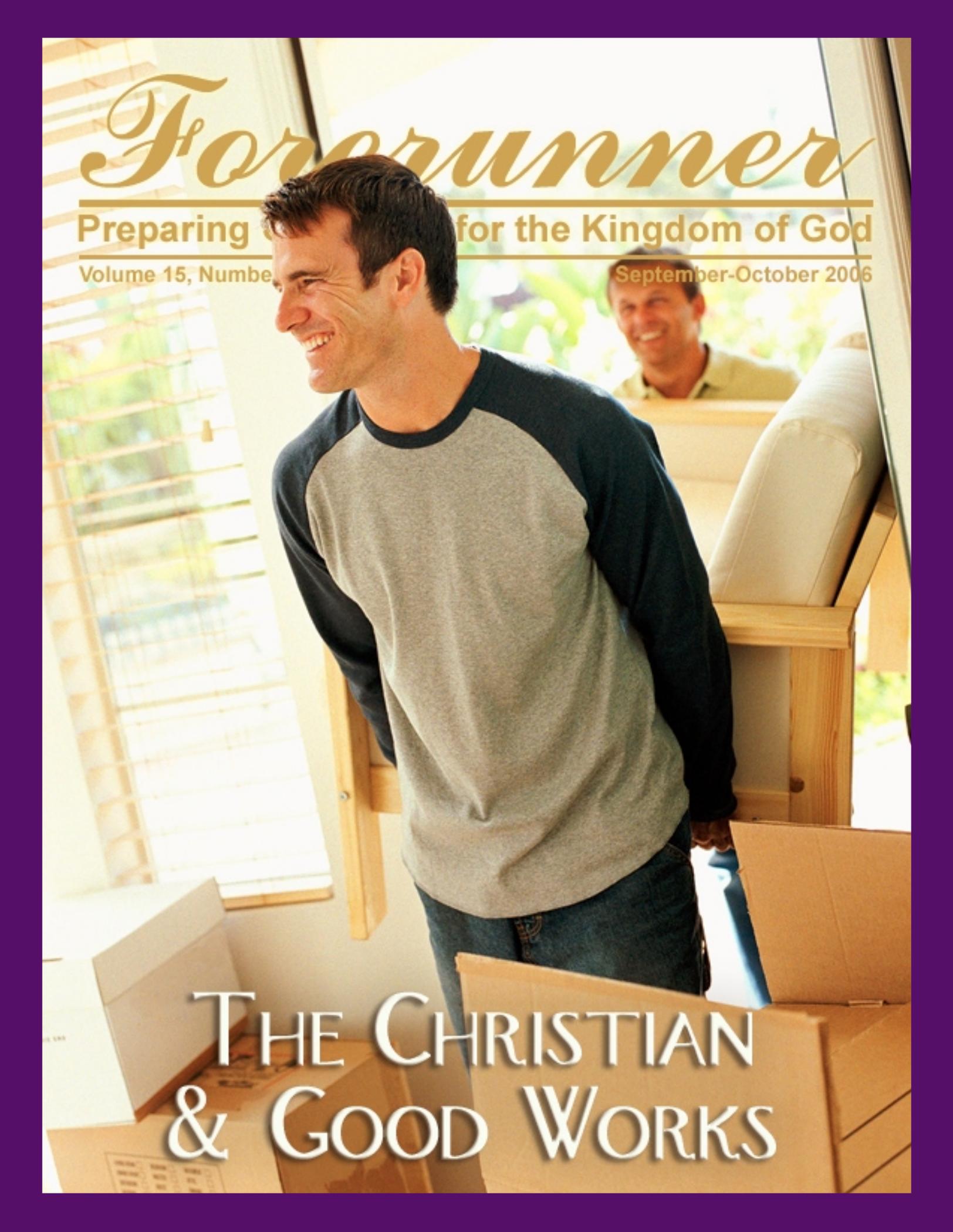


Forerunner



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Undoubtedly, many Christians have practiced good works—helping to move a widow, taking food to a shut-in, giving clothes to the needy, or many other such good deeds. But does God require them of us? Do they play a part in our salvation? If so, where do they fit? What is their spiritual purpose?

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Is the Christian Required To Do Works?

Part Six

The previous article laid a foundation to enable us to see more clearly why works are required. They have a direct connection to the fulfillment of God's creative purposes and our spiritual well-being. While it is certainly true that works cannot earn us salvation, they play many roles in our calling.

The apostle John writes in Revelation 20:12-13:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged *according to their works*, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one *according to his works*. (emphasis added)

Romans 14:11-12, written specifically to Christians, adds, "For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." Since all are to be judged according to their works, what if one claiming to be Christian has no works to show when God clearly expects them? James 2:19-20 clinches the argument: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

This entire issue is actually quite simple. No amount of works can justify us before God. Justification by faith in Christ's atoning blood makes one legally free to access God and to begin a relationship with Him. However, from that point on, works are absolutely required for sanctification unto holiness—to the extent that, not only is one's reward contingent upon them, but also salvation itself. Will God reward one who can show no works at all, or provide salvation to one whose faith is so weak it produces bad works? Such a person would be totally out of place, unfit for living eternally in the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this reality even stronger. Even though we are saved by grace through faith, the very reason we are created is for good works that God Himself prepared beforehand for us to walk in. The gospel of the Kingdom of God provides the reasons for which works are required—the major one being to prepare us for living in God's Kingdom.

Why Works?

God intended Israel's forty-year journey through the wilderness to prepare them for living in the Promised Land. However, even though Israel had the gospel preached to them and had godly leadership provided by the likes of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, in their stiff-necked unbelief they refused to submit in obedience to God's commands. They thus failed to receive the nec-

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essary preparation for using the Promised Land rightly, becoming an eternal example of why works of preparation are needed (Hebrews 4:1-2).

Can we learn a lesson from their examples? When God brings us out of spiritual Egypt, He is not done with us yet. In fact, a great deal of spiritual creating within us remains to be accomplished before we will be fit to live and occupy a working position in God's Kingdom. We are being created in Christ Jesus, created in His image. Can we honestly say we are already in His image when we are merely legally cleared of sin? Absolutely not! As great as this is, it is not the end of God's creative process. God is not merely "saving" us. His purpose is far greater than that.

The apostle Paul charges us in Hebrews 12:14 to "pursue peace . . . and holiness." Pursuing anything requires the expending of energy; it is often very hard work. Pursuing holiness especially goes strongly against the grain of the carnal, anti-God nature residing within us, leftover from following the course of this world.

Further, Paul adds that we must pursue holiness because "without [it] no one will see the Lord." It is true that, while we are justified, we are also sanctified. Being set apart is an aspect of holiness. However, the responsibility of pursuing remains because God wants our holiness to be, not a static state, but a dynamic, living, practical, and working part of our character. This character is built through experience after we have been given access to Him. We must seek and build it through cooperative association with and because of Him and our Lord and Savior.

A number of motivations exist for doing so. The first—a no-brainer—is because we love Him. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Another motivation springs from friendship. Jesus explains in John 15:14, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

Do we want to please God? Jesus remarks in John 8:29, "I always do those things that please Him." Do we want to be in God's Kingdom enough to walk His way of life entirely, regardless of what God may demand of us? Joshua and Caleb did on the journey to the Promised Land. Jesus declares in John 17:4, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." He paid a huge price, and He made it.

We are told to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in every circumstance because both of these are part of God's will (I Thessalonians 5:17-18). We are also to study "to present [ourselves] approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed" (II Timothy 2:15). Each of these is a labor that falls upon anyone who appreciates God for what He has done and for what He so generously and freely provides.

Do we want to witness for God, bringing Him glory by our labors of love? Is this not what all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 accomplished? According to Hebrews 12:1, they constitute a great cloud of witnesses. Abel's

work of faith still speaks (Hebrews 11:4); Noah's witness condemned the world (verse 7), and Abraham's faith drove him to seek "the city . . . whose builder and maker is God" (verses 8-10). Hebrews 11:39 declares that all of those named or implied in the chapter obtained a good testimony through faith.

