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Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Whither the EU Now?

may/june 2008

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Despite the European Constitution's failure in 2005, the bureaucracy of the EU made another attempt to federalize Europe through the Lisbon Treaty—and failed again. Ireland's referendum on the treaty stopped its ratification in its tracks. It is clear that not all of Europe's states agree on the EU's direction. Where will it head now?
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The First Commandment

Christians should have a great interest in the subject of idolatry because of its major importance to morality and our relationship with God. We ought to be constantly refining our understanding of it so we can avoid allowing anything to come between us and God. Five of the Ten Commandments directly deal with it. The first four clearly define our relationship with God, as does the tenth, because Paul defines covetousness as idolatry in Colossians 3:5. The Bible deals with no other sin so directly and so often.

Although Romans 14:22-23 is usually not applied to idolatry, it has an interesting bearing on this subject:

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Paul is dealing with a clash of values within an individual. Confronting a situation in which two distinctly different moral or ethical alternatives exist can produce puzzlement and fear. Such a situation has the potential to leave a person conscience-stricken after doing what he permits himself to do.

If there were no differences between what a person is permitted to do and what he actually does, there would be no self-doubt or self-condemnation to be concerned about. However, the reality is that differences arise. This often occurs when the individual has learned a value in his past, but he is challenged by a different value in the present. This leads to a number of overlapping questions that we need to consider:

- What is the source of what we permit ourselves to do?
- Where did our values originate?
- Where did we form our values?
- Are we sure we are right even when we are not conscience-stricken? This last question is necessary because people can be absolutely wrong while sincerely thinking that they are right.

We should ask these questions of ourselves in areas such as business ethics, education, entertainment, athletics, fashion, diet, child-training, and marital relations—in other words, the entire framework of life, not just in the obvious areas of morality. Acts 18:25-26 reminds us that Christianity is a way of life, a course of conduct encompassing every aspect of life.

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Our Source of Morality

In 1983, Herbert Armstrong gave a sermon on the source and origin of law. Within a community, laws establish acceptable standards and provide for penalties. He said, “That base, or body of beliefs from which you operate, is your system of morality and ethics.” That system of morality is also a body of laws and values. They are standards we have accumulated, at the very least, up to the time we were called. Where did our system of morality come from?

Notice the word “our” because that particular code of standards is our own. Bits and pieces of it have been absorbed from others—parents, church, friends, and business associates—who have had influence on us. Yet, whether accidentally, passively, or purposely, we have made those pieces ours by choosing to use them. Each one of us has a code that is probably not, in every detail, like anybody else’s.

Proverbs 16:25 is a familiar scripture: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” “Way” can be understood both as a narrow, single issue within one event or an entire package of values within a course of conduct. The proverb’s point is that mankind is frequently driven by blind self-deception or ignorance. He often has no absolute certainty regarding right and wrong because his standards have been merely absorbed and never seriously compared against God’s. How do ours compare?

This is a fair question because, since our calling and the fact that we are no longer blinded, we have the opportunity to make a fair assessment of this. In one sense, God is challenging us in this proverb either to defend our body of beliefs and practices, or to drop them and change to His. He is also warning us in advance that our way of life—if it is wrong—is going to kill us.

Any system of ethics and morality is by definition an expression of religion because religion, again by definition, is a way of life containing some measure of worship. Worship is merely a respectful response to one’s god. A system of morality concerns itself with values and the way one lives, even as God’s moral code does. The major overall difference is that His way works because it leads to life, even though in a given instance it may appear more wrong than ours.

Because these principles are true, it leads to the fact that each one of us is technically the god of our system of values and its way of life in opposition to the Creator God, if our code of conduct is not in alignment with His. We are serving, and thus in a limited way, worshipping ourselves.

Law, therefore, is codified, enacted morality. Whether it is God’s or man’s does not matter. The difference is in what they produce. What does man’s law produce on earth? History makes this obvious: confusion, warfare, constant competition, pain from all the collisions of values, and ultimately death.

