, "*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit…For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*" (verses 5, 13-14).

If we are living as the "sons and daughters of God," we should never allow ourselves to consider that our Elder Brother and Savior, Jesus Christ, is somehow our personal "trump card." But rather, it is through Him that we can overcome all things. In every sense, He does have our victory (winning hand), which shall be played at the last trump!

Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid!

By Ron Elkins, Texarkana Pastor

"Good News, Bad News"

Church's are known by their evangelistic pattern. Among the many platforms for emphasis, two of the more prominent are prophecy and Christian living. Either of these can be constructed from a negative or positive approach. Prophecy can be frightening and foreboding or enlightening and visionary. Christian living can feature the worst in human relationships or the excellence of human potential. Both platforms find general appeal among the masses.

It is refreshing to sense our fellowship seeking a balance between prophecy and Christian living. Perhaps we're coming to realize these platforms can explore more of the good news--and not so much bad news. This is certainly permissible as we model our evangelism after the ministry of Jesus Christ. His testimony did occasionally offer prophetical insight (i.e., Matthew 24) and condemnation of the worst in human nature (the Pharisees), but Jesus continually uplifted, served, and inspired those who would receive His teachings.

There's a lot of good news out there--but you don't hear much about it in some churches. Too often the preaching and publishing of the gospel center on tragedy, suffering, reprehensible conduct, celebrity mischief, murders, kidnappings, immoral trysts, war, disease, floods, hurricanes, injustice, family strife, and so on. Lot's of bad news!

Through many years of church association, it seems there have been an inordinate number of believers from our church "culture" intrigued with making sense of bad news. Rather than being moved with sorrow or love or pity over reported events, it has been somewhat religiously expected to figure out how bad news was actually good news leading to fulfilled prophecy. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the ready response to tragedies among religious leaders who quickly use every round of bad news for selfish purposes. How easily God's people can be influenced. Why not motivate believers through the "good news"?

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Jesus Christ came to this earth in human flesh and preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He urged listeners to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). What is the gospel? The word "gospel" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *godspel*, which means good tiding. The Greek New Testament word for gospel is *euaggelion*, which is the word from which we derive "evangelism."

To put it in the simplest of terms, the gospel that Jesus came preaching was the "good tidings (good news) about the Kingdom of God."

Following his triumph over Satan in the wilderness temptations, Jesus increased His public teaching. He came to Nazareth (his home town) where He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath (Saturday). In the synagogue, Jesus was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and He opened it to the section we know as Isaiah 61:1-2. Luke records, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4:16-19). In verse 21, Jesus tells the audience that these verses in Isaiah refer to Him.

In this quotation from Isaiah, we see the theme of Jesus' ministry. It's what He lived and preached and accomplished till His death. It is noticeably absent of bad news. Interestingly, there is a line from Isaiah 61:2 that **is not** included in Luke's account. It's worth noting. Isaiah 61:2 reads, "*To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, <u>and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn</u>*." Wonder why this underlined portion is missing from Luke's account? You also have to wonder why it is, then, that so many who preach today do so with an attitude of vengeance or judgment. Why find God in all the bad news when Jesus' ministry emphasized "the gospel" (GOOD NEWS) to the poor, and offered Him as one who brings relief to the oppressed?

It seems a ministry can do no better than to follow the themes of Jesus' ministry. If more of us would do that, we would be celebrating the fulfillment of prophecy with the development of the gospel or glad tidings.

As I think back, like too many people, my understanding of the Bible, particularly prophetic emphasis and interpretations, was formulated from four sources: 1) the ideas/theories/heresies/lies learned through childhood; 2) the sermons heard from ministers and lay members (some who presumed to be full of the Holy Spirit, thus supposedly having "special insight" denied to just faithful disciples); 3) the Bible, books, booklets, pamphlets I read; and 4) personal interpretations/ideas/possibilities that seemed to make sense through the aforementioned resources.

But what does 2 Peter say about leanings toward personal interpretations? "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:20-21). Even so, many Christians are tempted to force some prophetic perspective from the headlines and tragedies (earthquakes, forest fires, spread of disease) in everyday life. It's as if Christian belief is primed through God's failure to intervene for his creation rather than the remarkable gifts and involvement He provides every day. Does bad news validate God's Word more than good news?

Remember, Christ came preaching "glad tidings." His message and life offered hope and good news for sinful man. He taught that each of us could have a part in the Kingdom of God by living "Kingdom" principles in this life. Christ taught the better way to live. He taught repentance (which delivers us from bondage of lawlessness) and belief in Him as our sacrifice for sins (delivering us from the penalty of eternal death). He also promised that the Holy Spirit would be given freely to those who believed the "glad tidings."

There's an interesting aspect to the ministry of Christ. It had little to do with bad news.

Charles Groce, CGI minister

A Linchpin To Successful Christian Living

In Acts 1, Luke, the author of Acts, mentions that for forty days "after" Christ's crucifixion Jesus continued to be seen conducting additional miracles and speaking about the Kingdom of God.

But in Acts 1:10 we read of a historical event which resulted in a promise that remains unfulfilled to this day. Notice that in verse 10 we are told two men (angels) appeared while the apostles, mesmerized, watched Jesus ascend into the clouds.

In Acts 1:11 these angels reaffirm the promise Jesus personally made in John 14 when he said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." They said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." This

was the very first promise made by God, through these angels, after Jesus Christ ascended to the Father as our high priest.

Have you ever wondered why that particular truth was the one mentioned first? Why not "Don't forget to love your neighbor as yourself" or "God loved the world so much that He sacrificed His only begotten Son for you" or "This Jesus, whom you see ascending, is now your High Priest at the right hand of the Father"?