They worked in various ways, and they will be in the Kingdom. Undoubtedly, God included in His Book the witness of the shining examples of their labors so that their lives might prod us to do likewise in our own.

Down to Specifics

If one is truly being sanctified, it will show itself in a habitual respect for God's law, most specifically the Ten Commandments. Many specious arguments have been devised to convince people that God's law need not be kept for salvation. These arguments are specifically aimed at denying the Christian responsibility of keeping the Sabbath, despite Jesus and the apostle Paul keeping the Sabbath as examples to all.

Was it not our sins that made it necessary for God to give us grace for forgiveness? Is not *sin* defined in I John 3:4 as transgressing God's law? Does it not defy logic that God would allow His sinless Son's life to be taken, grant us an unearned, unmerited pardon, and then permit us to go right back to sinning as a way of life? Perhaps one who has been taught thus should reread Hebrews 10:26-31.

Contained in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of the very spirit of the Ten Commandments, showing that His followers have a more thorough and expansive responsibility to keep them than they ever had before conversion. He even admonishes us not to think that He has "come to destroy the Law or the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17). At just this point in His message, He launches into His expansion on the Ten Commandments.

Similarly, the apostle Paul never made light of God's laws. He writes, God forbid that we should break them and continue in sin (Romans 6:1-2). Do those calling themselves Christian really think that idolatry, lying, hypocrisy, thievery, murder, and adultery have God's approval? He does not approve of breaking His Sabbath either. We must labor not to break them so that we do not lose what our Lord and His Father have so generously and freely given us.

Habitually endeavoring to do Christ's will is a hallmark of one striving for holiness. He understands that Christ's teachings were given for the express purpose of promoting holiness because holiness is what pleases our Father in heaven. Is that not what our life is to be devoted to? In I Peter 1:16, the apostle quotes Leviticus 19:2, where our God commands, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." It is foolhardy indeed for one to neglect to make practical use of Jesus' teachings, especially those given so plainly and clearly in the Sermon on the Mount.

Will not one committed to glorifying God follow Jesus' example when opportunities present themselves to do good, lessening the sorrow and pains of those around him while increasing happiness and well-being? Will he not exude peace, revealing a caring nature that always looks for ways to make others' lives a bit easier? A truly sanctified person will not exhibit a self-righteous, holier-than-thou, hard-as-nails attitude that cares nothing about whether others sink or swim. A sanctified person will perform good works.

Some works are more passive than those just mentioned, but we must develop and perform them nonetheless. Of the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, three of them—longsuffering, gentleness and meekness (KJV)—are more or less passive qualities that express godly traits. We must work to become more patient and forbearing with the weaknesses of others. Peter recalls of Jesus, “[W]hen He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (I Peter 2:23). In this same context, he commands us to “follow His steps” (verse 21).

In the Lord's Prayer, we are reminded of our need to forgive those who trespass against us (Matthew 6:12). Immediately after this, Christ emphasizes how important this work is by telling us that, if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us (verses 14-15)!

Are we given to quick, cross tempers; sharp, sarcastic tongues; or disagreeable, easily offended attitudes? These are hardly godly attributes. It takes considerable work to overcome their presence in one's character.

We must never be ashamed of reaching for high standards of righteousness in our quest for holiness. Just because others do not seem to care is no excuse for us to lower our aim. For example, we cannot allow ourselves to be content with just keeping the Sabbath, somehow thinking that we have pleased God. Much of what passes for religion these days is perfectly useless when compared with the earnestness of God crying out in His Word for us to flee from the wrath to come (see Matthew 3:7; Romans 5:9; I Thessalonians 1:10). How do we flee from this wrath? By submitting to God. Can a person in danger flee in slow-motion or by standing still?

Where Does Holiness Begin?

Holiness starts in one's relationship with the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Justification through God's merciful act of grace opens the door of access to Him, as well as the door to the Kingdom of God. Justification is entirely an act of God, a legal action on our behalf that we accept by faith because He does not lie. Others do not easily discern our justification, since in most cases it has no outward manifestation.

While sanctification unto holiness begins at the same moment as justification, it is a progressive, creative, time-consuming work of God within us. Unlike justification, sanc-

tification cannot be hidden because it appears in our godly conduct. By it, a witness is made that God dwells in us. Where there is no holiness, there is no witness to glorify God.

So we see that justification and sanctification are two separate matters. They are related—indeed, they cannot be separated—but we should never confuse them. If one partakes in either, he is a partaker of both, but we should not overlook the distinctions between them.

Christians cannot take sanctification for granted. We must pursue it until we are assured that we are sanctified. Our course is clear: We must go to Christ as forgiven sinners, offering our lives to Him by faith, crying out to Him for the grace we need to enable us to overcome all the flaws in our characters.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” The same apostle adds in Ephesians 4:15-16:

... but, speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Close communication with Christ is the source of the perception, motivation, and energy to discern flaws and overcome them. It is a biblical principle that whatever God requires, He provides what we need to accomplish it. Thus, we are to draw from this inexhaustible well and be renewed every day in the spirit of our minds (verses 23-24). In John 17:17, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus asked the Father to sanctify us by His truth. Will God not answer that prayer, especially when we desire to be sanctified to be like His Son? He most certainly will answer it so that our sanctification will continue.

Perhaps a word of caution is in order, and with it an admonishment that we also ask for patience. Growth does not always come quickly. In addition, as we grow in knowledge, at the same time we become more perceptive of our flaws. The more we know, the more flaws we see, and this can become humiliating and discouraging. The humility it produces is good, but the discouragement is not so good if it halts our growth.

Paul faced this, writing of it in Romans 7, but he most certainly did not let it stop him. By the time he finishes his discourse, he declares resoundingly that he knows he will be delivered by Jesus Christ. Sinners we are when we begin, and sinners we find ourselves to be as we continue—we will be sinners to the very end. Salvation is by grace, is it not? Our absolute perfection will not occur until we are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (I Corinthians 15:52).

While reaching for God's holiness, we should not let our goals ever be anything but the highest. We should never let Satan convince us that we can be satisfied with what we are right now.

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Paul exhorts us in Philippians 3:12-15:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Earlier, this article emphasized the importance of works because we will be judged according to them. Works are not unimportant! One of the kindnesses of God is that, even in this life, they pay off. This does not mean that we should work for God and holiness in order to be rewarded for them. Nonetheless, a general biblical rule is that God blesses for obedience and curses for disobedience. If this were not true, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, and many proverbs would not be in the Bible. Generally, sanctified people—those striving for holiness—are among the most contented and happiest of people. They have a sense of peace and well-being that unrepentant sinners cannot have due to it being a blessing from God.

Psalm 119:165 reads, “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.” Proverbs 3:17, in which wisdom is personified, Solomon says, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” Jesus adds in Matthew 11:29-30, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” In contrast, Isaiah 48:22 reminds us, “‘There is no peace,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’”

Now Is Our Time

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon lists a series of activities, showing that there are times when one should be done and another not done. However, is there ever a time when we should not be holy? Can we at times throw “caution to the wind” and behave any way we desire? Are we allowed to “let our hair down” for short periods in terms of our conduct and witness? Is it allowable to forget for a time our duties to God and man or our goal of being in the Kingdom of God? Can we occasionally take a vacation from our labors to become holy and evermore in Christ’s image?

These questions touch all of us regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, position, or years in the church. Holiness must concern us whether we are rich or poor, learned or uneducated, young or old. There is not only no time when one should be unconcerned about holiness, but there is no

person, no matter who he or she is, who should be unconcerned about it.

David, in Psalm 10:4, observes a difference between the righteous and wicked: “The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.” We live in a busy and alluring world. Admittedly, there are numerous distractions, each with its attendant pressures, assaulting us from every angle. We must make choices to control the use of our time, and we must never allow God and holiness to slip from the overall highest priority.

