

# *Forerunner*

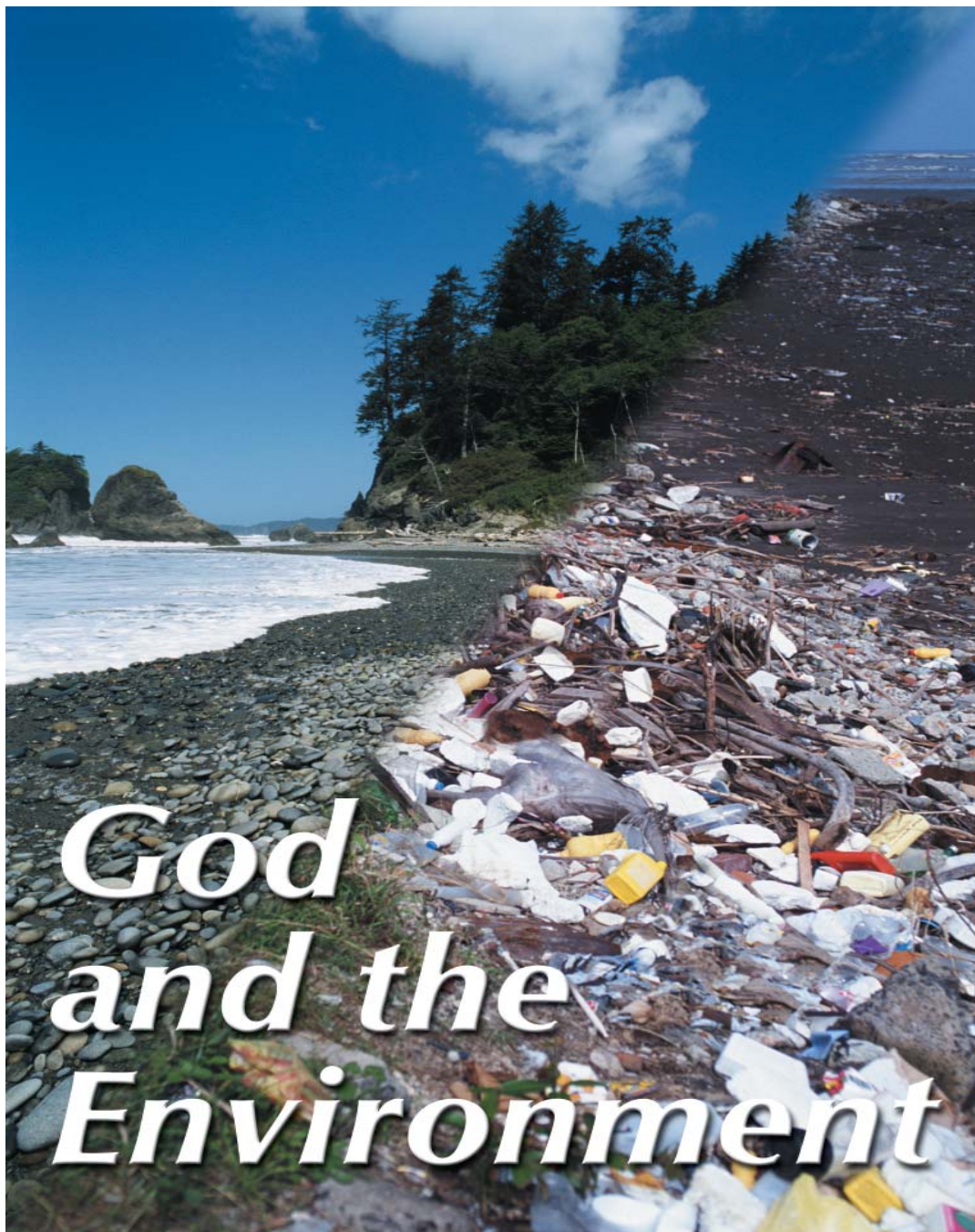
---

**Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God**

---

Volume 8, Number 2

February 1999



*God  
and the  
Environment*

# Forerunner

**Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God**

February 1999

Volume 8, Number 2

- 3 **PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH:**  
The Beatitudes: Poor in Spirit
- 9 **A READY ANSWER:**  
The Enduring Results of Compromise  
—Martin G. Collins
- 12 Valentine's Day and *Real Love*  
—John Plunkett
- 15 **PROPHECY WATCH:**  
The Bible and the Environment  
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 19 **WORLD WATCH**  
—Darryl Henson
- 20 **BIBLE STUDY:**  
Going On to Perfection

## About Our Cover:

Environmental concerns are a top priority to many people these days, and some environmentalists feel Christians are a chief cause of ecological ruin. Is God concerned with the environment? Is the Bible anti-ecology? How should Christians approach environmental issues? (PhotoDisc photos)

---

## CHURCH OF THE GREAT GOD

PO Box 471846  
Charlotte, NC 28247-1846  
U.S.A.  
(800) 878-8220 / (704) 544-2100  
(704) 544-2233 fax  
<http://www.cgg.org>

## Editor-in-Chief

John W. Ritenbaugh

## Managing Editor

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

## Associate Editors

Martin G. Collins, Darryl Henson

## Graphical Layout Editors

Bradley Mitchell, Sharon R. Onisick

## News Editor

Darryl Henson

## Contributing Writers

Ted E. Bowling, John F. Bulharowski,  
Mike Ford, Helmut J. Fraund, Ronny  
H. Graham, William Gray, David F.  
Maas, Lawrence P. Manzella,  
Howard E. Marchbanks, John  
Plunkett, John Reid, Mark Schindler,  
Philip W. Shields, Sherly J. Togans,  
Jr., Charles F. Whitaker

**Forerunner** is published eleven times a year as a free educational and religious service in the public interest. Articles, illustrations and photographs will not be returned unless specifically requested, and if used, become the property of the Church of the Great God. Comments, suggestions, requests and changes of address should be sent to the address listed at the lower left.

This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

## Photo/Illustration Credits:

Bible View Clip Art (pp. 3-8),  
Broderbund ClickArt (p.19), Corel  
(pp. 10-14, 19), PhotoDisc (p. 16-17),  
Task Force Clip Art (p.18).

© Copyright 1999

Church of the Great God

All Rights Reserved

Printed in the U.S.A.

**Forerunner ♦ February 1999**

# POOR IN SPIRIT

## THE BEATITUDES, PART TWO

Jesus Christ is easily the most important figure in the history of mankind. No matter how one may regard Him, he will eventually have to concede this point. Jesus' life and death and the teachings attributed to Him have influenced the course of human history more than any other man who has ever lived—more than Alexander, any of the Caesars, Charlemagne, Mohammed, Napoleon, Washington, Marx, Freud or Ghandi. More people's lives are influenced by His doctrines; more books are written concerning Him; more speeches (sermons) are made about Him than all other historical figures combined.

Jesus was the world's greatest Prophet and Teacher. He was God, yet He took on Himself the nature of mankind. He has been the religious inspiration for the whole of North and South America as well as Europe for almost two thousand years. His religion, Christianity, has dominated and molded the destinies of virtually the entire world culturally, socially, politically, academically, technologically, economically and militarily.

Therefore, we can hardly undertake a more important task than to inquire into what Jesus really stood for. What did He teach? This task

goes far beyond the scope of this series, which will delve only into His most basic teachings, as found in the Sermon on the Mount, regarding the nature of those who will be in His Kingdom. Even these basic characteristics present what some have called an impossible standard to attain; there is no doubt they are extremely high. Though they may be impossible for a carnal man to reach,



with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). He can enable us to meet and live these admirable attributes.

### Responsibilities and Blessings

During His earthly lifetime, Jesus demonstrated these qualities in His own person, and He expects us to do likewise. It is interesting and noteworthy that God places the Sermon on the Mount near the beginning of the very first book in the New Testament, immediately after Jesus begins to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Also of note is that it follows His call for repentance—for deep, heartfelt, sincere and radical change in a person's thinking and way of life. This change is what causes conversion to God's way. Then the Beatitudes appear as the preamble to the best-known sermon ever preached, teaching intended for those who have repented and are being converted.