Law, Sin, and Crime

Paul writes in Romans 3:20, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Romans 4:15 adds, “[T]he law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.” Together, these produce a general principle that covers, not just biblical morality, but also secular. Laws reveal to us our religious and/or civic duties. In reference to God, law awakens us to a consciousness of sin. Through God’s laws we become aware of the contrast between *what we do* and *what we ought to do*.

By enacting laws, our legislators tell us what is moral, right, and good in secular areas of life, but instead of calling a transgression of the state’s laws “sin,” we call it “crime.” In many cases, crimes are also sins. The difference between secular law and God’s law is that the latter contains clear moral values and reveals our duties toward the Creator God. Where do people get their ideas regarding what is moral?

We must conclude that religion, law, the state, and morality are each parts of the same family. Thus, every system of law is a system of ethics and morality. Since law establishes standards of conduct, those standards are the establishment of religion, a way of life we are to be devoted to following. Therefore, in truth, there can be no absolute separation of church and state.

This point escapes most Americans, but not every American. For instance, some journalists have clearly identified communism as a religion. In such a system, the government is the god. At the height of the Roman Empire, the Romans made no bones about this principle, declaring and demanding under the penalty of death that Caesar be worshipped as a god. This is part of the “divine right of kings” principle. Beware, because this idea is about to be reborn:

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. (Revelation 13:11-12)

When the Beast arises, he will be accorded this honor that belongs only to God.

In the Western world, a new religion is rising. It is not really new, but it has a fairly new name: secularism. It is a type of idolatry, one that has been increasingly challenging this world’s Christianity over the past century, and it is gaining ever more strength in numbers and devotion here in America. The war between it and this world’s Christianity is virtually over—with Christianity rapidly becoming irrelevant. Persecution in the courts is already an established fact, and outright persecution on the streets cannot be very many years away.

Loyalty to Whom?

Ezekiel 20:23-26 portrays a critical point regarding why Israel was taken into captivity:

Also I lifted My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed *My* judgments, but had despised *My* statutes, profaned *My* Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols. Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the LORD.

There is no doubt Israel was a religious people. Yet, notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun “My.” Their source of values was not God. Realizing the source of any given value or moral standard will go a long way toward determining its rightness and therefore its efficacy.

Romans 6:15-19 helps to clarify this:

What then? Shall we sin [transgress God's law] because we are not under the law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

The source of a person's values will determine his righteousness or his sinfulness. In addition, then, the source of the values to which he submits will also establish who is the sovereign in his life and of whom he is a servant. Finally, the source also determines whether idolatry is present and how the individual's conscience will be affected and respond.

If the source of values is man, then man is the sovereign. This can be perfectly acceptable as long as the value one obeys agrees with God's values. Any person's values may come from society in general, his family practices, his peers, or even his spouse. One often hears the justification, “Everybody's doing it,” as a defense. The source of that value is “everybody”!

Understanding the source helps to reveal the sin of idolatry in a clear but disgusting light. The Israelites of Ezekiel 20 apparently could, in all sincerity and with a clear

conscience—and perhaps even with fervency—sacrifice their firstborn to Moloch! This is a vivid example of how twisted a person's thinking and conscience can become by believing a corrupt source.

At the beginning of our conversion, usually during counseling for baptism, we are asked to consider Luke 14:26-33 seriously. Verses 26-27 are particularly important because loyalty to Christ is the issue in this context. Jesus says, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” Jesus makes it plain that, after entering into the New Covenant, our highest loyalty is to Him.

This is extremely important because the character of every life is determined by the loyalty that rules it. Peter confirms Jesus' words in Acts 5:29, saying, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” He made this affirmation following Jesus' crucifixion. Persecution was imminent against the fledgling church. However, we must understand that the world is always a threat against our loyalty to Christ. Life is a mixture of choices and compulsions, and many of our values have their source in the world. These values exert an ever-present pressure to conform to them, thus we must be aware.

The pressure to make moral choices is the furnace in which character is forged. Our compulsions to make choices come in two varieties: 1) forced, as by a gun to our temple that demands, “Do this or else,” and 2) unforced, the pressure of old habits, perspectives, and attitudes engraved in our character, hangovers from our past. Thus, the past and the present both push at us to choose. What we chose determines where our loyalties lie and thus whether we commit idolatry. If we are not thinking carefully, idolatry is an easy sin to fall into.