Of what does holiness consist? Is it the accumulation of religious knowledge? Many people have labored long to research material for commentaries and other tomes on religious subjects, but does that accumulated knowledge translate into holiness? After three and a half years with Jesus, Judas had undoubtedly accumulated much knowledge, but it did not stop him from betraying his Master. Would Jesus, the Holy One, have betrayed Judas?

The Bible shows that many had long contact with truly godly people, yet never became holy. Joab had an almost lifelong association with David, but he remained a scoundrel to his dying day (I Kings 2:5-6, 28-34). For years, Gehazi served Elisha, but he ended up cursed because of greed (II Kings 5:20-27). Paul reports that Demas had forsaken him because he loved the world (II Timothy 4:10). The rich young ruler, who appears to have been moral and respectable in conduct, asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life, yet his rejection of His counsel proves that he was not holy at the time (Matthew 19:16-22).

Were the Jews made holy due to their claim that the Temple of the Lord was in the capital of their nation and God dwelled there (see Jeremiah 7)? Does this equate to some taking comfort because they are “in the church” and are therefore holy? Later Jews claimed that Abraham was their father, and that they had “never been in bondage to anyone” (John 8:33). They were indeed “related” to someone of renown who was holy, but this did not stop Jesus from telling them that their spiritual father was Satan the Devil!

Demographic categories may play their parts in one’s sanctification, but none of them guarantees or makes one holy on its own merits. Holiness is not transferred via a group. Each must work with God on achieving it himself.

John Charles Ryle gives the following definition in his book, *Holiness*:

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man. (p. 34)

(continued from page 16)

WHAT IS A FALSE PROPHET? The book of

Revelation foretells that at the time of the end, in the last few years of Satan's dominion over the earth, a religious personality will arise and deceive the whole world by means of miraculous signs.

This individual is referred to as “another beast” (Revelation 13:11), as well as “*the* false prophet” (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). The False Prophet is given supernatural power to do things like calling fire down from heaven (Revelation 13:13), and the signs he performs, combined with the demonic words he speaks (Revelation 16:13-14), will cause people to give their allegiance to—and even worship—the Beast (Revelation 13:14). This man will wield tremendous religious influence, and inspired by the Dragon, he will successfully convince most of the world to commit idolatry (Revelation 13:12).

The Bible does not reveal the False Prophet's name or even the number of his name, as it does for the Beast. Instead, we will have to recognize him by his fruits—by what he says and does (Matthew 7:15-20). Yet, even this is a tricky proposition. For instance, the False Prophet will be able to call down fire from heaven, and yet Elijah, a true prophet of God, did the same (I Kings 18:36-38). If we see a man calling fire down from heaven, how do we know whether he is true or false?

The end time is prophesied to be full of deceptions (Matthew 24:11), and the elect will not be totally immune to having the wool pulled over their eyes (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). It will take careful evaluation to see through the façade and to recognize Satan's servants for what they *are*, rather than what they *appear* to be (II Corinthians 11:14-15).

The details given about the False Prophet are few. However, if we understand the patterns and motivations that the Bible reveals about the class of people called “false prophets,” we will be better equipped to recognize the general mold that the end-time False Prophet will fit. Both Testaments describe false prophets, and Peter, John, and Jesus Christ specifically warn of false prophets that affect church members.

DEFINING *PROPHET*

Because of the way “prophet” is commonly used, there is a misconception that its basic definition is “someone who foretells the future,” but this definition is too narrow. *Prophet* is better defined as “one who speaks for another.” A true prophet, then, is a person who speaks for God, delivering a message that God has ordained him to give. In Exodus 7:1, God tells Moses that Aaron, his brother, would be *his* (Moses') prophet, even as Moses was God's prophet. Because of Moses' unbelief in God's ability to speak through him, God would speak to Moses, who would tell Aaron what to say to others—Pharaoh in particular (verse 2). It is the function of speaking for another, rather than the miracles they performed or their foretelling of what would befall Egypt, which defined Moses and Aaron as prophets.

Frequently, the words a prophet spoke on God's behalf were, in fact, foretelling what would happen

prophecy watch *What Is a False Prophet?*

later. However, the prophet's essential role was to *speak for God*, regardless of whether he did any predicting of the future. A prophet expresses the will of God in words, and sometimes he uses signs to back up what he says and to demonstrate God's power behind it.

In a similar way, a false prophet also may not be in the business of foretelling the future. A false prophet is simply someone who speaks for another but falsely. False prophets either speak for the wrong god, or they claim to have heard from the true God but do not accurately represent Him or His words. At the very least, they speak out of their own human hearts, but more likely, the "god" they are speaking for is really a demon.

It is true that, if a prophet foretells something that fails to come to pass, he is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22), but foretelling the future correctly is not the determining factor when looking at false prophets. The real issue is whether one who claims to be representing God and speaking for Him, is doing so accurately or falsely. A prophet may accurately predict an event or demonstrate supernatural power, but if he is leading people away from the true worship of the true God, he is a false prophet.

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods"—which you have not known—"and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. (Deuteronomy 13:1-5)

This passage begins with the assumption that the prophet *does* foretell the future accurately or perform some other, humanly impossible work. Nevertheless, if that prophet's central message is to follow after a different god or to take a spiritual path that the true God has not said to take, that person is a false prophet. God states unequivocally that misrepresenting Him incurs the death penalty, and Revelation 19:20 says that this is exactly what happens to the False Prophet: He is thrown into the Lake of Fire.

DODGING MORAL TEACHING

The message of the false prophet is contrasted in Deuteronomy 13:3-4 with loving the true God with all of our heart and soul (life), walking after Him, fearing Him, keeping His commandments, obeying His voice, serving Him, and holding fast to Him. These elements indicate what God wants His people to be focused on, helping to define whether a man claiming to speak for God is truly doing so or not.

Verse 4 mentions *obeying God's voice* and *keeping His commandments*. This is a regular theme with God's true prophets: They *always* have God's law undergirding their messages. When the Old Testament prophets were sent to warn or inform Israel and Judah, they always pointed out the grievous ways in which the people had transgressed God's law.

False prophets, on the other hand, will not hold the moral line that God requires. Lamentations 2:14 says that the false prophets "have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions." False prophets will not connect the dots between the sinfulness of a nation and national calamity. They instead focus on something *other* than God's standard of righteousness.

This same principle appears in Isaiah 8:19-20. Both houses of Israel were guilty of seeking out mediums and wizards for spiritual guidance, and God's response is very telling:

And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

God gives us a standard by which to measure the words of a prophet: the law and testimony—His Word. If the prophet's message contradicts what is already established as God's Word, it is evidence that he lacks spiritual understanding. If his words do not line up with God's law and testimony, he is not speaking the truth.

In summary, the hallmark of a true prophet is his upholding of the law of God, while false prophets dodge moral teaching and instead preach a message that appeals to the masses. God's truth is abhorrent to the natural mind (Romans 8:7), and thus it is quite common for God's prophets to be killed, while the false prophets enjoy widespread popularity and support.

The current trend of outcome-based churches serves as a good example. Their leaders preach a widely popular message, and thousands of people follow them. Yet, Jesus says in Luke 6:26, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." Popularity is not a

good measurement of God's pleasure with a leader!

Jesus Christ, the most perfect Spokesman for God who has ever lived, only had about 120 true followers when His ministry ended (Acts 1:15). This was not due to failure on His part, but because His Father's message could be wholeheartedly believed only by those whose minds God had already prepared to accept it.

"Purpose-Driven" church leaders will not preach the unadulterated Word of God because they know it is divisive. It would also thwart their goals of a large following and a large income. Thus, their messages do not involve repentance, sound doctrine, or God's law, *except* where it may serve to further whatever purpose is driving them. Their messages do not remind people of their moral responsibilities to God and brother, and thus *if* they claim to speak for God or say that God sent them, we can know from biblical patterns that they are, in fact, false prophets. Their large churches, as amazing as they might seem, are not accurate indicators of God's involvement or blessing.