We must not be deceived into thinking Jesus intended the Beatitudes for eight separate groups of disciples, some of whom are meek, while others seek righteousness and yet others endure persecution. Far from it! These are eight distinct qualities of the same group, all of whom are to be poor in spirit, merciful, mourning, making peace, etc. Nor should we pass them off as intended only for an elitist group singled out





*To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge honestly and with understanding our spiritual poverty—indeed our spiritual bankruptcy—before God.*

---

from among the disciples, thus forming a kind of spiritual aristocracy. They are Christ's specifications of what every disciple ought to be. All of these qualities should characterize each of His followers.

Just as surely as every Christian character should produce all nine segments of the fruit of the Spirit, so Christ's eight Beatitudes describe His ideal for every citizen of God's Kingdom. Unlike the gifts of the Spirit, which He distributes as He wills to different members of His body to equip them for different kinds of service, the Beatitudes are qualities each Christian needs. We cannot escape our responsibility to seek them all.

Each beatitude pronounces the person who possesses that quality as "blessed." We need to understand this word because, as some have rightly noted, the Greek word used by Matthew, *makarios*, can also be translated as "happy." Happy, however, is not the correct translation in this context. Happiness is *subjective*; the same things do not always make everybody happy. And we can certainly rule out mourning as a producer of happiness. Instead, Jesus makes *objective* judgments about the state of the citizens of God's Kingdom. He declares, not what they feel like, but what God thinks of them. People with these qualities gain His approval. Because God thinks well of them, they are "blessed." God's blessing is far broader and exceedingly more important than merely being "happy."

The second half of each beatitude reveals what the blessing is. Just as surely as all eight of the qualities should be part of each Christian, so each should share in the eight blessings. As the eight qualities provide

broad overviews of our responsibilities, the eight blessings give us insight into the broad privileges that come to us because we are meeting our responsibilities and God is pleased.

Are the promised blessings intended for the future or now? The answer is both. God does not expect a Christian to have to wait until the future becomes the present to be blessed. Although we must endure heavy trials and pressures from time to time, is it not possible to be blessed with contentment and a sense of well-being—rather than a troubled spirit and debilitating anxiety—while patiently going through them?

Is not the Kingdom of God a present reality that we can enter, receive, inherit, or as Paul says in Colossians 1:13, be "translated into" in the here and now? Can we not obtain mercy and be comforted now? Can we not become children of God now, and in this life have our hunger satisfied and thirst quenched? The reality is that all eight blessings have both a present and future fulfillment. We enjoy the firstfruits now, yet the full harvest is yet to come. As R.G.V. Tasker, professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of London, writes, "The future tense . . . emphasizes their certainty and not merely their futurity. The mourners will *indeed* be comforted, etc." (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 61). We receive some of the blessing now but much more later.

John Donne, author of the poem used in the song, "No Man Is an Island," says of the Sermon on the Mount: "All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity, is in these three

chapters, in this one Sermon on the Mount." No doubt he employs a measure of hyperbole here, but it indicates the esteem that those who search deeply into this message hold for it. The Beatitudes are this profound message's introduction, paving the way for us to receive the rest. They are like a verbal bomb blast that forcefully gathers our attention by establishing standards of responsibilities of great height and depth.

Attempts to classify them into groups have met with some success, but John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) described them simply, "as a sort of golden chain." Like the Ten Commandments, each stands alone, but at the same time it is firmly linked to all the others, making a complete set of qualities each child of God must have to be in His Kingdom. One commentator sees the first three beatitudes as having overlapping qualities and combines them in one link, the following four in a second link, and the eighth as a final link in a three-link chain. The simplest grouping is probably the best, however. The first four, dealing specifically with one's relationship with God, sets the stage for the final four, which have more to do with one's relations to man.

## Blessed Are the Poor

In everyday conversation, "bread" means that staple food made from grain. But biblically it can represent all the physical things a person might require, including clothing, shelter, money, education, and even companionship. But above all, it stands for the Word of God, and thus by extension, spiritual things such as true knowledge of God and His way, perception and understanding, things that nourish spiritual life and give

vitality, energy and growth.

Likewise, “poor” has a wide variety of meanings and applications in both testaments. The Old Testament uses five different words from the Hebrew language, while the New Testament uses two from Greek. However, these seven are translated into a large number of English words. Besides describing destitution, they appear in contexts indicating oppression, humility, being defenseless, afflicted, in want, needy, weak, thin, low, dependent and socially inferior.

Of the two Greek words translated “poor” in the New Testament, *penes* designates the working poor who own little or no property. People in this state possess little in the way of material goods, but they earn what they have through their daily labor. A form of this word, *penekhros*, describes a poor widow who may be receiving a small subsistence from a relative or social agency. *Penes* is used only once in the entire New Testament (II Corinthians 9:9), and its cognate, *penekhros*, is used only to indicate the poor widow of Luke 21:2.

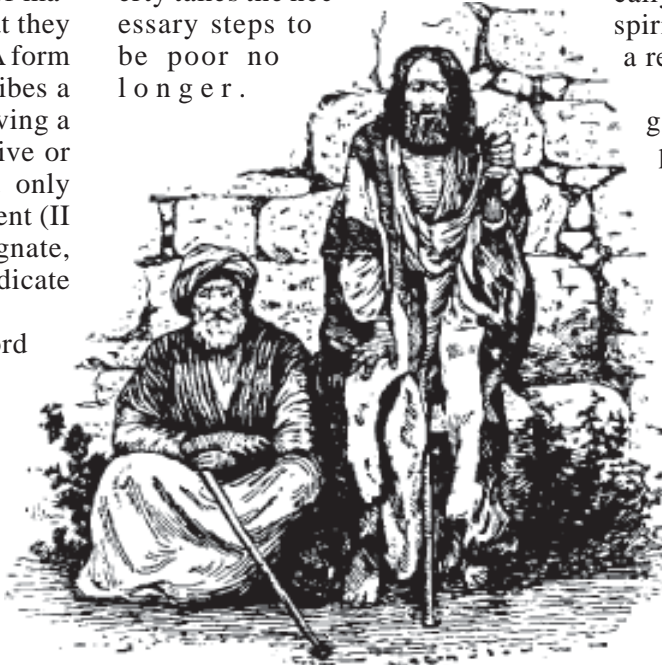
This, therefore, is not the word used in the beatitude in Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Here, “poor” is translated from *ptochos*, which literally means “to crouch or cower as one helpless.” It signifies the beggar, the pauper, one in abject poverty, totally dependent on others for help and destitute of even the necessities of life. In Galatians 4:9, it is translated “beggarly.”

At first “poor” simply indicated to be in material need, to be in poverty. Gradually, its usage spread to other areas besides economics to indicate people in weakness, frailty, feebleness, fragility, dependence, subservience, defenselessness, affliction and distress. The poor were people who recognized their utter helplessness before what life had dealt them. They recognized that nothing within their power solved their weak state, thus they would eagerly reach out to others for assistance in rising

out of their situation, as a beggar would.

Eventually, the word took on spiritual overtones because some began to perceive that these afflicted people often had no refuge but God. Thus David, a person we would not consider as defenseless, nonetheless says of himself in a situation where he felt only God could deliver him, “This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles” (Psalm 34:6).

To grasp how Jesus uses “poor” in this beatitude, we must contemplate the mind of a person who finds himself in poverty. One who recognizes his poverty takes the necessary steps to be poor no longer.



**The Bible uses “poor” to mean far more than the financially destitute. The weak, defenseless, powerless and afflicted are also “poor.” Spiritually, the poor are those who recognize their lack in comparison to God.**

He may seek advice on how to resolve his dilemma, get or change jobs, curtail spending to only necessary items, pay off his debts and/or get rid of financially draining liabilities. In other words, he tries to change his circumstances. God wants His children to have this recognition of poverty regarding true spiritual things, and possess the drive to seek their enrichment from Him.

## Poverty of Spirit

**T**he Old Testament supplies the background to Jesus’ use of “poor.” From statements like David’s, we realize that when God prophesies regarding Jesus—

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61:1)

—He is not speaking of the economically poor but those who are poor in spiritual qualities or poor in terms of a relationship with Him.

One can be spiritually poor regardless of how much money he possesses. He can be brokenhearted though living in grand houses, driving luxury automobiles, wearing the finest apparel and circulating in the highest levels of society. Is being captive to sin and Satan or addicted to drugs, fashion or the vain praise of men restricted by economic boundaries? Neither are godly attributes.