Now don't get me wrong; all of the above statements are true and very important, but they were not mentioned during this remarkable historical event. Quite the contrary, our Father had a very important reason for choosing this particular truth as the **first reminder.** There was a purpose behind stating this future event and promise **first.** Let me explain.

The Christian "way" is not an easy life. If a person engages, truly participates, in the battles of the flesh, it can be a brutal experience. The expectation God has for the Christian often translates into overwhelming sacrifices. These sacrifices are the challenges we Christians contend with regularly. It is these events that can wear a Christian out if we're not careful. The trials and tests, when in the heat of the circumstances, can be quite overwhelming. It's during these times--in the crucible of a trial--that real Christians are prepared and made.

However, I would like to point something out. Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-9. I want to bring your attention to verse 3. Notice how Peter mentions that we are begotten and brought into a lively hope existence "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away [it's eternal], reserved in heaven for you."

Notice what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:19: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you [being] in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?"

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Paul describes the future resurrection and then immediately admonishes us to "comfort one another with these words" (verse 18). As you read throughout the New Testament you can't help but notice how important the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection were to these early Christians. It gave them motivation and hope. It afforded them the inner strength and courage to face the raging challenges of persecution and death. Those were times of extreme agony and strenuous tests and trials for those early New Testament Christians and families.

Today the cauldron of trials is not causing most of us to face incarceration or loss of family and friends due to religious persecution; but we do have our challenges--trials of health, aging, finances, career, school, relationships, and marriage. There are issues that test our Christian character and attitude, reproving and testing us, allowing God to observe our skill, talents, patience, and ambition. Yes, brethren, God is learning a lot about us by our degree of performance or lack thereof.

Yet, the lesson is clear. A linchpin to successful Christian living is clearly identified. It's by no means the only one, but it is a major ingredient. It's key to our "long-term" success in this

marathon race of life. **It's the "lively hope" we have of the resurrection and return of Jesus Christ.**

This should be central and foundational to our lives. It should be the underscore to our behavior. God the Father, through those two angels, and through Peter, Paul, and others, consistently and frequently made reference to these events and promises. They were the driving force that kept life focused for so many Christians down through history.

So remember, brethren, whenever you need to refocus your perspective on life, think back on that first promise that was made as Christ was ascending to His rightful position at our Fathers right hand. Take some time to recognize you are being prepared for something much larger in scope than this temporary life. Remember, this too will pass.

Understand God is getting to know you by your commissions and omissions. You are constructing your legacy as you live. Remembering that Jesus Christ is returning to resurrect and reward will help you achieve and maximize that "long-term" objective of entering into His Kingdom.

By Bill Watson

Hear What Nehemiah Says to the Churches!

If the modern Church of God had heeded the lessons from the book of Nehemiah, the disaster that has overtaken us would have been avoided. The state of the Church of God would be radically--and refreshingly--different had we listened to this ancient prophet of God. But it is not too late for YOU to listen to this relevant prophet.

The first chapter of Nehemiah reveals a man whose heart was totally wrapped up in the work of God. There was no greater passion that Nehemiah had than for the people of God and their work on behalf of God. When he saw the parlous state of Jerusalem he wept and "mourned for days." What about us today? Does it bother us that the once great Work that used to rock the four corners of this world has been so greatly diminished and that the effective witness that the world should be getting is muted? Does it bother us that we have a message so powerful and a set of doctrines second to no other church, and yet we languish in lukewarmness and stagnant growth?

Nehemiah did not long for the glory days of Jerusalem so that he could boast against the other nations. Likewise, the truly converted child of God does not mourn the state of the church today because he envies the success of others. We mourn because we know we have the true gospel and that this is the only hope for the world. But what did Nehemiah do when he was depressed over the state of Jerusalem? He poured out his heart before God in prayer.

It seems simple, but we often don't do that first. We mourn and mourn and mourn, and then we blame and blame and blame, and afterward we complain and complain and complain.

Nehemiah did two important things. He took his cares and concerns to God, and he confessed the sins of his people before God. We in the Church of God need to do that. Rather than the blame game and attacking certain leaders for "taking the church off track" and lambasting them for being "used by Satan the Devil," we should collectively acknowledge that we as a church have sinned and

that we have not been faithful to God and, therefore, the once-great work is no more. “We have acted very corruptly against thee,” Nehemiah confessed. Do we have the humility to make this confession?

The problem is not just the “wicked, rumor-mongering, spiritual grave-robbing dissidents” who have published “slander” against “God’s ministers.” We as ministers and leaders have acted corruptly against God and His people. Full stop. The more we cover up our sins and our role in our present condition, the longer we will stay in this condition. Notice the prayers of Nehemiah in the book. They stress Israel’s unfaithfulness and God’s mercy (chapter 9). The Church of God will never escape its spiritual captivity today unless it confesses, repents, and forsakes the sins that led us into this condition.

Next, notice the faith of Nehemiah. We can’t build the work of God without faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Hebrews 11:6). We must have the confidence to know that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13), and that He who is in us is “greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We can do it! We must firmly believe this. We must have faith that we can build strong, growing congregations of love and good works. We must have the faith that we can be effective in getting the gospel to our world.

We must also expect discouragement. This is Satan’s favorite tool. We must expect that there will be gainsayers who will say we can’t do; that we are too weak, too small, too ineffective to accomplish anything really important for God. We in the CGI and the Church of God movement in general are small and insignificant to the world. One anti-Church of God source recently commented that even some of the larger Churches of God are not even a blip on the radar screen. That’s true. But this work will be done not by might nor by power but by God’s Spirit!