FRUITS OF FALSE PROPHETS

The apostle Peter, in warning against false prophets, illuminates their characteristics. The entirety of II Peter 2 is about false prophets and false teachers. What sort of message would these men preach? What would be one's impression of God—whom they allegedly spoke for—after watching and listening to such men?

- "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1). The King James Version calls their heresies *damnable*, implying that their words—their messages—are destructive to one's faith and relationship with God. "Denying the Lord" does not mean they deny that He lived or died or that He is God, but that their words and conduct are opposed to His fundamental nature. Their lives deny any close contact with Him.
- "By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (II Peter 2:3). False prophets use human nature's proclivity toward covetousness to make inroads to a person's heart.
- ". . . and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord" (II Peter 2:10-11). False prophets "walk according to the flesh"; their minds are primarily on

physical things rather than the true things of God. God is not in all their thoughts (Psalm 10:4). They also despise authority—other than their own—and apparently think themselves superior even to God's angels. They are presumptuous and self-willed, acting out of the dictates of their own hearts (or the influence of a demon) rather than following God with humility and trusting Him to bring His will to pass.

- ". . . having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness . . ." (II Peter 2:14-15). The apostle says false prophets have "eyes full of adultery." While this may apply literally, it can also more generally describe *unfaithfulness*—a willingness to abandon an agreement if they feel it is in their interest to do so. They also worry little about resisting sin. Their hearts are especially *trained* in covetousness, and like Balaam, they are willing to do just about anything for personal gain.

- "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (II Peter 2:19). They promise liberty—freedom, perhaps, from keeping God's law or from persecution or tribulation—but they are themselves enslaved to sin.

Not every false prophet will have each of these characteristics, but as generalities, they describe men who are much more concerned about their own situation, well-being, reputation, autonomy, and position than about accurately representing God. We will know these men to be false by the overall fruits they produce, even as they speak clever words that may even contain a degree of truth. This is seen in Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:15-20:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. *You will know them by their fruits.* Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore *by their fruits you will know them.* (emphasis ours)

Jesus does not spell out what "fruits" to look for, although in the Olivet Prophecy, He does link the deceptions of false prophets with the lawlessness and lack of love that abounds at the end time (Matthew 24:11-13). However, the rest of the Bible elucidates God's character

(continued from page 17)

BE THERE!

My maternal grandfather, Grampa Wool, was a friend to the youngest of her five kids and Grampa Wool was into

Nonetheless, he played baseball with us (he had been a serious player in his younger days), took us walking, told us stories and jokes, and made our life just a little better for us when he was around. He had a great sense of humor and each of us has fond memories of him.

When, in 1967, my mom began attending what was then known as the Radio Church of God, taking her five children with her, I do not remember any change in the way Grampa Wool treated us. Even though we were now, as it appeared to family members, involved in some sort of strange religion, he continued to show us the same affection. We caught a lot of grief from the aunts, uncles, and cousins; but not from Grampa Wool. When my grandson, Evan, was born, we had to decide what I would be called. Realizing that I wanted to be the kind of grandfather Grampa Wool was, I decided I would be called “Grampa.”

To the best of my knowledge, Grampa Wool did not attend a church or participate in organized religion. He was honest, hardworking, and faithful to my grandmother. He was positive and outgoing, but God did not choose to call him during his time on this earth. Yet, he will be in the second resurrection. He will be given the chance to follow God’s way and to reap the benefits that way of life brings. He will be there in that Last Great Day.

Being there is what we are all about. Matthew 6:33 tells us, “Seek first the kingdom of God.” It is why we are here and why we live this way of life. It would be shameful if Grampa Wool was there, and I was not. Who better to teach him than someone from his own family? He has been

dead now for decades. His body has returned to dust and his spirit to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Yet he will be there in the Kingdom of God, in the second resurrection. Will I? Will you be there too?

Fight the Good Fight

In times past, when people left the church, especially if they were friends or family, we would say, “Maybe they weren’t converted.” We hoped and prayed that they were not converted because we did not want them to end up in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8)! Only God knows whether they were converted or not and which resurrection they will be in. To turn one’s back on God’s calling is a serious matter (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31), yet people have done it.

Those of us in the church today continue to “[fight] the good fight” (II Timothy 4:7). It is not easy. It is possible that, after many years of effort and striving to obey God, we could become tired or discouraged. It is even conceivable—and very tragic—that some of us could turn our back on this way of life. Yet, God does not want even one person to miss the opportunity to enter His Kingdom. Notice:

- **II Peter 3:9:** The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

- **I Timothy 2:4:** [God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- **I Corinthians 15:22:** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

- **Romans 11:26:** And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written. . . .

Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15 shows three resurrections. The first resurrection will consist of the “firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4), those “called, chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). The second resurrection is pictured by the Last Great Day, which is a type of the Great White Throne Judgment, and those who rise to life at that time will include all those God did not call during this age (Revelation 20:11-13). Those in the third resurrection, also called “the second death,” will be primarily people whom God called yet who turned their backs on His way of life.

In the Last Great Day, billions of people will be resurrected, most with no real knowledge of God. Each will have, we think (see Isaiah 65:20), a hundred years to learn, grow, and become like God. They will not have to fight the pull of Satan because he will be out of the picture (Revelation 20:10). They will have millions of teachers to work with them, teachers

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to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble, for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Hosea 14 describes the time of the Last Great Day, when most of mankind—pictured here in terms of Israel—is resurrected and repents, and God forgives and blesses them. It contains lessons that can aid us in being there.

In verses 1-3, Israel is exhorted to return to God:

O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words [expressions of heartfelt repentance, not physical sacrifices] with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses [go to war], nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘You are our gods.’ For in You the fatherless finds mercy.”

This sets up verses 4-8, in which we glimpse a time when Israel walks with God. Verse 4 shows that God forgives and blesses: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him.” God lists specific blessings in verse 5: “I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon.” The dew is symbolic of God’s Holy Spirit, necessary to produce the things that follow.

God says that Israel “shall grow like the lily.” Israel, representing all of mankind, uses the Holy Spirit to grow. The lily is one of nature’s most productive plants. According to Pliny the Elder, the first-century Roman scholar and author of the seminal work, *Natural History*, the lily bulb of his time and locale could produce as many as fifty additional bulbs. The exact species of lily to which he refers is not known, but it was probably native to

the region and common enough to be known by the average person.

Having been buried in the ground all winter long, a bulb receives the spring dew and quickly shoots straight up, topped by a lovely bloom. Christ claimed the lilies of the field were every bit as glorious as Solomon’s robes (Matthew 6:28-29). Now recall the early days of conversion. God’s Holy Spirit began to open our minds and our growth was swift, and the result was a beautiful change of heart and the flowering of godly conduct.

Yet, the lily is not a complete metaphor for a Christian. Because its roots are shallow, a lily is easily pulled up. So God adds that we should lengthen our roots “as [the cedars of] Lebanon.” Mentioned throughout the Bible, cedars of Lebanon are stately, evergreen, slow-growing, long branched, durable, and sweet-smelling trees. They are, by themselves, a good comparison to a Christian.

Smith’s Bible Dictionary, written well over a hundred years ago, mentions a specimen living on Mount Lebanon that was 70 feet tall, 63 feet in circumference, and thought to be 2,000 years old! One writer said that the roots of these cedars could go as far down into the ground as the tree was tall—a foundation not easily destroyed. Nevertheless, these mammoth trees start as little seedlings, easily plucked up or eaten by grazing animals. If they survive long enough to gain some size, then, through the years they endure storms, drought, and countless environmental concerns. Each year, pushing their roots deeper and deeper into the soil, they build strength, constantly gaining a more solid footing. Such should occur in a Christian’s life.

Beautiful and Sweet-Smelling

God continues in Hosea 14:6, “His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.” A tree with a trunk 63 feet around and 70 feet tall could have branches that extend well over 100 feet side to side. What a great shade tree! In its shadow, one would be cool

born into God’s Family in the previous Millennium.