Jesus is not speaking to any clearly demarcated group. Though riches can motivate pride, the economically poor possess pride too. Jesus says the poor are blessed, but neither poverty nor wealth can confer spiritual blessings, though poverty may help to lead a person to humility. Both poverty and wealth can entail great spiritual peril. A poverty-stricken person can become very self-centered because of his desperate need, and a wealthy person can become equally self-centered through his profligacy. Jesus’ words cover the whole span of mankind’s circumstances because anyone without a right and true relationship with God can fall within His description. “Poor,” as Jesus uses it, truly relates to a spiritual quality.



*Poor in spirit is contrary to that haughty, self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition that the world so much admires and praises.*

“Poor” does not stand alone; Jesus connects it with “spirit” to clarify His intention. Even as the economically poor are very aware of their need, so also are the poor in spirit. Yet a vast difference lies between this and being financially destitute. Poverty of spirit is a fruit not produced in the natural man, but a work of God’s Holy Spirit in the minds of those He has called and is converting, explaining why being poor in spirit can span the whole economic spectrum. It is why an Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David or Joseph of Arimathea, all very wealthy men, can be simultaneously poor in spirit and materially blessed of God.

David referred to himself as a “poor” man, in need of what only God could supply. He perceived himself as destitute of the resources to improve his lot. He saw himself as beyond the help of men, afflicted, crushed, forsaken, desolate, miserable—as helpless spiritually as the poverty stricken are economically. Thus, recognizing his need, he cried out to God, and He heard him.

Another psalm by a thoroughly chastened and humbled David reveals in greater detail his recognition of the spiritual poverty in which he committed his sins. Notice the spiritual things David requested—things only God could supply—to fill his needs in Psalm 51:

Have mercy upon me . . . blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly . . . cleanse me from my sin. . . . Make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop. . . . Make me to hear joy and gladness. . . . Hide Your face from my sins. . . . Create in me a clean heart . . . renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from

Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit . . . Deliver me from bloodguiltiness. . . . Open my lips and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. (verses 1-2, 6-12, 14-15)

To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge honestly and with understanding our spiritual poverty—indeed our spiritual bankruptcy—before God. We are sinners and on the strength of our lives deserve nothing but God’s judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy His favor. But upon profession of our faith coupled with repentance, He allows by His grace the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the sins of the world, to cover our sins, justifying us and providing us with access into His presence.

### **The Publican and the Pharisee**

**P**erhaps no parable that Jesus gave conveys this attitude better than the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus illustrates this attitude by not only showing the publican’s attitude, but by contrasting his with the Pharisee’s:

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax col-

lector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The publican’s is the language of the poor in spirit. We do not belong anywhere except alongside the publican, crying out with downcast eyes, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” John Calvin, the founder of the Methodist Church, wrote, “He only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God is poor in spirit” (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, p. 261).

Notice how Jesus brought out that the underlying attitude of the Pharisee was reliance in self. He boasted before God of all his “excellent” qualities and works, things he evidently thought would earn him God’s respect. His vanity about these things then motivated him to regard others as less than himself. So we see that self-exaltation is the opposite of poor in spirit.

Poor in spirit is contrary to that haughty, self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition that the world so much admires and praises. It is the reverse of an independent and defiant attitude that refuses to bow to God—that determines to brave things out against His will like Pharaoh, who said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice . . .?” (Exodus 5:2). A person who is poor in spirit realizes



that he is nothing, has nothing, can do nothing—and needs everything, as Jesus said in John 15:5, “Without Me you can do nothing.”

In his commentary, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Emmett Fox provides a practical description of what “poor in spirit” means:

To be *poor in spirit* means to have emptied yourself of all desire to exercise personal self-will, and, what is just as important, to have renounced all preconceived opinions in the whole-hearted search for God. It means to be willing to set aside your present habits of thought, your present views and prejudices, your present way of life if necessary; to jettison, in fact, anything and everything that can stand in the way of your finding God. (p. 22)

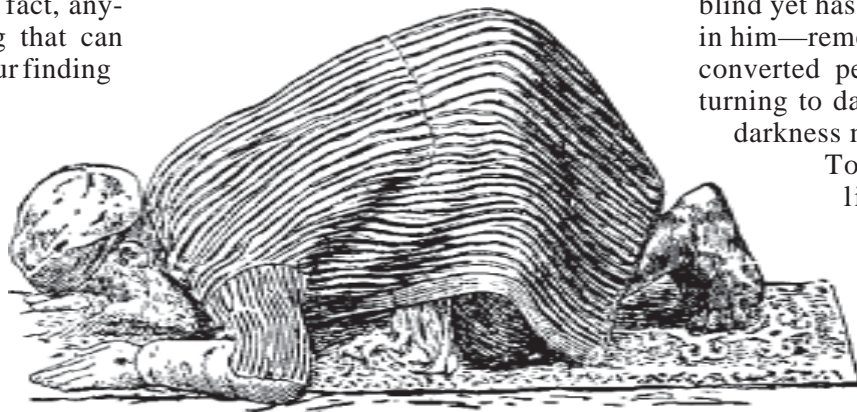
Poverty of spirit blooms as God reveals Himself to us and we become aware of His incredible holiness and towering mercy in even calling us to be forgiven and invited to be in His Family—to be like Him! This understanding awakens us to the painful discovery that all our righteousness truly is like filthy rags by comparison (Isaiah 64:6); our best performances are unacceptable. It brings us down to the dust before God. This realization corresponds to the Prodigal Son’s experience in Luke 15:14 when “he began to be in want.” Soon thereafter, Jesus says, he “came to himself” (verse 17), beginning the humbling journey back to his father, repentance and acceptance.

### An Application for Today

As the church is being scattered, it is intriguing to note that Christ’s stern evaluation of the Laodiceans mentions both “rich” and “poor”: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and

have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked!” (Revelation 3:17). How close this is in principle to what the Pharisee says in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican! Oblivious to his spiritual poverty, the Pharisee chooses to compare himself to humans he can see rather than the holy God to whom he supposedly prays in faith. Notice also his conceit in listing his wonderful works of tithing and fasting!

Though the Laodicean is indifferent, lackadaisical and inconsistent in his devotion to God, his ignorance of his spiritual condition reveals a fundamental flaw that undergirds his lukewarm condition



**The Publican would not so much as look up to heaven because** he realized how wretched and inadequate he was before God. The Pharisee, on the other hand, boasted to God of his good works. Which one was “poor in spirit”?

and paralyzes his spiritual life. The Laodicean says he is rich, but Christ’s revelation shatters that delusion. He completely misreads his spiritual condition! He thinks he is already complete, thus he is indifferent to growing and changing. So great is his conceit that it blinds him into saying he needs nothing!

This self-deception results in inconsistency in prayer and Bible Study and nonchalance in overcoming. Why do those exercises when he has no need? His relationship to Jesus Christ is distant and insipid. Would we want to be married to a person who could take us or leave us depending upon his momentary mood? No wonder Christ reacts so severely! The Laodicean’s self-perceived “wealth” is a barrier to any

meaningful relationship with Him (Proverbs 18:11).

A Laodicean is poor—really and truly poor—yet all the while thinking himself to be rich. He is unwilling to jettison anything, let alone everything in a whole-hearted search for God. Undoubtedly, he has knowledge about God and thinks this is the true religion, but it is plain that he does not know God. If he did, he would not be so blind to his poverty because he could compare himself to God’s holiness, and his shortcomings would be exposed. He is intelligent, but he mistakes it for true wisdom. Christ may even have given him gifts for ministering to the church in some way, but he mistakenly judges them as grace toward salvation. He is blind yet has the light of God’s truth in him—remember, this is written to converted people—but the light is turning to darkness. How great that darkness must be!

To be wretched describes life when everything one owns has been destroyed or plundered by war. Here it describes the Laodicean’s spiritual destitution and pitableness before God. He is being devastated in the spiritual war against Satan, even though to all

outward appearances he may look well-clothed, well-fed and vigorous in carrying out his daily secular responsibilities.

How careful Christians must be in this time when the world and Satan are pressing their distractions upon us as never before! We cannot allow ourselves to be deluded into negligently or carelessly cheating ourselves out of so great salvation (Hebrews 2:1-3).