“Now when Sandballat heard that we were building the wall he was angry and greatly enraged and he ridiculed the Jews and he said…‘What are these feeble Jews doing?’ Will they restore things? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish and burned ones at that?” (Nehemiah 4:1-2). How impossible! How ridiculous! How crazy of these Jews! The same with the Church of God today: We are small. We are despised. We are often ridiculed by the big churches of the world and by those who were once a part of us. There are all kinds of negative articles on the Internet and in publications about us. Many “painful truths” are being told.

I have one article by a former member titled, “Why the Churches of God Will Not Survive.” Many are predicting that in only a few years the movement will literally die out. And they say the world will be better for it!

Don’t be discouraged, saints of God. These are ancient tactics. Don’t attack or get depressed. Turn to God and have faith! “Hear O God,” Nehemiah cried, “For we are despised; turn back their taunt upon their own heads…” (Nehemiah 4:4). And the Scripture says, “So we built the wall…for the people had a mind to work”(verse 6). Do you still have a mind to work, or are you burnt and “disillusioned”? Have you lost your zeal? Have you been discouraged once too often? Do you feel it no longer makes sense to get fired up over the work? You found it easy to be fired up in the ’50s, ’60s, ’70s, and early ’80s when the church was growing, but you are too beaten down now to put one foot forward?

Notice Nehemiah again: The more the enemies taunted and planned to sabotage him, the more he turned to God in prayer. “And we prayed to our God…” (Nehemiah 4:9). The Church of God has lost the art of prayer, if we ever had it in this modern era. We have used politics instead of prayer. We have used control tactics instead of prayer. We have preached more “church government” sermons instead of prostrating before God in prayer. We have used all kinds of human responses--including fear, blame, and criticism--instead of simply praying and fasting.

If we were not so afraid of looking like “the world’s Protestant churches,” we would have convened prayer and fasting sessions, and prayer vigils like the early disciples when they faced crises like Peter’s imprisonment, instead of panicking and politicking. It is not too late. Nehemiah still speaks to the churches. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Chapter 5 is very critical. If this chapter had been followed, the entire modern history of the Church of God would be totally different. The crisis of 1978 would not have happened. And 1995 (when the Worldwide Church of God rejected the Sabbath) would certainly not have happened. But

the seeds of our destruction were sown in part by negligence of the issue of justice in the Church of God.

"Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brethren" (verse 1). The people were complaining because there was injustice, and those with authority and power were not acting in the people's welfare. Notice that Nehemiah said he was "angry when I heard their outcry" (verse 6). But, unlike in our case as pastors and church leaders, he was not angry with the people for complaining and being in the "rotten, REBELLIOUS spirit of LUCIFER!" He was angry with LEADERS who should have acted justly. "I brought charges against the nobles and the officials" (verse 7). IF we of the Church of God had expressed the courage, dignity, and the righteousness to bring charges against our "nobles and officials," can you imagine the credibility we would have had in the eyes of the brethren and the genuine loyalty it would have engendered? Instead we allowed corruption to continue. We turned a blind eye to the sins of our leaders. We made excuses for them while every year keeping a festival that reminds us forcefully that sin must be put out!

We danced around the plain Word of God and fiddled with the righteous standards of God while the Church of God burned. And now we are wringing our hands and wondering how we have come to this? Nehemiah, a leader if ever there were one, brought the situation under control and brought about reforms. Nehemiah led by example. "The former Governors who were before me laid heavy burdens upon the people and took from them food and wine besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants LORDED IT OVER THE PEOPLE. But I did not do so because of the fear of God" (verse 15).

Oh for leaders like that! We as pastors ought to be that kind of leader. If we are not, then we are risking the judgment of God on our work and our ministry.

Nehemiah shows how important leadership is and what disasters can occur when there is bad leadership. But there are some even more critical lessons for the Church of God in the remaining chapters of this profoundly important book. Stay tuned to this page for the next installment!

By Ian Boyne

A Hero of the Faith

Although he was the leading persecutor of Christians in the first years of the new faith, Paul became a believer in Jesus, and the most influential voice--after Jesus Himself--in the history of the church. In reading the Scriptures "here a little there a little" (Isaiah 28:10), one can glean much of the personal history of the apostle Paul to see that indeed he was one of the "heroes of the faith."

Paul reveals much about himself in Acts 22:3: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." So we can see that he was highly educated and was also a "Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6).

But after His conversion, Paul was really a changed person. He was now a humble man. He did not flout his formal high social standing or the education he received from the finest teachers of that day. Later, in a letter to the Church at Corinth, he said, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9).

Paul was a highly trained Jew, and his understanding of the law, tradition, Israel's history, and God's grace and love had to be completely rethought. As Paul went on with his ministry, later he and Barnabas got together at Antioch, and it was there that the followers of Christ were first called "Christians"(Acts 11:26).

Paul had great confidence in Christ after his conversion, even though he went through many trials that could have defeated him. He wrote of being beaten, of shipwrecks, being in the water a day and a half, in pain and weariness, fastings often, and in cold and nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:25-27). Then, after all this, he said, "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (verse 28). In spite of so many burdens, Paul kept his confidence in the gospel of Christ. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Yes, the apostle Paul was a hero of the faith, as we can see from all his epistles. Jesus Christ was first and foremost preached, often to a hostile gathering of people who did not want the gospel to be preached. Finally, Paul was at Rome. He was arrested and placed under a loose house arrest for two years, which helped him continue his missionary work even while under arrest. He was freed and traveled about for a while, but eventually he was arrested and taken to Rome for trial. He was freed again, only later to be rearrested and accused of a capital offense, perhaps simply the charge of being a Christian leader (Acts 28:30-31). As he was waiting for trial, his writings to Timothy reflected his continued confidence in Christ. He wrote, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

These words should inspire us as we run a race to attain eternal life and battle the forces of evil continually so as to finish this course of life. Paul knew, as we can know, that as we keep the faith, there is a crown of righteousness laid up for us also.