It hardly seems fair that they will have it so easy! No Satan, a world of plenty ruled by Christ, and good examples wherever they look! While this is true, our opportunity to be the firstfruits—to have positions of great responsibility and authority, to be there at the beginning—is far greater, despite the present hardships and trials!

Ensuring Our Calling

Grampa Wool lived a rich, full life, but he never knew why he had been born. Even with the attacks of Satan and the suffering God allows to come upon us, it is far better to know humanity’s true goal and to realize that life has a purpose. It is hard to imagine enduring what true Christians have experienced through the ages and not knowing why!

As we draw closer to the return of Christ, the going will undoubtedly get even tougher. What can we do to ensure that we are there to watch our unconverted loved ones rise up in the Last Great Day? This does not imply, of course, that we can somehow “earn” salvation, but we are all aware that, once God calls us, certain responsibilities fall to us. As the apostle Peter encourages us in II Peter 1:10-11, after telling us to add certain godly character traits to our faith, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent

in the summer and protected from wind and rain in winter.

At this point, the comparison switches again. God says Israel will be beautiful as the olive tree. It is not that the cedar is an ugly tree, far from it. However, unlike the North American cedar tree, which is upright and narrow, the cedar of Lebanon is more sprawling, giving it a rangy appearance. The Bible often uses the olive tree, however, as a symbol of peace, prosperity, and beauty. It, too, is an evergreen, and in the same way, the Christian walk is not a part-time endeavor.

The olive tree is fruit bearing, while the cedar is not. Many professing Christians of this world talk a lot, but they produce little, if any, real fruit. They will tell you how good they are, how much they give to their church, how much they help the poor and downtrodden—then they will lie, cheat, and bury their neighbor in business!

Matthew 7:15-20 warns us of false prophets, saying that we will know the good from the bad by their fruits. This is true, not just of ministers, but of all people. In our walk through life, we will produce good fruit as we grow in God's ways and overcome. If we do not, Matthew 7:19 says we will be cast into the fire—the opposite result of being there.

Next, God says that Israel's fragrance will be "like Lebanon." Hosea 14:7 also says, "Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon." By some accounts, the scent of the olive tree is not so good, so the symbolism switches back to the cedar tree, as well as to the frankincense tree and the many other trees and plants that made the mountains of Lebanon smell so wonderful.

Revelation 5:8 describes the prayers of the saints as incense, and the church is called a garden of spices in Song of Songs 4:12, 14. Likewise, our spiritual sacrifices carry a sweet aroma to God (Genesis 8:21). When we live a life of obedience to God, as we strive to do now, and when Israel will do so in God's Kingdom, it pleases God as a beautiful perfume is pleasing.

The first part of Hosea 14:7 reads,

"Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like the vine." "His shadow" might refer to God, but "his branches," "his beauty," and "his fragrance" (verse 6), refer to Israel, so "his shadow" must also. The whole phrase, "dwell under his shadow," denotes protection and reviving, restoration under shelter from adversity. Everyone has sought relief from the harsh rays of the sun in the shade of a tree, just as most have run under the spreading branches of a tree to escape a sudden shower. So will the nation of Israel be a refuge in that time, a fellowship of restoration under the blessings of God.

Those who live within that refuge "shall return"; they will grow again and again like a perennial plant. A lesson for us is that the shadow cast by the church, the spiritual "Israel of God," provides protection and growth. Over the centuries, God has called many into His church, but unfortunately, a great many did not stay. When the sun slipped behind a cloud or when the storm abated, many left the safety of the shadow. Some, however, choose to dwell there, never again leaving the spiritual safety of God's church.

It is these who "shall be revived like grain" and "grow like the vine." Grain, when it is sown, first dies and then revives (I Corinthians 15:35-44), a wonderful analogy of the resurrection of both the firstfruits and those of the White Throne Judgment. These revived ones will "grow like the vine," that is, produce fruit that is pleasing and glorifying to God (John 15:1-8).

Who Is Wise?

In these verses, five principles have become clear:

1. God gives us His Holy Spirit (the dew) to open our minds, and we use it for growing into productive Christians (like a lily).
2. After an initial burst of growth, we settle into a slower, but steady progress (like a cedar putting down roots).

3. We are to be evergreen (like both the cedar and the olive tree), not relaxing our diligent growth for a moment. Our growth is evident in our fruit (olive trees produce olives).

4. We are to live a life of obedience, and this ascends to God like sweet-smelling incense (fragrant as Lebanon).

5. God has given us a place of refuge (shadow), where we have protection and opportunity to grow. Leaving the church is not an option.

Hosea 14:8 says, "Ephraim shall say 'What have I to do anymore with idols?'" and God answers, "I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me." Ephraim, symbolic of Israel and all mankind, will see the benefits of following God's way and renounce all idols. These are not idols made of stone or wood but idols of the heart. God will take notice of their repentance and reveal Himself to them—in the metaphor, as a fellow evergreen tree, the cypress or fir. As Israel is a refuge for its people, God will protect and care for Israel. He is the Source of its growth and prosperity.

Verse 9 asks, "Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." The wise are those who understand the truth through the sacrifice of Christ and the mercy of God's calling. The prudent make sensible and correct decisions.

There are only two ways to go, Hosea asserts. One can follow "the ways of the LORD" or walk against them. As Peter says, Christ is a foundation stone to some, and a stone of stumbling and rock of offense to others (I Peter 2:6-8). To use another metaphor, the same sun that softens wax hardens clay. Will we be wise and prudent to choose correctly? Through Hosea 14, we recognize our charge: to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" so that we might *be there*.

—Mike Ford

“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

Prepare for Next Year’s Feast!

**“And you shall eat before
the Lord your God,
in the place where
He chooses to make
His name abide. . . .”
—Deuteronomy 14:23**

“The king is dead! Long live the king!”

This is a saying that the nobles of England cried immediately upon the death of one of their monarchs. Sometimes they mourned the death of the deceased king, and sometimes they did not, but they always looked forward with optimism to the reign of the new monarch, with the hope that he or she would learn from the good and bad examples of the old.

In these days and weeks immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, we in God’s church can utter a similar cry:

“The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!”

Even though the excitement and the memories of this past Feast of Tabernacles are still fresh, we should be preparing—both physically and spiritually—for *next year’s* Feast. Armed with the experiences of this year’s Feast, we can, as the monarchs of England were supposed to do, learn from both the good and the bad that we experienced.

Do Not Murmur!

We usually think of this first admonition immediately after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when we examine the murmuring attitudes of the Israelites after God had rescued them from Egypt by means of some of the most marvelous miracles ever. However, we also need to consider it now, after the fall festivals, when it may again be necessary for us to learn from the bad, murmuring examples of the Israelites.

Also Moses said, “This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the LORD hears your murmurings which you make against Him. And what are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the LORD. (Exodus 16:8)

Here are a few questions to ponder:

- Was this past Feast your “best Feast ever”? If not, why not?
- What was/were the problem(s)?
- What areas would you like to see improved next year?

Please consider the answers to these questions, but please do not murmur in doing so! Murmuring to one another gets us absolutely nowhere. In fact, as we see from the Israelites’ examples, it is very detrimental. It can even be hazardous to our health! Rather, we should resolve to do something positive about any negative experiences we encountered. Complaining will not solve any problems, but taking steps to see that they do not happen again will make the Feast better for everyone.

Evaluate Your Experience

First, of course, we should pray about any problems we encountered at this year’s Feast. We should pray that God will take any negative, murmuring, complaining attitudes out of us, and help us to turn them into some positive, constructive suggestions.

Please ask yourself another question: “What can *I* do to make next year’s Feast even better?” Here is one thing we can all do: Take the time now—during the next day or two, while your Feast memories are still fresh in your mind—to sit down with pen and paper and jot down what, in your opinion, did not measure up about this year’s Feast.