### A Foundational Trait

Arthur W. Pink, in his commentary on the *Sermon on the Mount*, writes, “Poverty of spirit may be termed the negative side of faith” (p. 17). Similarly, Charles H. Spurgeon, a Protestant preacher of the nineteenth century,



*A person who is poor in spirit realizes that he is nothing, has nothing, can do nothing—and needs everything, as Jesus said in John 15:5, “Without Me you can do nothing.”*

comments, “The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves” (*The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 21). It is this realization of our utter unworthiness, a sense of spiritual need and destitution, that drives us to seek Christ to lift it. The economically poor gravitate to where they can have their needs met. Recognizing one’s spiritual poverty parallels this, motivating us to seek to have that need supplied through a relationship with God. Poor in spirit, therefore, describes a fundamental trait found in every son of God who earnestly seeks Him.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:29, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” This is how to cultivate this God-honoring attitude. We must do this because, while merely feeling lowly before God is insufficient, it nevertheless opens the doors to the awesome beneficence only God can give and indeed yearns to give. He says in Isaiah 66:2: “‘For all these things [in creation] My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the LORD. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.’”

Poor in spirit is one thing, contrition is another, and humility is yet a third quality. They are all related, but they are not specifically the same attitude. To be contrite is to be sorry or remorseful because of guilt, equating to “Blessed are those who mourn” in Matthew 5:4. Humility is more active than either of the other two, involving consciously choosing submission in obedience. It equates more with “Blessed are the meek” in Matthew 5:5. Poverty of spirit,

then, precedes contrition, remorse, humility and meekness because it is a major factor involved in producing them.

## Promised Blessings

**T**hose who possess poverty of spirit are pronounced “blessed.” In one sense, they are blessed because they now have a disposition the very opposite of their natural one. This is perhaps a fundamental proof that God has begun working in them by His Spirit to create them in His own image. Poverty of spirit is part of the nature of our Creator, as Jesus affirms in Matthew 11:29.

God makes many promises to those of this disposition:

◆ “But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God” (Psalm 40:17). If God is thinking on someone, he has the attention of the One with greatest power, wisdom and love in all the universe!

◆ “The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your hearts shall live. For the LORD hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners” (Psalm 69:32-33). One can be glad even in difficult circumstances because God hears the poor and He will deliver.

◆ “For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy” (Psalm 72:12-13). Beyond deliverance, these verses promise mercy in judg-

ment and perhaps salvation to the poor in spirit. No wonder Jesus calls them blessed!

◆ Psalm 107:41 is a psalm of thanksgiving: “Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock.” God will make sure that in time the poor in spirit will receive exaltation. Their families, too, receive blessings.

◆ Two psalms reveal the eternal destiny of the poor. Psalm 113:7-8 says, “He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people.” Psalm 132:13-17 reads, “For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation: This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.” In these psalms salvation and glory are definitely promised—the ultimate in blessing!

Truly blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God! This is an attitude we should fervently seek to pave the way in becoming a whole new man.

In Christian love,

*John W. Ritenbaugh*



# The Enduring Results of Compromise

**H**ave you ever compromised about something you thought was just a little thing, something you considered inconsequential? What about more important matters? Have you compromised a belief only to realize that what you thought was a conviction was really a preference? Have you let your standards slip?

Nothing erodes convictions and standards faster than compromise. Human beings are rather skilled in this area, and this skill runs the gamut of humanity. Even Solomon, known and extolled for his wisdom, fell victim to compromise, and it severely tarnishes his reputation. If we compromise our obedience to God, we also expose our reputation to suspicion or disrepute—especially with God Himself!

God appeared to Solomon on at least two occasions (I Kings 3:5-14; 9:2-9), both times offering him tremendous blessings. Nehemiah 13:26 records that Solomon “was beloved of his God” for a good part of his life.

Sadly, some time later, “The LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel” (I Kings 11:9).

All indications are that Solomon compromised with God’s way because of expediency; he decided to give in to his wives’ idolatrous practices for personal and political peace

als for reasons of expediency. Expediency is doing or considering what is of selfish use or advantage rather than what is right or just. Expediency is always based in self-interest.

Although God had given him wisdom far above any person before or since save Jesus Christ, Solomon still allowed himself to reject God’s commands by not using the wisdom at his disposal. Wisdom is the right application of true knowledge, and compromise erodes it quickly. Unlike Solomon, we cannot compromise the wisdom God has given us by His spiritual revelation if we are to “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Hebrews 3:14). Compromise can steal away our eternal life if we are not careful!

Solomon’s example teaches us a lesson about how dangerous compromise with God’s law is, particularly in those areas we may view as small and unimportant. His apostasy late in life shows how seemingly inconsequential compromises can lead to greater sins and the resultant diffi-

*“Blessed are those  
who keep His  
testimonies, who  
seek Him with the  
whole heart.”  
(Psalm 119:2)*

or advantage (verses 1-8). That is what compromise is—a weakening or giving up of our principles or ide-

---

## A Ready Answer

---

“Be Ready Always To Give An Answer” – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

culty in repentance. The Bible gives no indication that Solomon repented before he died. We can see, then, that the more we compromise, the harder it is to return to “the faith . . . once delivered” (Jude 3, KJV).

## Principles Governing Kings

**A**s the children of Israel stood poised to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, Moses accurately predicted that Israel would eventually reject God’s divine leadership, preferring a human king like other nations (Deuteronomy 17:14). Israel did this about 350 years later in the time of Samuel the prophet (I Samuel 8:1-7).

Tolerantly, God instructs Moses to tell Israel how to make the best of this mistake by giving guidelines a godly king should follow. These governing principles are listed in Deuteronomy 17:15-20. As we examine these principles, we will compare them to the life of Solomon to see how well he followed them.

### Horses

The first guideline requires that the king should “not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again’” (Deuteronomy 17:16). Given the size and scope of the empire he inherited from his father David, Solomon no doubt needed means for transportation and trade. Beyond this, horses were prime war materiel in those days, particularly for pulling chariots, so mul-

tipling horses can indicate territorial aggression and a warlike spirit. Most importantly, it can show a lack of faith in God and too great a faith in armies.

I Kings 10:26, 28 says that Solomon had thousands of horses imported from Egypt. The next verse reveals further proof of his departure from these royal guidelines: He also imported chariots and sold horses and chariots to other nations. What surfaces here is nothing more than a tenth-century BC arms race! Solomon armed the Hittites and Syria, providing them with the means to attack Israel and Judah in later years (I Kings 11:23-25; 20:1; II Chronicles 22:5). In so doing, he violated one of the “smaller” precepts of God’s law, first given to Israel 450 years earlier.

### Wives

In the second guideline, God’s instruction through Moses again leaves little room for interpretation or doubt. Israel’s leader was not to “multiply wives to himself” (Deuteronomy 17:17). Solomon may have subconsciously reasoned, “If importing horses from Egypt has brought no immediate penalty, what is the harm of taking a second wife?” Yet he eventually took a third, a fourth, a fifth and so on. Each new wife confirmed his decision to violate God’s law.

By the end of his reign, he had 700 wives, not to mention an additional



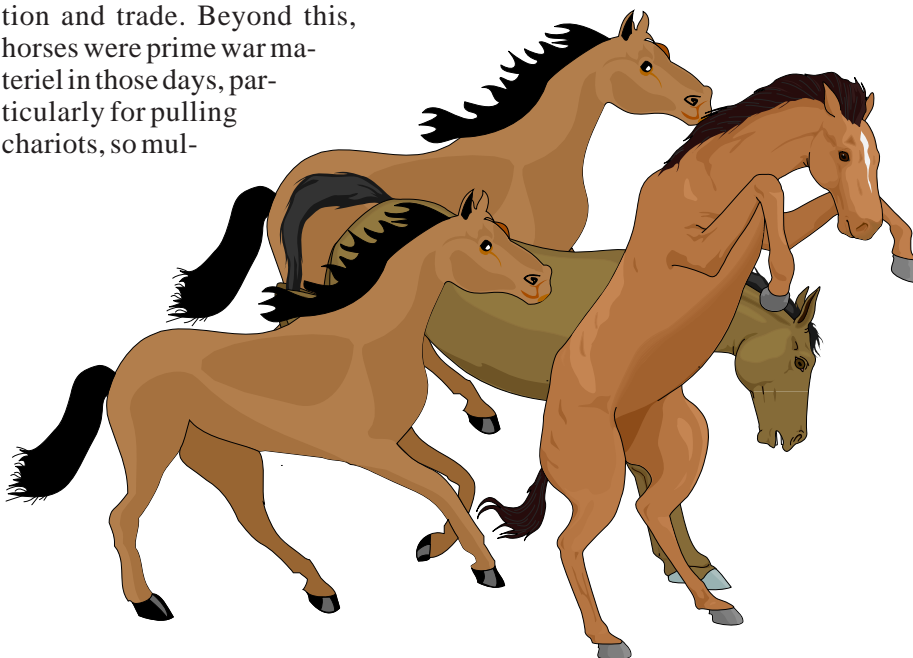
300 mistresses or concubines (I Kings 11:3)! God’s prohibition of royal bigamy was a means of protecting the king from having his heart turned away from Him. Solomon failed to heed this wise principle.