God help us to be heroes of the faith as Paul was.

By Frank Denman, Minister

True Love

We all recognize much misuse of the word love, such as someone saying he loves a certain food, when he really means that he likes it very much. I know that Im getting a little technical, but I have to do that to make the point that Im leading up to.

We may hear a professing Christian say, I love the Lord, but regularly do things that our Lord Jesus Christ would not approve. What, then, does the Holy Bible define as truly loving our God?

The apostle Paul defines love very well in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, parts of which are often used in wedding ceremonies. The passage states: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (NIV). As imperfect humans, we never quite attain this standard of conduct, but it provides a goal for us to aspire to.

The apostle whom Jesus loved defined the love of God in 1 John 5:3: For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (NKJV). This is consistent with what God says in Deuteronomy 5:10 and 7:9: showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

There are some who think that the commandments of the Old Testament and the commandments of the New Testament are different, but this is not what the Holy Bible says. John 1:3 says, All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (NKJV). This includes all the laws of the first five books of the Bible, including the Ten Commandments. Jesus also states in John 5:30, I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. Again, in Hebrews 13:8 Paul says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That, then, would say that all the commandments are consistent from Genesis to Revelation. Unfortunately, some people have a problem understanding the meaning of some scriptures because, as Peter said in 2 Peter 3:15-16, our beloved brotherhas writtensome things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

A giant step in understanding all Scripture is understanding Gods plan of salvation, which is pictured by His feast days listed in Leviticus 23. First is the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, picturing Gods rest after six days of creation and resting, as well as the future rest in His Kingdom. Then the Passover, not a high day but an annual observance, pictures the sacrifice of Jesus, our true Passover Lamb. The seven days of Unleavened Bread picture putting sin (pictured by leavened bread) out of our lives and putting Christ (pictured by the unleavened bread) into our lives. The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, symbolizes the coming of the Holy Spirit of God. The Feast of Blowing of Trumpets looks forward to Jesus Christs return to this earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to set up Gods Kingdom. The Day of Atonement represents our becoming at one with God through Jesus Christs sacrifice. Then the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles pictures Jesus Christs millennial rule, followed by the Eighth Day, or Last Great Day, which represents the Great White Throne Judgment when Jesus Christ judges those resurrected at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:11-12), after which the Kingdom will be turned over to God the Father.

While keeping Gods commandments cannot earn salvation for us, breaking His commandments can earn death for us, which is clear in Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus Himself said, He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him (John 14:21). He also said, Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Perhaps you have heard of a comment from the chivalrous age of one of a young couple telling the other, Your slightest wish is my command, because of his or her love for the other. In the light of that, whats the problem with doing our best to keep Gods commandments if we really have true love for Him, after all that He has done and plans to do for us?

By Tom H. Kauffung

Watch, Wait, and Stand Fast

"But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come." At no time in history has this verse been truer. With terrorism rampant throughout the world, hunger and disease affecting many countries, and immorality infecting all society, we know we are in the last days. Paul's second letter to Timothy contains warnings of future events to come, things we are seeing today. If we as Christians aren't careful, we also can be carried away in the hysteria of fear and turmoil as we watch world events unfold, bringing us ever closer to the beast system and finally to the return of Christ. We must, however, watch, wait, and stand fast, if we are to share in that wonderful inheritance waiting for our big Brother, Jesus Christ.

The first thing we must do is watch. Paul, writing to the church in Thessalonica, described the world in which we live today. First Thessalonians 5:1-11 exhorts us to watch and be sober (self-controlled). We must be aware of world events, noting calmly how each event fits into place. Each event has its purpose, and if we can have the proper understanding, we can help others through these perilous times. Jesus also warns us to watch in Matthew 24:42-44. We cannot go about life ignoring what is happening around us. To do that would invite disaster--failure. Jesus states in Matthew 26:41 that we must watch and pray else we enter into temptation. Worldliness and its effects can cloud our judgment and cause us to fall into lethargy and despair, doubting whether Christ is really coming back or not. We must stay focused on Christ and not let down our guard.

The second thing we must do is wait. Waiting is hard, for as humans, we usually want all the good stuff now without having to put up with any bad. However, we all know it doesn't work like that. Just as the first-century Christians waited in the upper room "for the promise of the Father," we must wait patiently throughout our lifetime for the rewards that come, frequently after suffering. Paul shows us in Romans 8 that even the creation groans in travail waiting for redemption. So for us to wait a few years is nothing compared to what the whole universe has suffered because of sin.

Lastly, we must stand fast. We must not be moved, but be planted firmly in God's Word. Passages such as Ephesians 6, Philippians 1, 1 Thessalonians 3, and 2 Thessalonians 2 describe how to stand against Satan, who is the perpetrator of all things evil. He is our enemy, the one who would keep us from our reward if possible. Our goal, as put by Paul in Colossians 4:12, is to labor fervently--and stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

The will of God is that we become full and complete children, in the same measure and stature of His firstborn son. The way we do that is watch, wait, and stand fast.

By Dean Roberts

Is Science Discovering the Mysteries of Creation?

Greetings from the Washington D.C. area! The CGI group here meets twice a month in Gaitherburg, MD, and once a month we meet with a group affiliated with CGI in Towson, MD.

I recently read a book titled Before the Beginning by Martin Rees, a British astronomer. I'd like to relate a few interesting items in the book that relate to theology.