- Poor sound quality?
- Problems with seating or access in the main hall?
- Not enough restaurants close by?
- Poor service?
- Hotel staff taking us for granted?
- Not enough local attractions?
- Not enough Wal-Marts?

With some of these, of course, I jest. With others, I do not. Once you have listed the negative points of your recent Feast experience, write down what, in your opinion, could be done to correct or improve those situations. But do not stop there! Send your positive suggestions—not a negative list of complaints—to those who are in positions to be able to correct any problems. These would normally include your pastor or your festival coordinator. They will consider your positive input and deal with it themselves, or if necessary, forward it to the appropriate department heads.

Perhaps you did not care for the Feast site itself. If this is the case, you are probably aware that other cities in other relatively central locations are constantly under

consideration. However, here again, send your input to your pastor or your festival advisor. I repeat: Send *positive* input, *constructive* input—not just, “I don’t want this or that location!”

Wherever the Feast is—wherever God chooses to place His name (Deuteronomy 14:23)—resolve to be there! Remember that the physical location is at best secondary to the spiritual inspiration of God upon those giving Feast messages and the fellowship of believers in unity.

Let us not forget to let those in leadership roles know how things went well too. If there was marked improvement in one area of your Feast experience this year, let them know so that it can be noted and continued next year. Besides, a pat on the back and a “Good job!” help make all the planning and effort worthwhile.

Practice Friendliness

Did you have a less than perfect Feast this year because:

- . . . you did not make any new friends?
- . . . you did not meet any new people?
- . . . there were no new people there to meet?

There were, in fact, lots of new people to meet—people of all ages—people whom most of us had not met before. So perhaps the problem lies elsewhere:

- Did *you* spend much of your time with the same group of friends?
- Were *you* tied to your own relatives?
- Do *you* consider yourself shy?

If any of these factors applies to you, then it is even more reason for you to prepare for next year’s Feast by practicing being friendly during the coming year. How can we do this? It is quite simple really, but it does require a little effort: “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Proverbs 18:24). Despite many different renditions of this verse, the concept implied in the old and New King James versions is a valid one: If you want friends, you must show yourself friendly.

You can practice being friendly at church services each Sabbath throughout the year, especially when you have visitors from other areas. Whenever you meet someone new, thrust out your hand, give the other a firm handshake, and simply say, “Hello, my name is Fred Bloggs, and I live in Paducah, Kentucky!”—of course, substituting your own name and hometown. Follow up your initial greeting with, “What do you do for a living?” or “Where do you work?” Most people love this question, especially those who have been retired for a long time!

We can also practice friendliness at work, in the

grocery store, in the bank, and so many other places in our everyday lives. Being more outgoing and sociable will pay dividends over time in our careers and relationships.

Were you so excessively tied to your own extended family during this year's Feast that it prevented you from meeting new people? We must learn to take time to get to know our *spiritual* brothers and sisters, even if it means spending a little less time with our *physical* families. Jesus left us an example on this point:

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

We can be sure that Jesus loved His physical mother and brothers dearly, but His Father's will being His top priority, He deliberately spent time with His spiritual family. Now, this does not mean that we should ignore our physical family members. The Feast certainly is a great opportunity to spend time with our physical families—especially those whom we may not be able to see as frequently as we would like during the rest of the year. The bottom line is this: Divide your time as suitably as possible among old and new friends and family at the Feast.

Prepare Your Children

We have all probably experienced Feasts at which the behavior of children, during services especially, distracted us terribly. Babies crying, children talking and whispering constantly, making loud noises with their toys, taking excessive trips in and out of the hall, and hanging around the water tables in the corridor, etc., can be quite trying, to say the least! Even if the church service time were not divided up by hymn-singing, announcements, and special music, as it is, expecting a child to remain quiet for two hours cannot be construed as a cruel or unusual restriction—they will easily and gladly do this while watching a movie!

All in all, parents seem to be doing a better job of looking after and restraining their children, and this has made services much more comfortable for everyone. However, there is always room for improvement, and this means that preparation and training are required throughout the coming year: "Train up a child in the way

he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Effort spent in proper training now will lead to benefits that will extend way beyond next year's Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, those benefits can last on into the child's adult life, and even further, on into eternity!

Here are two effective training methods that were suggested to my wife and me some years ago when our daughters were little—training methods that will prepare babies and young children for proper behavior during Feast services. One is a *daily* training session. The other is a *weekly* session.

Beginning with the daily session, a mother's Bible study time can serve as an excellent training period for her children. Here is how: Put the child on the same blanket one would normally put him (or her) on for services. Gently, day after day, teach him to stay on the blanket and remain quiet. Give him books to read and *quiet* toys to play with—special and appropriate books and toys that are reserved for that special time.

The weekly training session is similar to the daily session, but it takes place, of course, on the weekly Sabbath day during the service. Just as in the daily session, the child should be trained to sit quietly on his blanket with his special Sabbath books and toys.

In both daily and weekly training sessions, discipline and punishment for infractions should be dependent upon the child's age and level of understanding. Please do not expect too much right away from babies or even from older children who have not had the benefit of previous training in this regard. Always keep in mind how lovingly our heavenly Father trains us. Be gentle, be patient, but be insistent and consistent.

Many organizations in the greater church of God have two sets of circumstances for Sabbath services. Larger groups meet for weekly Sabbath services in relatively formal assemblies—typically in some kind of rented hall or hotel conference room. Others, generally the smaller groups and individual families, keep Sabbath services in a home environment.

No matter which kind of group one belongs to, Sabbath services are the perfect weekly training ground for proper behavior at the Feast. Children should sit calmly and quietly during services, even if the services take place within one's own living room! If parents allow them to talk, play, and get up and down at their whim, they will not know any difference at the Feast, and they will disturb other church members without knowing that they are doing anything wrong.

Save Your Festival Tithe

If you really want to be with your spiritual brothers and sisters next year at the location where God chooses to

place His name, you need to start immediately to save your second or festival tithe. The scriptures covering this necessity are very familiar:

And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:23-26)

We find God’s commands to save our festival tithe in the same area of His Word that we find His commands to keep His feasts so, as the old Doris Day song tells us: “You can’t have one without the other!”

Some may need to supplement their second tithe with additional funds if the expected amount of their festival tithe is calculated to be insufficient to cover their Feast expenses. This will take some advance thought and planning. Considering the priority God places on our attendance at His Feasts, we should, if necessary, be willing to forego some unnecessary expenditures during the rest of the year so that we can save those funds and put them towards our Feast expenses. Another tip to bolster your festival tithe funds is to put a day’s worth of your regular budgeted grocery money towards each day you will be away for the Feast.

Let us prepare—both physically and spiritually—for next year’s Feast—being armed with the experiences of this year’s Feast that has just finished.

The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!

—John Plunkett

personal *Is the Christian Required To Do Works?*

(continued from page 6)

We must understand more to appreciate more fully what he wrote. Ryle’s is only an overall definition because he reveals as he continues that it defines only the overall mindset, foundation, and trigger of the holy person’s conduct. Holiness includes both one’s mindset and conduct. What good is a mindset without the conduct to give evidence of it?

To paraphrase Ryle’s conclusion, a holy person will strive to shun every sin known to him and to keep every known commandment whether required physically or in spirit. He will have an enthusiastic desire to perform God’s will combined with a greater fear of displeasing God than displeasing the world. Paul writes in Romans 7:22, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.” David, too, says, “Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:128).

Why will this combination of attitude and action exist? Because the holy person will be striving to be like Christ. He will labor to have Christ’s mind in him, as Paul admonishes in Philippians 2:5. He will deeply desire to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). Thus, the holy person will bear with others and forgive them, even as Christ bears with and forgives us. He will make every effort to be unselfish, just as Christ did not please Himself,

sacrificing Himself for our sakes.

The holy person will endeavor to humble himself and walk in love, as Christ served and made Himself of no reputation. The holy person will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth, that He came not to do His own will but His Father’s. He will deny himself in order to minister to others and will be meek and patient when receiving undeserved insults. On the other hand, Jesus was bold and uncompromising when denouncing sin yet full of compassion toward the weak.