He compounded the problem even further by marrying,

many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you’” (verses 1-2).

In Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Moses predicts the deadly results of marrying non-Israelite women: Such wives would lead their husbands “to serve other gods.” Solomon disregarded these warnings. When he was old, he allowed his foreign wives to turn his heart “after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God” (I Kings 11:4).

From the “minor” infraction of importing horses from Egypt, he eventually condoned, or at least was an accessory to, the sins of idolatry and murder, sins he would not have contemplated seriously at the beginning of his reign.



Murder? How so?

Solomon not only “went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (verse 5), but he also “built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, . . . and for Molech, the abomination of the people of Ammon” (verse 7), whose rituals involved the horrible rite of child sacrifice by fire (Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 32:35). Archaeologists have found skeletal remains of infants at three sites where this brutal human sacrifice occurred. These Solomonic high places for Chemosh and Molech stood for three centuries before Josiah finally destroyed them (II Kings 23:10, 13).

As a result of Solomon’s perverted disobedience, several of his corrupt successors to the throne even caused their children to “pass through the fire” (II Kings 16:3, 21:6). How degenerate can someone be to sacrifice his own child as a burnt offering to Satan’s idolatrous creations?

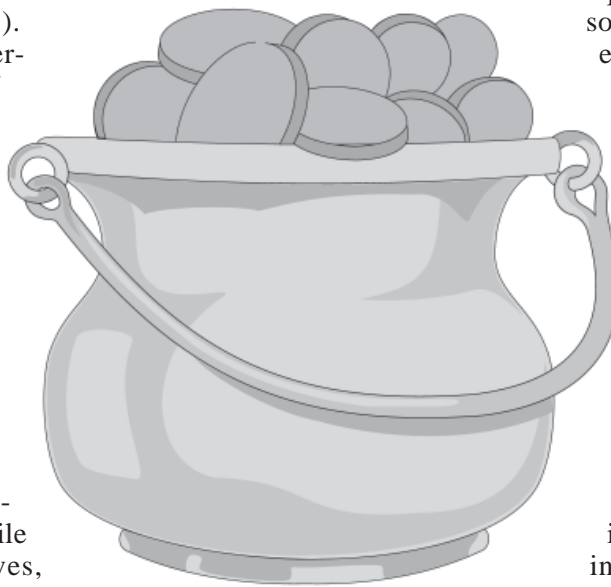
### ***Silver and Gold***

After his prodigious wisdom, Solomon is best known for his colossal—seemingly astronomical—personal wealth. While riches are not evil in themselves, God admonishes the Israelite king not to “greatly multiply silver and gold” for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). Beyond the greed factor, God gave this warning, not because He wants His rulers to be poor, but because of the effect amassing wealth has on the general populace. When a king gathers all of a nation’s wealth to himself, the citizenry experiences acute financial oppression.

I Kings 10:14-25, 27 describes Solomon’s nearly unbelievable wealth in detail. He was so wealthy that he “surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches” (verse 23). He generated an income of 666 talents of gold per year (verse 14), and “silver [was] as common in Jerusalem as stones, and . . . cedars as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland” (verse 27). He even charged a hefty, yearly set fee for anyone who desired

to hear his wisdom (verse 25)! Money just seemed to pour into his coffers.

Obviously, much of this wealth came to him from trade and as gifts like that from the Queen of Sheba (verses 1-2, 10). However, he took advantage of his people to garner a great deal of wealth in the form of high taxes and using resident aliens as forced labor on public works projects (II Chronicles 2:17-18; 8:7-10). After he died, the people sent emissaries to his son Rehoboam to request a lightening of their work and tax burdens, but he rebuffed them, causing Israel’s rebellion under



Jeroboam (I Kings 12:1-20; II Chronicles 10). From the biblical perspective, amassing wealth like this is a terrible abuse of power.

Solomon had no excuses. He was fully aware of these instructions. Deuteronomy 17:18-19 shows that Israel’s kings were to read all of the book of the law, write it out by hand, keep it with them, and read it continually. Solomon knew it was wrong to import horses from Egypt, take many wives and enrich himself. Apparently, he considered these infractions too minor, too small, to limit him from such action.

### **Victim of Compromise**

**W**ise Solomon fell victim to the same temptation that the rest of us so often face:

to compromise in what we think are small concerns or the “gray” areas. The danger in such reasoning is that small compromises weaken character and over time, lead to major sins. Just as we can grow in character little by little, so we can backslide in the same manner.

Solomon’s experience is a warning of what will befall us if we follow his example of compromise. His series of compromises gradually but inexorably distorted his understanding of God and His ways. The psalmist of Psalm 111:10 writes, “A good understanding have all those who do His commandments,” and its converse is equally true. If we slacken our resolve to keep all of God’s commands, even those we might deem as less important, we will gradually lose our God-given understanding of His way to eternal life.

King Solomon may not have understood how far-reaching his “little” sins would be. By giving His royal sanction to the worship of pagan deities, Solomon set a precedent that was followed by most of Judah’s kings after him. His example was retained by the ten tribes of Israel in Samaria and in their subsequent wanderings. His religious influence still pervades the thinking of the monarchy of the line of David to the present day.

Solomon, having learned the hard way, writes, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Satan begins making his inroads in our lives when he influences us to compromise on God’s law and follow our own way. Once we compromise, the process of sin has begun, and its ultimate end is death (see James 1:14-16).

The time to stop the process is in the beginning, when the situation and the pulls are still small and simple. It is the little compromises—the ones we think are so meaningless—that grow into full-blown sin and apostasy. Nip sin in the bud! And the enduring consequences of compromise will never have a chance to bloom.

—Martin G. Collins



# Valentines Day

## & Real Love

How can we say, “I love you”?  
Let me count the ways!

On their wedding anniversary, a husband might give his wife a nice card and a gift, perhaps some flowers and maybe even a romantic dinner at an upscale restaurant. He is saying, “I love you”!

On Father’s Day, his wife might give him a card and a gift. She is telling him that she loves him!

But our society, urged on by the greetings card industry and other merchants, tries to tell us that it is not enough for family members to declare their love for each other on anniversaries, Mother’s and Father’s Days. You must do it all over again—on Saint Valentine’s Day!

But God’s people say, “No!” The members of God’s church do not keep Saint Valentine’s Day. Why not? With a little tongue-in-cheek humor, let’s search out the reasons by answering five questions one by one.

### **Question 1: Who was Saint Valentine?**

Valentine” was apparently a very popular name among the so-

called saints of yesteryear, as history records a considerable number by that name! The most famous “Valentines,” however, were two martyrs whose festivals both fall on February 14. That’s right, there were two Saint Valentines! Most people never realized that!

One was a Roman priest. The other was the Bishop of Terni, a town in central Italy. Apparently, these two men had quite a lot in common: They lived at the same time, around the second half of the third century AD; died on the same day; and are supposedly buried on the same street, the Via Flamminia. No one knows why they were not buried in a cemetery like civilized saints!

Except for the setting of their feast day, the historical record gives absolutely no indication at all why either of these men are connected with love and romance. That is as it should be—as long as they were behaving themselves as all priests and bishops are supposed to!

This, in a nutshell, is about all we know about the two Saint Valentines. Not much, is it?

### **Question 2: What are the real origins of the celebration of this day?**

As far back as documented history goes, we can trace the celebration back to two ancient Roman fertility festivals: a lesser-known one on February 13 called the “Faunalia,” in honor of the god Faunus, and the better-known one on February 15 called the “Lupercalia,” honoring the god Lupercus. The Romans considered Faunus and Lupercus to be closely related, and some historians even think they are one and the same god, named differently by ancient Italians living in different regions.