Law and Sovereignty

Psalm 81:4-5 states, “For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob. This He established in Joseph as a testimony when he went throughout the land of Egypt, where I heard a language I did not understand.” Asaph points out that God ordained the law of which he speaks. Law is inseparable from sovereignty. The god of any system can be identified by locating the source of its laws. From this principle, Mr. Armstrong concluded that the church is the only place on earth where the government of God operates.

In the beginning of the United States, our system of law and our standards of morality were lifted in principle—but sometimes almost verbatim—from the absolutes of the Bible. After the Civil War, the basis of our laws gradually switched from the absolutes of the Bible to human relativism, which claims there are no absolutes. It asserts that every system's values, indeed everyone's values, are as good as the next. This philosophy began as mere advice to be tolerant, but as it became more popular, its adherents urged people to be pragmatic, that is, to adapt, to make

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compromises in values, to do whatever needs to be done regardless of its conflict with others' values.

Concurrently, situation-ethics systems arose so that even churches eventually looked upon the Ten Commandments as mere suggestions. God was gradually erased from our public schools. Relativism has crept into every area of life so that it now dominates our moral and ethical thinking in education, religion, childrearing, marital relations, economics, agriculture, health care, social programs, etc.

Psalms 10:4 is central to this series on the Ten Commandments: "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of His thoughts." This is of major concern because the first commandment is the most important. It lays the foundation for all that follow. If the source of a person's values is not of the very highest order, he sets himself up for certain moral and spiritual failure. No other source can even begin to compare to Almighty God.

The last phrase of this verse does not mean the "wicked" man is an atheist. In fact, He may be a nominally religious person. However, while undoubtedly considering himself realistic, he has such a low regard for God that he does not consider Him as he makes his choices in life. God plays no major role in his life, and he may even purposefully avoid Him. To him, God is not dead, but He is nonetheless an inconvenience brought into play only in times of extreme stress. He has essentially chosen to live without Him, and thus he is effectively worshipping himself. This description likely fits a high percentage of Americans.

Loyalty to Satan and the World?

John writes of this system:

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)

John's warning against the world is focused on the very reason for the "source" theme of this article. The word translated "world" is *cosmos* in Greek. John uses it six times in three short verses, emphasizing its importance to us. It literally means "an orderly arrangement." In other words, it means "a system." The apostle refers to the environment and lifestyle system into which we were born. Our values originated from this source, and those values are a confused mix of good and evil, specifically designed to entrap us in a web of death.

Cosmos identifies the system established on earth

apart from the Creator God. Since the system's source is Satan, it cannot produce life. The problem for us is that this system is quite appealing to human nature, and it is continuously exerting pressure on us to return to it. Yet, if we love the world, it precludes love for the Father. The Father is then pushed to the background of our lives.

John points out that love for the world is essentially meaningless because the world is passing away. If it and its values pass away, what will a person following that system have to show for his life?

The basics of that system's values are contained in the words "flesh," "eyes," and "pride." *Flesh* indicates a self-oriented outlook that pursues its own ends independent of God, a focus that clearly produces idolatry. *Eyes* suggests being captivated by everything that entices the sight, drawing attention to the human attraction to covetousness, which is idolatry. *Pride* indicates a pretentious hypocrisy that glories in self, possessions, and accomplishments. This too is idolatry because pride focuses devotion on the self.

So, to whom or what are we loyal? II Corinthians 4:3-4 identifies the source of the spiritual beliefs and values of everybody in the world prior to his calling:

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

This system is the source of much of what we believed, and its author, Satan, has been our god, though we did not realize it. Because Satan has been clever enough to include some of the true God's system, beliefs, stories, and practices within his, the Devil's system has an air of righteous authority. We can feel good, even joyous and inspired, while doing evil—like committing idolatry—in submitting ourselves as servants to his way.