The holy person will separate himself from the world and be instant in prayer. Christ would not even allow His closest relatives to stand in the way of doing the work He had been given to accomplish. In sum, the holy person will shape his life to walk in the footsteps of His Savior, as the apostle John advises in I John 2:6, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

God expects us to do plenty of works as He creates practical holiness in us. But there is much more still.

What a Holy Person Does

Moses was a holy man, as well as meek (or humble, NKJV) above all men on earth (Numbers 12:3). He did not rise in a fiery anger when accused but bore with it without

prophecy watch *What Is a False Prophet?*

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and nature, so we already have the tools to evaluate whether a message allegedly coming from God fits with what His Word reveals about Him. God is not double-minded; He will not contradict Himself.

“BY THEIR WORDS . . .”

A false prophet, then, can be anyone who claims to be speaking for God, but whose message is contrary to God. False prophets will not convict people of sin, for they themselves do not feel convicted. While true prophets speak according to God’s law and testimony, false prophets speak soft, easy things to make them more popular. They will tell people what they want to hear.

A true prophet expresses the will of God with words. Sometimes signs, wonders, and foretelling are involved to add additional weight, but the most important part is *the message*. A true prophet points people to *God* and shows people their sins. False prophets point people to almost anything else. If they *do* try to point people to a god, it will be a different god from the God of the Bible. Whoever they point to, they do it for their own benefit.

Many false prophets simply point people to themselves. Their covetousness manifests itself in a desire for power, influence, control, prestige, or importance—the antithesis of being poor in spirit, meek, pure in heart, and mourning over their ungodly weaknesses. The true prophet does not draw attention to himself but to God. If a prophet or teacher spends a great deal of time talking about himself,

it is a good indication just who his god is!

John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, serves as a positive contrast. He undoubtedly knew what the angel Gabriel told his father, Zacharias (Luke 1:13-17), but there is no record of John promoting this remarkable story. His focus was not on proclaiming who *he* was, but on doing the work that God had given him to do. The fruit of his life and teaching reveals that he fulfilled the role of Elijah, which Jesus confirms. A false prophet, though, with his covetousness, presumption, and self-will, is more likely to end up spending a good deal of time talking about himself.

Other false prophets, like Balaam, are essentially in it only for the money, and so they will do what is necessary to ensure that the gold rolls in. The False Prophet in Revelation points the whole world to another *man*—the Beast. A true prophet would never suggest that a man be worshipped, with the exception of John the Baptist pointing the people to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. John pointed people to a Man who was also God, and thus worthy of worship.

Prophets are false when they fail to express God’s will accurately, and they fail because they are not in contact with the true God. The fruits of their lives and the meaning behind their words will indicate the source of their teaching. To paraphrase Jesus Christ, by their words they will be justified, or by their words they will be condemned (Matthew 12:37). If the words of a prophet are contrary to Scripture, contrary to God’s law, the prophet is false, and worthy of condemnation for leading people astray.

—David C. Grabbe

striking out at his accusers. Rather than taking vengeance, he pleaded with God in their behalf. David, another holy man, set a fine example when cursed by Shimei during Absalom’s rebellion (II Samuel 16:5-13). He bore the cursing with an even temper and looked within himself, thinking that God allowed Shimei to curse ultimately to benefit him.

An individual who strives to imitate the outstanding examples in God’s Word will exercise self-control and self-denial. He will labor to put to death the fleshly desires that tempt him so strongly and frequently. Jesus warns that we are not to allow ourselves to become weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life (Luke 21:34). The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 9:27, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Did not Jesus pursue love and brotherly kindness? The holy person will thus endeavor to observe the Golden Rule in his associations with others. He will speak of them as he

wants others to speak of him. He will especially be full of affection toward his spiritual brethren, their property, their character and reputations, their feelings, and their spiritual lives. Does not Paul say, “He who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8)?

This means that the holy person will abhor all lying, slandering of another’s reputation, backbiting, cheating, and dishonesty. He will be open and aboveboard in his dealings with others. There will be no conspiracies to take advantage of others. He will accept loss rather than allow himself to be offended enough to take revenge against another. The holy person will strive to make his attitude and approach toward others adorned with beauty. He will be a walking example of I Corinthians 13.

He will disdain staying idle all day long. He will not be content with doing no harm; rather, he will try to do good. He will strive to lessen the loads others are carrying and to relieve their misery. Acts 9:36 says of Dorcas, “This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.” The apostle Paul was like-minded, writing in II

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Corinthians 12:15, “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. . . .”

The apostle John writes in I John 3:3, “And everyone who has this hope [of being like Christ and in God’s Kingdom] purifies himself just as He is pure.” A holy person will pursue purity, dreading all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit and avoiding anything that might draw him into it. He will be like Joseph, who fled from the temptations of Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:13). A holy person will be warned by David’s example and will flee when temptation arises.

We can learn much about these things from the ceremonial law. In them, if a person so much as touched something that had been designated unclean—like a dead person—he immediately became unclean in the sight of God. A holy person learns of these things and accepts the spiritual instruction.

The holy person will abide in the fear of the Lord. This is not a slavish fear filled with terror for the fear of punishment, but the deep and abiding respect for God of one who wishes to live as if he were always before the face of a Father whom he loves deeply and desires to please with all his being. Nehemiah, a holy man and a governor of God’s people, was a fine example of this. As governor, he could have required them to support him. Previous governors had done so, but Nehemiah would not, writing, “But I did not do so, because of the fear of God” (Nehemiah 5:15).

As a child of the faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9), the holy person will strive after faithfulness in all his duties and relationships. He must do this because he has higher motivations in life, and because of his relationship with God, he has more help than others. Paul commands, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Holy persons should aim at doing everything well. In fact, Christians should be ashamed of allowing ourselves to do anything ill. Of Daniel it is reported, “Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God’” (Daniel 6:5).

Practically, this means that we should strive to be good husbands or wives, good children, good supervisors, good employees, good neighbors, good friends, good in private and public, and good in business. Is this asking too much? Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:47).

We should be able to see that the holy person will seek and practice spiritual-mindedness. He will have his affections entirely on things above (Colossians 3:1-2). He most certainly will not ignore the responsibilities of this life, but

his grip on these things will be loose compared to heavenly things. His treasure resides in the spiritual realm, and this is what drives his life. He will live life as a stranger and pilgrim, knowing full well that he is traversing a training ground in which his character is being built and tested to see where his heart and loyalty lie.

The holy person measures the value of everything in the light of whether it will draw Him closer to God and to the image of Christ and will make a positive, glorifying witness. Holy people think as David does in Psalm 119:57, “You are my portion, O LORD; I have said that I would keep Your words.” He adds in Psalm 63:8, “My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me.”

None of these things completely wipe away the fact that sin still dwells in all of us. We still, as Paul expresses in Romans 7:24, carry about “this body of death,” but the holy person is not at peace with this. He fights the sin, never giving up, while keeping his eyes on fulfilling his mission and entering the Kingdom of God. The hope of the gospel drives him on. Because of the gospel, he has this opportunity, and he does not want to let it go. He knows God is making him fit to live in His Kingdom, and he wants to cooperate with Him so he will be prepared to do his part when that occurs.

It is sometimes difficult to understand the mind of one who considers himself religious and a Christian but denies the importance of works. It is so obvious that God requires them. It is for this very reason that we have been created and made part of Christ. We know that God is full of mercy but is also just. His judgment is unerring, and He always acts in His people’s best interest. Because this is so, He would have to disqualify anyone unfit or unprepared to live in His Kingdom since it would be in his or her best interests. Such people would be utterly miserable living there—nobody there would have anything in common with them!

Perhaps the apostle Paul has given us in Titus 2:11-14 as fine a description as is available of what has happened to those whom God has called:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

In Christian love,



What Is the Pope Up To?