One of the things I found interesting in the book was the fact that our universe has many characteristics that would not allow life if they were slightly altered. One of the characteristics is the degree of gravity. If gravity were stronger it would mean that life would not exist as we know it. Here's a quote from the book on this:

"On our earth, the size of living creatures is limited by gravity...Imagine any animal at double its actual size. Its linear dimensions are scaled up by 2, its volume and weight goes up by 8; but the cross sections of its legs go up only fourfold, and would be too weak to support it...Simple physics sets a crude limit to the size of animals on Earth."

Another interesting point Rees makes has to do with existence itself. He mentions that some physicists believe that observation of the world or other worlds is needed in order for those worlds to exist. If you don't have any knowledge of quantum physics this might not mean much to you, but let me try and explain. In the quantum world (matter in the smallest state) matter does not operate consistently with the normal laws of physics. One example is that particles will manifest themselves differently depending upon whether or not they are being observed. Listen to this quote in the book from John Wheeler:

"The system of shared experience which we call the world is viewed as building itself out of elementary quantum phenomena, elementary acts of observer-participancy. In other words, the questions that the participants put--and the answers they get--by their observing devices, plus their communication of their findings, take part in creating the impressions which we call the system: the whole great system which to a superficial look is time and space, particles and fields."

Now think of that in relation to our understanding of Romans 8:19-23. It tells us there that the creation is in bondage until the manifestation of the sons of God. When we become spirit beings, what will we be doing in space? Doing what our Father and Elder Brother did? Remember Genesis, where God says (communication), "Let there be light," and there was. "Let there be dry land…lights in the firmament"…etc., and these things were so. I think these physicists are tripping over truth, but just seeing it from a different perspective. What Wheeler is saying is that until there are beings in space-time observing it and communicating about it, then it really is not existing in the full sense--much like Romans is telling us that the creation (which includes the vastness of space) is not experiencing its full potential because we are not out there in it.

One final point I want to mention about the book is that Rees relates that two of the most influential theorists about space and time today, John Wheeler and Roger Penrose, advocate the view that the paradoxes of quantum mechanics and the nature of consciousness are linked. What are the theological implications of this? Remember that, in quantum mechanics, a particle is seemingly there or not there depending upon your observation of it. Remember these particles are matter, the stuff that makes everything up broken down to their smallest parts. Recall that Jesus, once He became a spirit being, again could appear and disappear. Angels were in the hills as an army and seen and not seen. Is quantum mechanics making science aware of the possibility of the spirit world? Is the spirit body just a reorganizing of the particles of matter in such a way that they

manifest differently in our reality? Quantum physics allows for that possibility. In another book I read on the subject, the author talked as though the microscopic particles had a mind of their own! There is a lot to this, but I believe that science is beginning to scratch the surface of the mysteries of God's creation.

By Mike James

Belief

The Bible has a lot to say about belief. A lesson in belief is found in Mark 9, where we find the account of a father who brought his son to Jesus for healing:

"Then one of the crowd answered and said, 'Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.' He answered him and said, 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.' Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes' (Mark 9:17-23).

Yes, all things are possible--if we can just believe!

Jesus did have compassion on the man's son and healed him.

Faith is belief. We can have faith (belief) in a lot of things--a bank where you have money, for instance--but the faith (belief) we are talking about today is faith (belief) in God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 11:6 states, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

We have to believe in God and Jesus Christ, and we have to believe in God's Word, the Bible--all of it, not just some of it.

The belief that pleases God includes believing the promises God gives us in the Bible, and a lot of those promises are for right now. But we can claim them only if we believe.

On one occasion, after Jesus performed a miracle, the disciples asked how it happened. Jesus answered, "I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever you ask in prayer, believing you will receive" (Matthew 21:21-22).

These are promises for right now if we can believe. We say we believe, and we ask in Jesus' name, but often we don't receive. So what's wrong with our belief?

Maybe there are some promises we want to believe and perhaps even say we believe but are actually hard to believe. Take, for example, Jesus' statement, "Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." Or Romans 4:7-8, which says, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." Are these promises too hard for some of us to believe?

Consider Romans 4:7-8 (quoted above). Why would God not impute sin to us? Think of it this way: If one of your children is trying to do what is right, and he slips up and does something wrong, do you really want him punished? No, you don't--not if you know that his heart's desire was to do right. God is the same way with His children.

"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:23).

So if we have God's Holy Spirit in us, the Father and the Son are dwelling in us, and that makes us very special to God.

In Hebrews 2:13, Christ says, "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

When we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, our Heavenly Father gives us to the care of His Son Jesus Christ, and as long as we are trying to do what is right Christ keeps us free from sin.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

John goes on to say, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (verse 3).

"Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

As long as you are practicing righteousness, you stand before God clean and pure. In fact, He thinks you are perfect!

The Old Testament animal sacrifices could not make a person perfect (see Hebrews 10:1). “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected foreverthose who are being sanctified” (verses 12-14).

We know we are not perfect, so what does this mean? I like the way the Living Bible renders verse 14: “For by one offering He made forever perfect in the sight of God all those whom He is making holy.”

As long as we are practicing righteousness Christ keeps us free from sin. When the Father looks down He sees a perfect person. In fact, the Father sees us as new creatures in Christ.

“For 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. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:5-9).

When we receive God’s Holy Spirit, we become sons and daughters of God. At that time, God gives us to Jesus Christ to take care of us, His children.

Our Heavenly Father doesn’t want a one of His children to lose out on eternal life.

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one that comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up the last day” (John 6:37-39).

So if we keep practicing righteousness and don’t give up we will all be in that first resurrection and will inherit all things.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God if for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32).

But we do have to believe that we are His sons and daughters and that God is our Heavenly Father. Let’s remember this when we pray to God: Why wouldn’t He want to answer our prayers? After all, He is our Father.