Romans 1:18-32 provides us with a compelling history of mankind's efforts to avoid God as the source of their values, and it shows what this has produced. Satan has made strong and persuasive efforts—seemingly doing everything in his power—to diminish the importance of obedience to the Ten Commandments. Mankind's failure to keep these godly standards is responsible for the condition of the world.

The undermining of their importance began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan's persuasions were so enticing that they submitted to his values despite having seen God literally eye to eye! None of us has been blessed with that gift. However, in God's judgment that does not let us off the hook. Yet, mankind cannot plead complete ignorance of God because He is revealed by His handiwork. Since men will not seek out

(continued on page 16)

GOD'S TWO WITNESSES

Over the past year, certain groups among the churches of God have brought the subject of the Two Witnesses to the fore once again.

One minister is proclaiming that he and his wife are the pair of prophets that Revelation 11 foretells will appear in the last days to testify in God's behalf for the final time before Christ's return. Another minister has said that, no, he is not one of the Two Witnesses, but they will arise under his auspices. No doubt, many church members, seeing the worsening conditions around the globe, have privately speculated about who the Two Witnesses will be.

For years, the Worldwide Church of God had to fend off multiple claimants of this prophetic role. Funny stories circulated around the Ambassador College campus about the loony man who proclaimed himself as the Two Witnesses—evidently, he had at least two personalities. And, of course, not to be outdone, there were rumors about the group of *three* who said they were the Two Witnesses!

All ridicule aside, there is a general expectation among God's people that the Two Witnesses will begin to prophesy soon, if only because we anticipate Christ's return in the near future. Obviously, the two events are linked in the flow of prophecy. Revelation 11:3 plainly states that the Two Witnesses' ministry of testimony is confined to the "one thousand two hundred and sixty days"—three and a half years—of the Great Tribulation. They are martyred by the Beast three and a half days before the first resurrection, when they are

raised to join Him in the air with the other firstfruits of God's Kingdom (verses 11-12; I Thessalonians 4:15-17).

If this is so, then the timing of their work for God is set and known. No two people will officially be "the Two Witnesses" before this time. Therefore, if the Great Tribulation has not begun—if the holy city has not come under the dominion of the Gentiles (Revelation 11:2)—then the Two Witnesses have not officially begun to prophesy. Until then, according to the silence of the Scriptures, they will be essentially anonymous servants of God.

Yet, this does not mean that the Bible fails to provide any clues about what *kind* of people the Two Witnesses will be. What few hints that can be gleaned from Scripture give us a thumbnail sketch of the general character of these two enigmatic, yet pivotal, end-time personalities.

WHEAT FROM CHAFF

To begin our investigation, we can quickly dispense with who and what the Two Witnesses are *not*, an exercise that will considerably narrow the field of likely candidates. Like the ancient process of gleaning, we can toss the whole mess up into the air, and the insubstantial chaff will float away in the breeze. What remains is the grain.

The primary texts on the Two Witnesses are

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Revelation 11 and Zechariah 4. What does not fit the facts and implications of these two prophetic passages we can discard as highly speculative and not worth serious consideration except in dismissal. Some people have asserted truly wild ideas about these two prophets, but we will see that they derive from their own imaginations rather than from the Bible.

First, the Two Witnesses will not be crazed, unstable individuals. Nothing in the Bible—much less these two passages—suggests that God ever uses people of unsound minds to accomplish a major work for Him. The apostle Paul tells us that God's Spirit in us is not "of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). While some of God's prophets had personal problems and were commanded to do some strange things to get God's point across in symbolic ways—Ezekiel comes to mind—they were far from being lunatics. They were *different* from the world around them because they believed God and did His will, but they were quite sane and rational.

Second, they will not be anything other than men. We can take this on two levels. Some have suggested that the Two Witnesses are entities like the Old and New Testaments, Israel and the church, the Jews and the Gentiles, or even the Philadelphia and Laodicean eras of the church! However, Revelation 11 is quite clear that the Two Witnesses are "prophets" (verse 10), that they can be killed (verse 7), that they have bodies (verses 8-9), and that the breath of life enters them upon resurrection (verse 11). The literal meaning of these details is the best interpretation, leading to the conclusion that they are people, not things.