The main center of the ancient Lupercalia celebrations was the cave of the Lupercal, on the Palatine Hill in Rome, where Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, were supposedly nursed and brought up by a she-wolf. The Greek word for “wolf” is “lukos,” and the Latin name for the gray wolf is “canis lupus,” hence the terms “Lupercal,” “Lupercus” and “Lupercalia.” Some traditions even say that Romulus and Remus actually instituted the feast of Lupercalia.

Space restrictions forbid going into the details of all the strange rituals that were performed at the Lupercalia, but a few are worth mentioning. One ritual had two young priests running almost naked (this is in mid-February, remember!) around the old city walls, slapping any bystanders they met with thongs cut from animals that had been sacrificed earlier. A smack from one of these thongs was supposed to cure sterility.

Another rite was a purification ceremony held during the Lupercalia at which Roman women were purified by the priests of Pan Lyceus. Please refrain from asking for the details of how this happened! Suffice it to say it should not be repeated in mixed company!

### Question 3: How did the Lupercalia transform into Valentine's Day?

The feast of Lupercalia was very important to the Romans, and the feast of Faunalia to other Italians. It is regarded as the oldest of the Roman festivals and, along with the Saturnalia, was among the most important. The significance of this festival is borne out by the fact that the primary function of two of the most prominent families of the ancient Roman nobility—the Fabii and Quinctilii families—was to organize the annual Lupercalia festivities.

A modern parallel of this would be if a nation's President or Prime Minister were to dedicate two of his top cabinet officials and their entire staffs to the organization of the annual Saint Valentine's Day celebrations! Sound ridiculous? Nevertheless, that is how important the ancient Romans thought the Lupercalia was.

Lupercalia was firmly entrenched in Roman life, surviving even the arrival of Christianity in Rome. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states, "The annual celebration of the Lupercalia went on until AD 494, when it was changed by Pope Gelasius I into . . . the feast of the Purification."

Remember that a major ritual during the Lupercalia was the purification of the Roman women by the priests of Pan Lyceus. Now a pope

substitutes his interpretation of God's post-pregnancy purification ceremony as a direct replacement for a heathen one!

The Roman Church originally held the feast of the Purification on February 14, forty days after the Epiphany (January 6), and the Armenian church still keeps it on that date. Later, it was changed to February 2, forty days after Christmas (December 25), and the empty day on the calendar was filled, apparently arbitrarily, with the dedication of February 14 to the two Saint Valentines (or should that be "Saints Valentine"?).

As an aside, in the Roman church virtually every day is a feast day in memory of one "saint" or another. Emperor Justinian established Feb-



ruary 2 as the feast of the Purification in AD 542, and today some call it "Candlemas." It may be significant—and it seems too much of a coincidence not to be—that February 2 is also a very prominent day for those who practice witchcraft around the world.

### Question 4: What does God think about it?

God warns His people literally hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testaments to stick to His ways, His laws and His feasts, and to stay away from the pagan ways of the surrounding world. Here are just a few of these:

Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. You shall make no covenanted gods for yourselves. (Exodus 34:12-17)

Then, right after this instruction, God commands His people to keep *His* feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 18), the weekly Sabbath (verse 21), Pentecost and the fall feasts (verse 22). Now notice Numbers 25:1-3:

When Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

The Bible is full of warnings for God's children to stick to His ways and to avoid pagan ways like the plague. Just look up all the scriptures containing the word "gods." Warning: There are hundreds of them! But probably no scripture in the whole Word of God puts it better than Deuteronomy 12:29-32:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you have displaced them and

dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise." You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

### Question 5: What should we do about it?

The Scriptures, even the few verses we have included here, are quite clear that we in God's church should not be keeping Saint Valentine's Day. It is an ancient pagan festival covered with a very thin "Christian" veneer. The alternatives are also made quite clear. We must keep God's holy days, and we should keep them with joy and zeal.

God gave the ancient Israelites the authority and the responsibility to go into their new homeland and to tear down all the places of pagan worship. He, of course, has not given us that authority and responsibility. We must make the best of living in the middle of all of this thinly disguised paganism!

For most adults in God's church, Valentine's Day celebrations present few problems. In the unlikely event that you receive an invitation to a Valentine's party, a simple "No, thank you" usually suffices. To avoid getting into a major—and probably unnecessary discussion—plan in advance a couple of good reasons (true ones, of course!) why you cannot attend.

The ones who have the most problems with avoiding Valentine's Day celebrations are our children, particularly the younger ones. High-

school-aged children should be able to do their own advance preparations as the adults do. Most teens have been through it often enough to know what to expect and how to avoid it, but we cannot expect our younger children to handle it on their own. They need help, parents!

Warning: Please do not rely on that 10-minute chat you had last August or September with your child's new teacher, during which you told her all about the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles,

Remember also that they have not been given to understand these things as we have. It was not that long ago that we, too, were "in the dark" on these matters!

### Love for God

Most importantly, how can we tell God we love Him if we compromise with His instruction and observe this day, especially considering our understanding of its origins? He specifically commands:

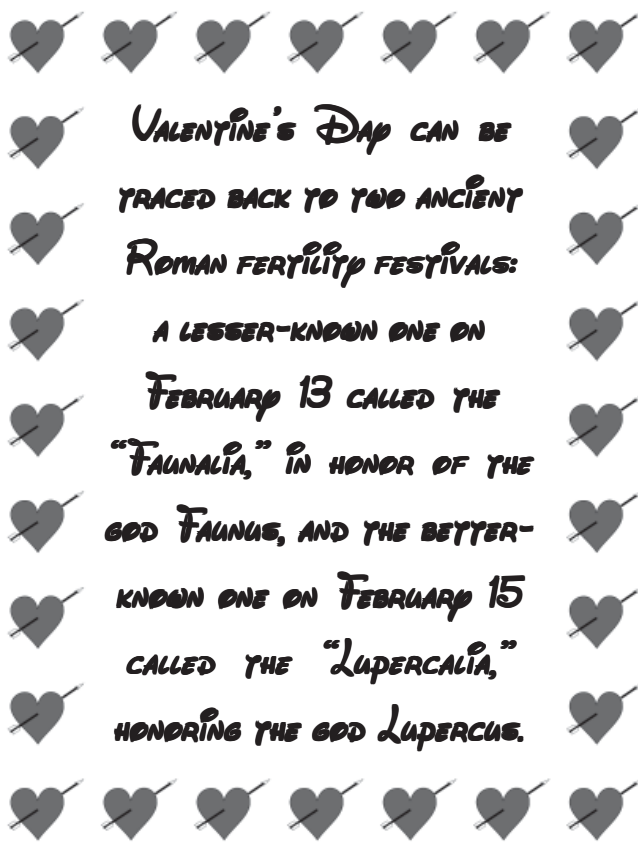
Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (I John 2:15-17)

We can be glad that God has freed us from the modern versions of the old pagan holidays. Paul reminds us, "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier" (II Timothy 2:4). As we take care not to entangle ourselves in the affairs and holidays of this world, we can instead focus our thoughts on God's true holy days and appreciate how their observance gives us a unique

understanding of God's plan for both us and the rest of mankind.

This should make us realize how much He has given us, motivating us to keep His true Sabbaths and holy days more effectively and appreciatively. So how can we show God we truly love Him? His Word in I John 2:3, 5 tells us, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. . . . Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." And that love is *real* love!

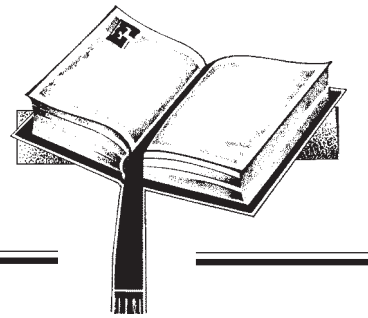
—John Plunkett



Halloween, Christmas, New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Easter and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Take some extra time shortly before Valentine's Day to drop by the school to have a friendly talk with the teacher (or teachers, as may be the case).

If you definitely cannot get to the school to see the teachers in person, write a friendly little note of explanation to each of them and send it along with the children. Remember to be nice! It is not the teacher's fault that the school's curriculum is built around the world's celebrations and holidays.