Pope Benedict XVI, the German-born former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, is the leader of over a billion Catholics worldwide and presides over a multi-billion dollar empire of land holdings, churches and cathedrals, companies, universities, institutions, hospitals, etc. His representatives, official and otherwise, are in every nation on the globe, influencing policy to the advantage of the Roman Catholic Church. He has hundreds of advisors and assistants, many of whom are among the most learned men on earth. He sits atop an organization that wields power and influence far beyond the confines of tiny Vatican City in Rome.

If he has all this wealth, knowledge, and authority behind him, why did he make such a colossal blunder in his comments at Regensburg University in Germany on September 12? Did he not know that even quoting a fourteenth-century Christian emperor's anti-Islamic remark would ignite protests and perhaps violence as well across the Muslim world?

Without a doubt.

The Pope, 79, has observed the world long enough to predict accurately just how his audiences will react to his ideas. The Vatican, long steeped in both politics and cultural sensitivity, understands the hair-trigger reactions of Islamic fundamentalists to anything even remotely offensive to "the religion of peace" or its prophet, Muhammad—remember that the furor over the Danish cartoons erupted just months ago. If his words, then, were not a thoughtless blunder, what were they designed to do? Why did he intentionally make them? What is the Pope up to?

There are probably at least two answers to these questions. The first is contained in the public response to Muslim demands of the Pope to apologize to the faithful for his "outrageous slander" of Muhammad. In his remarks to invitees to a meeting at his summer residence near Rome on September 25, the Pope regretted that his comments offended Muslims, yet he went on to explain briefly that Christians and Muslims "must learn to work together . . . to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence."

A reading of his Regensburg speech makes it plain that this was his intention all along. Notice this passage:

The [Byzantine Emperor Manuel Paleologos II, a Christian] must have known that Sura 2,256 reads: "There is no compulsion in religion." . . . But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Quran, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, . . . he addresses his interlocutor . . . on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul.

"To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death. . . ."

Here he introduces his real subject, the relationship of reason and faith in religion. Muslim extremists—and frankly, most Muslims period—have abandoned reason in their wholehearted devotion to Islam, and the result has been conflict, destruction, and death. On the other side, Western Christianity has rejected faith in favor of rationalism, producing cultural relativism and an essentially godless society. Benedict's speech was designed to steer a course toward the future between the two extremes.

At this point, the second answer to the *why* of the Pope's intentions comes to the fore. Upon ascending to the pontificate, Benedict dedicated himself to returning Europe to fundamental Christian values in response to increasing secularization. In a May 1996 address titled "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," he noted, presaging his papal theme:

Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of education is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own ego.

To counter this creeping narcissism, he recommends Europe's re-Christianization, urging Europeans "to open ourselves to this friendship with God . . . speaking to him as to a friend, the only One who can make the world both good and happy. . . ." ("St. Josemaría: God Is Very Much at Work in Our World Today," *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 9, 2002). In early 2006, he reiterated, "It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians . . ." ("Friendship with God," *Zenit News*, February 7, 2006).

In this light, his remarks at Regensburg were a rallying cry to Europe to reject the fanatical, violent faith of its burgeoning Muslim minority as well as the sterile, empty secularism of modern society—and to embrace the reasonable, traditional, and beneficial faith of Christianity. By doing so, he sets up himself and the Roman Catholic Church as sound-minded bastions of European solidarity and strength.

Despite the violence his remarks caused, he has calculated that they were worth the turmoil so that he could gauge, not the Muslim reaction, which was predictable, but the European response. He is hoping to see a shift in attitudes toward the Catholic Church and the papacy to defend Christendom from the ongoing Islamic assault. So far—and granted, his remarks still echo across the Continent—he has seen nothing from secular Europe to give him hope.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

WORLDWATCH

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Part Two

In the world today, physical healing is looked upon with at least some skepticism, if not outright doubt. Much of this skepticism results from the many charlatans who play on the misery of the infirm, often performing their spectacles on stage and on television for the entertainment of thousands. What a contrast to Jesus' humble, circumspect miracles of healing! His miracles reflect His character, naturally expressing His love and sympathy for suffering mankind.

It is obvious that dramatic miracles of healing are not occurring today with the frequency and power that they did when the church was new, when there were immediate, complete, and permanent healings. There is no historical record over the intervening two millennia that such healings were a consistent feature in the church, and in fact, except for the healing of Eutychus in Acts 20:9-12 and Publius in Acts 28:8, very few miraculous healings are mentioned after the first several years of the church.

The Bible contains a few other aspects of miracles of divine healing. For instance, the prophet, apostle, or evangelist would take no payment for healing. Most importantly, he would always use his gift to glorify God and not himself. He directed all credit and thanks for healing to God.



1. Do true miracles ever fail? What should accompany them?

COMMENT: Christ's healing acts were never tentative, nor was He ever unsure of His abilities. The Gospels contain no record of failure or relapse in anyone He healed. The excellence and permanence of Christ's miracles of healing prove Him to be God in the flesh. One group of His miracles shows His control over nature; another group, His power over physical and mental diseases; and yet another group, His ability to command the spirit world. His miracles were accompanied with prayer and with the giving of thanks (John 6:11; 11:41). Jesus did not depend on His own power, but that of His almighty Father in heaven (John 5:19, 30; 14:10).

2. Did Christ heal everyone who was sick?

COMMENT: Clearly, Christ did not heal every person who was sick. While He did not refuse to heal anyone who sought His aid, many were not healed. In John 5:3-9, He passed by a great multitude and selected only one for healing. Through sometimes painful experience, we know that healing is not always the divine will. Some He heals, while others are ordained to suffer. While we pray for the sick and desire their restoration to health, we must be subject to God's holy will and purpose. Whatever God decides is best for a sick person is, in the end, the result of the excellence of His wisdom. He promises that the suffering that even members of His church must experience cannot compare with the glory we will receive (Romans 8:18).

3. How did Jesus heal?

COMMENT: During His ministry, Jesus was not limited just to physical or to spiritual healing. Sometimes He laid His hands on the sick, while at other times, He healed without any contact. Some reached out to touch Him or His clothes and were healed. Once, He used His spittle to heal. In short, He followed no set method or ritual. Because of His close relationship with the Father, His word and will were sufficient. In several places, miracles are represented as having been performed, not so much by Christ, as by the Father

(Matthew 9:8; 15:31; Luke 7:16; 17:15; 18:43).

4. What were the purposes of Christ's miracles of healing?

COMMENT: Jesus revealed that His actions were guided by a desire and zeal to glorify God. In so doing, He was likewise glorified as the Son of God. Relief of the afflicted was secondary (John 11:4). Jesus' miracles had two essential purposes. First, they revealed the sovereignty, power, and glory of God and of His Son. Second, they revealed mankind's desperate need. His healings reveal the devastation caused by sin, as well as God's power and will to repair such sin-wrought desolation and wretchedness.

5. Did human faith make an impact on Christ's miracles?

COMMENT: While Jesus placed limited value on the faith produced by witnessing His miracles (John 4:48), nevertheless, human faith played a role in His effectiveness. Strong faith was rewarded with healing (Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 5:25-34; 7:24-30; 10:46-52), while, in contrast, unbelief caused Christ to refrain from manifesting His miraculous power (Matthew 13:58; Mark 6:5-6).

Christ possessed a deep sympathy for those afflicted with bodily and mental diseases: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). The Gospels say many times that He was "moved with compassion" (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27, 33; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 5:19; 6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13). His healings contained no ulterior motive; His merciful works arose from His loving, giving character, which harmonized with His life and teachings. Despite this, His healings did not always lead to repentance; miracles do not guarantee conviction of sin.

We do not know exactly how many miracles Jesus performed. Most of them are referred to collectively, and they far exceed the number of healings recorded in detail. Whatever the number, He brought relief and mercy to many during His ministry. His far greater work, however, is the spiritual mercy and redemption He brought with His great sacrifice and His present work of salvation as our High Priest.

—Martin G. Collins