By Frank Marang

THE SUFFICENCY OF GOD'S GRACE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We all understand that we are indeed saved by God's grace. However, while in His plan for mankind salvation is the primary objective, we must realize that His grace is not limited to our salvation.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul spoke of a "thorn in the flesh" he had been given. Three times he implored the Lord that it be removed from him but the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness"

(2 Corinthians 12:9). Upon hearing the Lord's response, Paul yielded to Him, saying, "Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are not told what the "thorn in the flesh" given to Paul was, and we should not allow ourselves to be diverted in pursuit of specifics. Whatever it was, Paul viewed it as being "a messenger of Satan" allowed by God to buffet him and keep him from exalting himself.

Paul is talking about **power** and **boasting** about it. But by nature power corrupts the carnal human mind. He wants us to have the mind of Christ, which is not carnal but spiritual. We accomplish this by constantly yielding ourselves to His guidance. When we resist His guidance He will, by His grace, do whatever is necessary to get us back on track. As instruments of His service, we have nothing to boast about. All the credit belongs to Christ, and we should glorify Him and thank Him for allowing us to serve Him.

If we want to be true disciples of Jesus we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him, as He tells us in Matthew 16:24. And, in Matthew 10:38, He says that if we do not take up our cross and follow Him, we are not worthy of Him. So what is this cross that we must carry? It will differ with each individual. Whatever it is, it will not be strength. It will be a weakness that must be dealt with. We could do as Paul did and pray that God will remove it, but why would we want to do that?
Paul gave us an example that we should follow: "Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). These are crosses that Paul himself had to bear, and we should do as Paul and give thanks to God for them. After all, he did tell us to give thanks for all things.

This is not an easy thing to do. Unfortunately, we are more prone to complain and expect God to remove our burdens, even those that He himself may have placed upon us. What we should do is go to God with humility and thank Him. Then we can ask for His guidance and help in dealing with our situation. If we will do this, then we will find favor in His sight and He will not fail us.

God is a gracious God; it is His nature. He is kind, merciful, compassionate, and indulgent. He is slow to anger and quick to forgive. By His grace He gave us free moral agency to choose which path we will travel, the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life in his kingdom, or the wide and crooked path that leads to eternal death. But we must choose, so let us choose wisely. God has extended His grace to us and His grace is sufficient.
By Bob Simmons

From Weakness to Strength

The Bible states, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty…" (1 Cor. 1:27).

The phrase "weak things" is translated from the Greek word asthenes, pronounced "as-then-ace." Its meaning (literally, figuratively, and morally) is: more feeble, impotent, sick, without strength, and weaker. It is also understood that "weak things" is a reference to people and not inanimate objects.

Christians generally understand that they are to be imitators of Jesus, but there is a problem with the understanding of what Jesus was like. For almost two thousand years He has been depicted in paintings and too often by preachers as an effeminate weakling who would never take a stand on anything. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Jesus was a carpenter by trade. Anyone with experience in carpentry knows you cannot work at that very long without building muscles and strength. It is logical to presume that He had a determined physical presence that made a reasonable impression. It is also interesting to see that Jesus did not "turn the other cheek" when he faced the moneychangers and merchants in the temple. He chased them out with a whip. Neither did Jesus "turn the other cheek" when he confronted the hypocritical Pharisees and Scribes. Matthew recorded seven instances in one chapter (Matt. 23) where Jesus called them hypocrites to their face and related the areas where they were hypocritical.

Jesus certainly did say, "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other" (Luke 6:29). This was instruction to avoid returning evil for evil and had nothing to do with taking a stand on what is right. Jesus consistently refuted the false doctrines of the religious teachers that he came up against.

Paul made this statement: *"I* am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). When we examine Paul's life we discover that he defied the people who stoned him until they thought he was dead and drug him out of the city (Acts 14:19). He came back to the same city and preached the very same gospel that he had been stoned for preaching (verse 21).

Let God's Word tell the story of how Paul stood his ground when faced with false teachings:

Acts 9: 29: "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him."

Acts 17:17: "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him."

Jesus' statement about "turning the other cheek" and the one of Paul about "all things to all men" were statements about—to use a modern day phrase—being willing to take the "short end of the stick." This simply meant that they were willing to suffer abuse and even physical loss rather than alienate others. This enabled them to enhance their opportunity to promote God's plan.

Jesus and Paul clearly demonstrated their ability to stand their ground and defend God's Word when it was being maligned. They were real men, not ones who could be pushed around by the majority or those believed to have a more influential position at the moment.

Even though God has and is calling the weaklings of this world, let's not forget that he clearly said that he is calling such to "confound the things which are mighty." This demands a transformation that no human could accomplish by his/her own efforts. To be sure, great effort is required of us… but in comparison to God's part in this transformation, our efforts do little more than convince God that we want him to finish the job.

This transformation is to be so awesome that only the very faithful can come to believe it. It is realized over time as "the weak" study God's Word and practice what they learn. It is completely natural to reject the whole concept until one has enough interest and is committed to persistent study and obedience.

Those who are true Christians are to become literal Kings and Priests on this earth. "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). Some will be rulers of five, or even ten cities (see Luke 19:13-27). The apostles (except Judas Iscariot) will each rule over a great nation that has grown from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

Ezekiel wrote about the time when King David would rule over all twelve of the tribes of Israel under the authority of Jesus the Christ, King of Kings. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shephe And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it" (Ezek. 34:23-24). "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

Jesus was born as a flesh-and-blood human in order to qualify to rule this earth by defeating Satan the Devil, as well as to give His perfect life as payment for our past sins and finally to bring peace to this earth. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasti Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

The power and strength that Jesus Christ will give to those who have the strong desire to follow him, instead of the "false gospel" being preached for the benefit of those preaching it, will be greater than man can conceive of at this time. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1Cor. 13:12).