## The Bible and the Environment

In listening to the American media, a person could be led to believe that God and Christianity are enemies of nature. Thrown in among the epithets mouthed by environmentalists against their adversaries are “Christian,” “right-wing” and “conservative,” as if they believe that these words describe the same group and all people within them. So it is not a great leap of thought to conclude that since Christians follow the teachings of the Bible, God must be anti-environment!

It is not uncommon to hear liberal, non-Christian, radical environmentalists quoting parts of Genesis 1:26, 28 as their proof that Bible-believing Christians seek nothing more than total devastation of the earth:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; *let them have dominion* over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” . . . Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and *subdue it; have dominion* over

the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

To environmentalists, this means that God gives man free rein to do anything he wants to the planet—bend it to his uses and abuses, rape it of all its beauty and diversity—for his own benefit. “Does not the land have any rights?” they cry. “What about the plants and animals, birds and fish? What gives us the right to mine and burn and kill without care for nature?”

Certainly, God did not give man the authority to degrade and destroy His earth. Environmentalists are correct in saying that mankind should consider and address environmental concerns. They are quite wrong, however, to blame God for the earth’s ecological problems; He is not responsible for *man’s* destruction of the natural world.

### God Is Creator!

To think that God gave man carte blanche to plunder and destroy the earth is simply ludicrous. He is its Creator! Why would He immediately command Adam to ruin it? Would any woodworker, upon just

finishing a beautifully stained piece of furniture, tell his son to break it up for firewood? No! Just as God desires for His creation, the woodworker would put his handiwork to use and also care for it by keeping it waxed and dusted to prolong its life.

This is exactly what God told Adam. Genesis 2 contains a parallel account of creation, adding detail to certain parts of the narrative of the first chapter. Notice God’s expanded instruction: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to tend [dress, KJV] and keep it*” (verse 15). This greatly modifies the force of “have dominion” and “subdue it” from Genesis 1:26, 28!

*Tend* (Hebrew *abad*) means “to work or serve,” and thus referring to the ground or a garden, it can be defined as “to till or cultivate.” It possesses the nuance seen in the KJV’s choice in its translation: “dress,” implying adornment, embellishment and improvement.

*Keep* (Hebrew *shamar*) means “to exercise great care over.” In the context of Genesis 2:15, it expresses God’s wish that mankind, in the person of Adam, “take care of,” “guard” or “watch over” the garden. A caretaker maintains and protects his

charge so that he can return it to its owner in as good or better condition than when he received it.

To Noah, God gives a similar command after the Flood:

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. (Genesis 9:1-2)

Once again God gives man dominion over all other life on the earth, and with this renewed authority comes the implicit responsibility to tend and keep what was explicitly given to Adam. In this post-Flood world, God gives mankind a second chance to use and preserve the resources He had so abundantly provided. To that end Noah, after 120 years as a preacher and shipwright, took up farming and planted a vineyard (verse 20). We can assume, from what we know of human nature, that this attitude of stewardship did not pass to very many of his descendants.

## Eco-Friendly Laws

Most people would be hard-pressed to think of any biblical laws that are "environmentally friendly." In fact, a great many of them would scoff at the idea that any ancient document could contain positive admonitions about the treatment of nature. Modern environmentalists hold the arrogant notion that such "enlightened" concepts never occurred to anyone else but themselves down through the long march of Western civilization.

But God has been and is way ahead of them! His Word teaches the proper balance between man and nature, frequently tipping the scales toward the environment. Our Creator is also the Sustainer of the universe. Who knows any better than He how the billions of living and nonliving parts of His creation work together?

The books of Moses, among the most ancient biblical writings, contain the bulk of the environmentally friendly passages, showing God's



attitude toward the land and the plants and animals that inhabit it. All of these laws provide specific examples to expand the "tend and keep" principle He gave to Adam.

In Leviticus 25, God outlines a vital provision for the land, particularly cultivated lands:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, "When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor

gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land." (verses 2-5)

The land sabbath gives cultivated fields a chance both to rest and return vital nutrients to the soil, allowing it to produce bountifully for an indefinite time. This law enhances the quality of the produce, which leads to healthier people and livestock. Everybody benefits!

Exodus 21:33-34, part of the Old Covenant, attempts to protect animals from human-produced hazards:

And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead beast shall be his.

As Creator, God knows that the intelligence level of these beasts is not so high that they can avoid pitfalls beyond what He has "programmed" into their instinct. This law, then, pressures men to take precautions around animals for their sake.

The same principle is true for plants: "If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fires shall surely make restitution" (Exodus 22:6). Obviously, these laws have economic and criminal implications, but the ecological benefits are clear. They forestall people from taking a careless approach to their living environment, and their principles apply to all sorts of ecological abuses.

God gives us laws regarding the growth and producing of fruit trees (Leviticus 19:23-25) designed for the mutual benefit of man and tree. He does not even allow His armies to cut down all the trees around a city when they need to besiege it (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). They must leave the fruit and nut trees intact! His law also proscribes the use of differing varieties of seed in a field, which more

often than not “defiles” or weakens the resultant produce (Deuteronomy 22:9).

God provides a law to handle finding a bird’s nest with eggs or chicks in it (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)! He makes sure our beasts of burden receive their “wages” for their work (Deuteronomy 25:4). Solomon adds as a general admonition, “A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10).

It is very clear that God’s Word is very friendly to the non-human inhabitants of planet earth!

## New Testament Promises

**T**he New Testament contains three prophetic passages regarding the state of the earth’s environment before Christ’s return, and all agree that it will be very poor. God knew that human nature would eventually lead men to rape the land and kill the animals with abandon, and that during the last days this attitude would reach its pinnacle. And such will be the earth’s state *before* the devastation wrought by the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord!

The first passage, Acts 3:19-21, never mentions the environment directly, but the implication of the earth being in need of repair, rest and rehabilitation is definitely present:

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

The time is coming when God will restore to the earth its beauty and productivity that man has selfishly stripped from it. Water will be purified, soil will get its rest and be revitalized, animal and plant populations will return to their natural rates

and rhythms, and blighted and desert areas will be healed. Only when God’s government rules and administers God’s law will this restoration occur.

The apostle Paul provides the second “environmentally prophetic passage” in Romans 8:19-22:

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

God’s whole creation is enslaved in grievous bondage! This slavery,



called by Paul “the bondage of corruption,” is subjection to decay, devastation, disease, destruction and degradation because of sin—

mankind’s sin. The earth and all its creatures are expectantly waiting for the time when God’s sinless children will take over the rule of this world and deliver creation from the curse of sin! And like a human birth, the worst pains—in this case, the worst ecological devastation—will occur just before and at the delivery of the new life. This explains the earth’s groaning and laboring as the end nears.

We find the third passage in Revelation 11:17-18, as part of the explanation of the Seventh Trumpet, ushering in the seven last plagues. In these verses the 24 elders tell John what is about to happen:

We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the [nations], that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and *should destroy those who destroy the earth.*

According to these angels, part of the reason for Christ’s return is to pass judgment on those who have polluted, defiled and marred God’s creation! God has great patience, but by that time He will have seen enough of man’s blatant disregard for the work of His hands. He will strike with a vengeance that mankind has never before even imagined (Matthew 24:21-22), and the guilty will pay with their lives.

## Individual Efforts

**M**ost of us need not go very far to see ecological problems and abuses. Even with the attention environmentalism receives nowadays, many polluters and pollutants remain to do their dirty work. From what we have seen in Scripture, we cannot expect it to get any better. This world’s consumer-driven cul-



# Forerunner

## Online!

<http://www.cgg.org>



A year has passed since the unveiling of Church of the Great God's website, <http://www.cgg.org>, and our first year on the Internet has been a success! Over the past twelve months, thousands have accessed the current *Forerunner*, back issues, our tape list, booklets, Herbert Armstrong literature and church news, and many have become subscribers.

To kick off our second year, our site will take on a new look, making loading and navigating faster and easier. We are also adding downloadable sermons in the RealAudio format. And of course, we will be constantly updating and adding past *Forerunner* articles, church news, prayer requests, anniversaries, thought-provoking quotations and other interesting information.

So, if you have Internet access, surf over to [www.cgg.org](http://www.cgg.org)! We hope you'll like what you see!

## The Bible and the Environment

(continued from page 17)

tures will demand even greater and more diverse resources, space and energy, and the earth has only so much to give.