If you have the interest to prove for yourself just what God has in store for mere weak human beings,

you may be being called to have a part in the awesome government of God that will accomplish what the most powerful nation on this earth cannot accomplish—ESTABLISH PEACE ON EARTH.

We can help you find the answers in God's Word, but you must supply the interest in what God has planned for this earth and its inhabitants.

By Orville Bumgardner

Justice Administere d

With the recent capture and apprehension of the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, we are reminded of how Gods Word tells us that people and leaders like Saddam, guilty of crimes against humanity and in violation of Gods Ten Commandments, will be dealt with justly and righteously by our Savior and soon-coming King, Jesus Christ, at His return.

Leaders of this world would do well to acknowledge Gods authority (Psalm 75:7; Daniel 2:19-22; 4:17). Just as God allows a person to be set up over others, He allows them to be put down. Whether a leader came to power by the election process, royalty, or some other way, God is in charge. This truth should greatly affect the way we think about leadership, how leaders come to their positions of authority, and how their authority is taken away. Daniel 2:37-38 gives us insight in these matters. In this passage, which is a part of Daniels inspired interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzars dream, we see that God gave the Babylonian kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar.

In the future, this world will see a time of trouble that will eclipse all others (Matthew 24:1-21; Jeremiah 30:4-7; Daniel 12:1). The beast system depicted in Revelation 13:1-9,18 and 17:1-18 will involve a fallen religious system in concert with a man that maintains control over ten kings and will wreak havoc on this earth. Jesus Christ will return to this earth just at the correct time before mankind destroys himself (Matthew 24:22). God is merciful. A remnant will survive the great tribulation (Revelation 7:13-14).

With the return of Jesus Christ to administer the government of God on this earth, sinning governments will be destroyed (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 11:15). Jesus Christ will crush the enemies of God (Revelation 19:11-21). The world will see that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Those that qualify to be in Gods Kingdom will inherit responsibilities to lead under Christs direction (Revelation 5:9-10; 2:26-27; 3:21; Daniel 7:18). He will administer the wrath of God in truth and in righteousness (Revelation 19:11).

Though it may seem there is no justice in this world, the Word of God shows justice will be administered through Jesus Christ, as all corrupt leadership including Satan (the god of this world1 Corinthians 4:4) and his demons will be put down (Revelation 20:1-2; Isaiah 24:21-23; Psalm149:5-9). Thanks be to God; His mercy endures forever.

By Marvin Wyke, Elder, Memphis and Jackson, TN

Worry: Unnecessary and Beatable

Worry has plagued mankind since Eve worried if she should have taken the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden.

And not much has changed to this day. We worry about our families, our jobs, our futures, and our eternal lives. We worry when a child is sick, if elderly parents are all right, when a mate is late coming home from work, if our teens will keep their curfews, not to mention the worry of drugs and alcohol. Will the car last another year? Can we pay the house payment (or rent)? Will the boss (or teacher) balk at permission to attend the Feast of Tabernacles?

You name it, we worry about it.

Worry is something we all battle, especially after we begin our Christian walk.

Let's keep in mind there is a difference between worry and concern. Our great God does not worry, but He does have concern. He was concerned when physical Israel was coming out of Egypt that they might become afraid and want to return to Egypt, even after 430 years in slavery (Exodus 13:17-22); and He is concerned today as spiritual Israel comes out of "spiritual" Egypt (Luke 18:6-8).

Concern is a good thing. Concern is caring, involvement, interest, and engagement. Worry is distress, trouble, vexation, and anxiety—distress of mind.

Worry is mental pain, but it is unnecessary and curable. The cure lies in change, the change that begins at baptism and continues until that final change that Job (Job 14:14-15) and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) spoke about.

That change leads us to have our minds on godly things. At baptism with the laying on of hands, we receive God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and worry are not compatible; one stays and the other has to go. It is our right and responsibility to make the decision of who stays and who goes.

When we have the mind of Christ (Philippians 5:2), we have the power to overcome **any**problem of worry in our lives.

Do we ever think about the fact that worry is a kind of sin, as it is caused by a lack of faith in God? The aged apostle John wrote in Revelation 21:8 that the fearful and unbelieving will have their place in the lake of fire with other sinful persons.

A great place to start in our "war" with worry is to have a prayer partner. In the world of televangelism that means to sign up and send lots of money so the "Lord" can start to bless you. But the best prayer partner (Jesus) is available and He's free of charge. Start each day (before your feet hit the floor) with words to the effect, "Thank you for another day of life; thank you for your truth; thank you for calling me to your family as a firstfruit; and there's nothing that you and I cannot handle today together." Make Jesus your prayer partner.

Then we need to build our faith and trust in the ETERNAL. And this doesn't mean merely believing in Him, but actually **believing** Him. Billions (including Satan and his fellow demons) believe in God, but do they truly believe Him—that He will deliver what He has promised and pledged.

We sing in one of our hymns, "Be not dismayed what e'er betide, God will take care of you." Do we truly believe that?

Jesus addressed His very disciples' unbelief in Matthew 17:14-21, where they were unable to cure a man troubled with demons. After Jesus takes care of the healing, He scolds them for their lack of faith and goes on to tell them that with faith they could even move mountains. Was this merely metaphor to overstate a lesson? Maybe. Maybe not. Oftentimes problems and worries in our lives seem like mountains.

There was a time in my life that I faced a "mountain." I wrote of it in the INTERNATIONAL NEWS article "Facing Your Red Sea" (Volume 22, Number 3). Briefly, I faced a crisis of distress in doctrinal changes in my former church, problems on the job, and a prognosis of terminal illness for both my mother and me. At the nadir of my life, I cried aloud to God, "Father in heaven, I can't take anymore; please help me!" What I experienced was a never-before and never-since feeling of calm. It was as if someone had put an arm around my shoulder and said, "Bob, it's going to be okay!"