As individuals we can do little about it overall, but we can help out in small ways. Though it takes a little more time and effort, we can recycle scores of items and materials, either through local trash collection or regional recycling centers. We can try to use renewable commodities and energy, and make the most efficient use of those that are not. Even small efforts at conservation help.

On balance, however, we should not take the approach of today's environmentalists who have made a religion of their cause. Some go so far as to worship an earth goddess called Gaia, a kind of Mother Nature. This, of course, is idolatry, which God hates. We must be careful that our concern for the environment does not overtake our God-given priorities of putting Him and His righteousness first (Matthew 6:33).

Perhaps the best we can do is to appraise our lives with regard to the "tend and keep" principle God gave to Adam. Whatever domain we have, we need to ask ourselves how well we are doing in caring for what God has provided. Are we good stewards of our possessions—home, yard, vehicle, furniture, clothes, equipment, etc.—or do we leave something to be desired? If God asked for them back, would He be pleased with their condition?

Spiritually, this evaluation has long-reaching ramifications. In Luke 16:10, our Judge reminds us that "he who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much." Our reward and position in God's Kingdom may rest on our faithful "tending and keeping" of our blessings right now. A little effort today to make our environment better may earn us great reward in the world to come!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

# World Watch

by Darryl Henson

## Africa



◆ Several factors are endangering stability on the African continent. One in every six Africans suffers from mental disorders resulting from ongoing strife, political chaos, poverty, disease and genocide. On average two South African farmers a day are murdered in military-style attacks by heavily armed bandits. Life expectancy in Zimbabwe may soon be a mere 30 years due to AIDS, whereas a decade ago it was 60 years.

## Civilian Internment Camps In America



◆ Civilian prison camps, more commonly known as concentration camps, have been a subject of speculation the past few years among Americans. Congressman Henry Gonzales (D-Texas) answered the question of the civilian detention camps' existence in a recent interview: "The truth is—yes, you do have these standby provisions, and the plans are here . . . whereby you could, in the name of stopping terrorism, . . . evoke the military and arrest Americans and put them in detention camps."

## Financial



◆ Deutsche Bank, Germany's largest commercial bank, has announced a preliminary merger agreement with New York-based Banker's Trust. If the merger is consummated, it will bring Deutsche Bank's total assets to \$1.3 trillion and make it the world's largest financial firm.

## Health



◆ A recently discovered substance called telomerase is being hailed as an "immortality enzyme," since it encourages cells to divide indefinitely rather than dying with age. Though it might slow the aging process, fears exist that it will cause cancer by allowing cell division to run amok, creating "immortality with cancer."

◆ A New York blood bank is notifying 40,000 Chicago-area residents that their 1994-1996 transfusions may have contained blood improperly tested for viral infections, including HIV and hepatitis. The New York Blood Center has known about the problem for two years, but has waited until now to notify Chicago "because of the logistics of simultaneously notifying the four cities affected." The center alerted New York last year and Pittsburgh and Memphis last month.

◆ A flesh-eating microbe that causes incurable skin ulcers is spreading across Victoria, Australia. The microbe, which has killed many in Africa, is normally associated with tropical climates, and experts are baffled by the incidents in Victoria's more temperate climate.

## Weather



◆ According to a team of British scientists, 1999 may be the warmest in the past 1,000 years. By using tree rings and ice cores as indicators, the scientists compared temperature peaks during the past millennium. They found AD 1106 was approximately one-half percent warmer than average and predict 1998 will turn out to be slightly warmer.

◆ The past few months have been the driest in Israel in more than 58 years with some areas receiving only 0.33 inches since April. The Sea of Galilee, the country's main reservoir, has only two months' water supply left. Without significant rainfall soon, stringent water rationing is forecast.

## Y2K



◆ John Koskinen, chairman of President Clinton's council on the millennium bug computer problem, told a UN conference that the shipping industry lags well behind other industries in attending to the problem, even though 95% of all goods coming into the U.S. arrive by sea.

# BIBLE STUDY:

## GOING ON TO PERFECTION

Just what is perfection? Paul admonishes us to go on to perfection, but is that possible? We often reason away our imperfections with the rationale, “Well, I’m not perfect....” Others use the common dodge, “There was only one perfect man....” Armed with these ready phrases, we can go

through life not squarely facing or accomplishing Paul’s instruction. Will this let us off the hook? Is our Judge in sympathy with our excuses, or will He require performance? We need to know where God stands on the issue of perfection so we can put ourselves in line with Him.



1. What is perfection? Colossians 4:12; Luke 8:14; Ephesians 4:13.

**COMMENT:** The context of these passages show perfection to entail completeness, ripeness (like fruit), and the fullness of the stature of Christ. The biblical Hebrew and Greek definitions of *perfect* and *perfection* include “without spot or blemish,” “complete,” “full,” “sound,” “undefiled,” “whole,” “mature” and “ripe.” These all describe Christ’s character, who embodies all these traits.

2. Does this definition fit what Paul admonishes us to be? Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1-12. Does perfection come easily? What should we expect? I Peter 5:10; Hebrews 2:10; 5:7-9.

**COMMENT:** In his analogy Paul compares babies to adults. Little children are unskillful at many tasks, often becoming discouraged and quitting when the going gets tough. A sure sign of approaching maturity is endurance, but this is not passive waiting. Paul urges diligence in becoming perfect and complete, following those who endured great trials. Peter warns us that we will suffer during the perfecting process. We can not expect to escape what Christ Himself endured, learning perfection by the things He suffered.

3. Can we be perfect apart from others? Matthew 5:43-48; 19:21; Luke 6:39-49; John 17:20-23; Romans 8:35-39; Hebrews 13:5; Psalm 138:8.

**COMMENT:** The Bible links perfection with human relationships. Christ urges us to be as perfect as our Father in heaven, and ties the process to how we treat each other. The Kingdom of God is about eternal, peaceful relationships. We cannot withdraw from people and still develop the necessary relationship skills, just as God never leaves us but continues to work with us. Life would be easier for Him if He ignored us, but He works on, helping us develop our relationships with Him. He is the One who works perfection in us.

4. No one really expects “perfection.” If we were perfect, however, would it make us everyone’s friends? Psalm 64:2-5; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Isaiah 53:3-9.

**COMMENT:** Jealousy is the rage of a man! Those who begin to reach a degree of spiritual maturity will constantly suffer the arrows of those who compare themselves among themselves. By God’s own mouth, Job was a “perfect” or mature man, but his friends—and even his wife!—turned

bitterly on him when they thought they saw the first sign of imperfection. Christ, the paragon of perfection, was despised more than any man has ever been.

5. What are the fruits of perfection? How can we judge our progress toward it? Luke 8:14-15; Psalm 37:37; II Corinthians 13:11; Romans 12:2-3; Acts 3:16; James 1:4; Hebrews 13:21; James 3:2; II Timothy 3:17; I John 4:17; Matthew 19:21.

**COMMENT:** These verses can help us quickly check how we are doing. Is the direction of our life producing peace, soundness, patience, faith and good works? Is our tongue under control? Are we still fearful? Perfect love casts out fear! The young rich man had to be willing to give up what was dear to him for God and man, a fruit he was not willing to produce!

6. Does perfection ultimately mean we are completely without fault? Matthew 5:48; Philippians 2:5; II Corinthians 10:5; James 3:2.

**COMMENT:** Perfection, as used in Scripture regarding everyday life, means maturity and completeness. We can certainly attain an increasing level of spiritual maturity, yet we cannot truly complete the process until changed into God—until our human nature has been totally changed. Only then can we reach the stated goals of being perfect “as our Father in heaven,” having “the mind of Christ,” bringing “every thought into captivity,” and never uttering a wrong word.

7. Is there hope for us? Philippians 3:12-15.

**COMMENT:** Though Paul urges us on to perfection, he was admittedly not completely there himself. He struggled to leave the past in the past and pursue the future. He shows that part of the process is maintaining a perfect attitude—a mind ready, willing and seeking after the prize of the high calling of Christ.

8. What promises are associated with perfection? Proverbs 2:21; Hebrews 11:38-40.

**COMMENT:** Those who “go on to perfection” will never be cast out of the land—their inheritance is eternal. Even those we consider spiritual giants in Hebrews 11, mature and complete as they were, will not receive their inheritance ahead of those of us now being perfected. They must wait in their graves for us, and we will inherit God’s Kingdom together!