I related how I was led to the Church of God International, where I now have the priceless privilege of serving in Christ's ministry, how my disability sailed right through, and both my mother and I were healed. Talk about moving mountains!

What I had experienced (completely unaware of at the time) was Psalm 34:4-8 in action. The Good News version renders it thusly: "I prayed unto the LORD and He answered me, He freed me from all my fears. I will never be disappointed. He saves me from all my troubles. His angel guards me, rescues me from danger, find out for yourself how good the LORD is. Happy are those who find safety with HIM!"

When we totally trust and place our lives in His hands, we can literally, as did Peter until he took his eyes off Jesus, walk on water.

Satan will use worry to defeat us. He always sends negative vibes and influences; God sends the positives. Contrast the gifts of God: faith, hope, and love, with Satan's "gifts": worry, despair, and hatred.

If we say we cannot defeat worry, we certainly won't. But when we see ourselves as winners and victors, we cannot lose the war with worry.

Another good tool to utilize is to meditate on all the blessings God has poured out upon us by merely being born in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, or Australia.

Worry not only troubles us mentally and spiritually, but it can even wreak havoc on our physical health. Check the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs (3:5-8; 12:25; 14:30; 15:30; 17:22).

There is an account in Isaiah 41:10-14 where God promises to always help us and hold our hand. In the 1965 film Dr. Zhivago, Yuri's daughter relates how she, her mother, and her father were running after an earthquake, and she said, "My daddy let go of my hand and I was lost." Her interrogator, an uncle (knowing his brother Yuri), said that was someone else. "Your daddy would have never let go of your hand." And our Daddy will **never** let go of our hand, unless **we** pull it away.

Does God concern Himself with our worries? Look how He intervened and even stopped the rotation of the solar system for a full day to give Israel the victory over its enemy (Joshua 10); parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14); delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abeddnego from their woes (Daniel 3); turned the lions in the den with Daniel into pussy cats (Daniel 6); brought about all the miracles of Jesus' ministry.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites us to bring our worries to Him, as His yoke is easy, His burden is light, and He promises rest—relief from worry.

Moses, in Psalm 94 (Good News) says, "Whenever I am anxious and worried, You comfort me and make me glad…."

Many of the long-time members of the church will remember the almost obsession with a physical place of safety (I think some are still aiming for Petra), totally overlooking the worry-free solution in Psalm 91. (Please take the time to read it.) We're invited to hide our worries and seek safety under the same covering wings and feathers He offered while He walked the earth (Matthew 23:27; Luke 13:34).

Another of the old precious hymns of the late 1800s contains the words, "If you trust Him and never doubt, He will always help you out; take your burden to the Lord and leave it there."

Yet one more, this one from the 1970s, prodded to "Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee…."

Place these six encouraging scriptures in your war-against-worry arsenal (all quoted from the Good News version):

2 Peter 2:9: "And so the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials." (Note, it does say godly people.)

Isaiah 26:3-4: "You, LORD, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you. Trust the LORD, forever, He will always protect you."

John 15:7: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish and you shall have it."

Philippians 4:13: “I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.”

Psalm 4: “Answer me when I pray, O God, my defender, When I was in trouble, You helped me.”

1 Peter 5:7: “Leave all your worries with Him, He cares for you.”

One final quote, this one from a world-famous television personality, Barney the Dinosaur: “DON’T WORRY, BE HAPPY!”

By Bob Swimm, pastor of Fort Thomas, KY, congregation

Thomas the Doubter

Thomas was one of the disciples of Jesus. His name appears in all the Gospel accounts. But it seems this apostle, Thomas, had the tendency to view things negatively, or look on the dark side, as is evident when Jesus was telling the disciples the way to salvation. Thomas saith to Him, Lord, we so not know where You are going, and how can we know the way? (John 14:5).

When Jesus reported the death of Lazarus and informed His disciples that He was going to Bethany, where Lazarus died (John 11:14-15), Thomas said, Let us also go, that we may die with Him (verse 16). Thomas knew the Judeans had tried to stone Jesus there, and that to go back would likely mean death for Jesus and His companions. The expression doubting Thomas is derived from an account in Johns Gospel. Jesus had appeared to the disciples after His resurrection and, for some reason, Thomas wasnt there that day (John 20:24). When the disciples told Thomas what had happened, Thomas said, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe (verse 25). Here was momentarybut downrightunbelief! He stated most emphatically, I will not believe. Of course, he later recanted (verse 28). To this day, there are unbelievers, such as doubting Thomas was, refusing to believe in a risen Christ, or doubting that the resurrection was a literal historical event.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, [You are] making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mark 7:13). Today, so many people, instead of looking to the Word of God for direction, tend to look at the other side as Thomas did for a while, doubting, even refusing to believe the scriptures telling us the truth of Christs death and resurrection. But after Thomas had seen Jesus, his unbelief vanished. Seeing the risen Lord with his own eyes, he said, My Lord and my God (John 20:28). Jesus replied, Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (verse 29).

Today, many doubt the biblical accounts of Jesus death and resurrection; or, if they do claim belief, they cling to the traditions of Easter, even including bunny rabbits and eggs to bolster their unbelief in the truth of the Bible.
Passover season is coming soon, and the true believers of Jesus Christ and of His death and resurrection will be meeting to commemorate the event. As Jesus told Thomas, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So we, though we havent as yet seen Christ in Person, abide in the assurance of faith that He is the way to salvation. I am the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus assures us. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).
…….Frank Denman, Minister