The other level is gender, a touchy subject in these inclusive times. Many have tried to hold the door open for a woman to fill the role of one of the Two Witnesses, but the language in the primary passages is overwhelmingly masculine (except where the natural gender of the languages demands it). Additionally, the pronouns are consistently masculine plural, as is the word "prophets" in Revelation 11:10.

Although it can be argued that the masculine is the Greek default gender for groups of mixed gender, the biblical pattern reveals that it is far more likely that God would choose two men to shoulder the burden of this final work. In addition, the allusions to types within the two primary passages are to men: Moses, Elijah, Joshua, and Zerubbabel. This is not to say that a woman could not do this work, but that the preponderance of Scripture argues against God choosing a woman to do it.

Third, the Two Witnesses will not be resurrected saints from the past, such as the aforementioned Moses and Elijah or perhaps Enoch. These three are often cited as candidates because the Bible describes their deaths so mysteriously, as if they are not really dead but in heaven waiting for God to send them back

as His witnesses in the end time. There is no indication in the primary passages even to suggest this. So much time has passed since their lifetimes that it is ridiculous to think that anyone on earth today would even know who they are!

Besides, Hebrews 9:27 and the rest of New Testament theology, as well as God's consistent patterns, challenge this view. Except for Jesus, all the dead await the resurrection. In addition, God has never used a servant in two separate times. Jesus Himself tells us, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets [in Scripture], neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Fourth, and finally, they will be neither unconverted nor recently converted people. In other words, they will be baptized members of God's church and probably ordained ministers. Again, God's pattern in working to bring His plan to fruition reveals that the Two Witnesses will come from among His people, just as the prophets came from Israel and the apostles were chosen from among His disciples. The apostle Paul may seem to be a glaring exception to this rule, but even he was required to undergo a three-year period of instruction before he was sent out to fulfill his expansive calling (see Galatians 1:16-18). Due to their mission's magnitude, the Two Witnesses will likewise be prepared for it over an extended period beforehand.

These four points have eliminated great portions of humanity from the search for a sketch of the Two Witnesses. Now we need to decipher the Bible's hints about them.

OLIVE TREES AND LAMPSTANDS

It is no wonder that these two are so enigmatic, for the Bible says little about them as persons. It says what God will do for them and what they will do for God during their time of testimony, but for the most part, the individuals themselves are cloaked and hooded. A shallow study of the primary passages might suggest that they are faceless, anonymous everymen.

However, this would be a hasty and mistaken conclusion. Revelation is a book of types and symbols that are designed, like Jesus' parables, to hide the truth from the uninitiated, yet to reveal it to whom "it has been given . . . to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). The book's very name demands that it be a disclosure of truth, not a concealment of it.

Jesus, through the angel speaking to the apostle John, identifies who the Two Witnesses are: "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth" (Revelation 11:4). To the unenlightened, this sounds like little more than further symbolic claptrap. However, to those who use God's Spirit, which imparts the mind of Christ to His disciples (I Corinthians

2:16), it is a lighted, flashing arrow pointing back to the prophecy found in Zechariah 4.

Zechariah 4:14, in summing up the prophecy, parallels Revelation 11:4: “So [the angel] said, ‘These [olive trees] are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’” Clearly, the Two Witnesses and their work are revealed in the two olive trees, but understanding this heavily symbolic description takes some effort.

In Zechariah 4:2, the angel describes a strange golden lampstand, somewhat like a menorah—a seven-branched candelabra—but with a large bowl on top. This lampstand features a central pole, on top of which is the bowl, and from it, perhaps in seven different directions, extend seven arms or branches, each ending in a lamp. Further, seven pipes or tubes run to each of the seven lamps from the large bowl on top. Verse 3 informs us that the two olive trees stand to the right and left of the bowl.

A similar vision is given to the apostle John in Revelation 1:12-13. In it, the resurrected Jesus Christ replaces the central pole, and the seven lampstands are arrayed around Him, much like the seven lamps. Christ Himself interprets the vision, saying that the seven lampstands are the seven churches (verse 20). However, in this vision, the olive trees are not to be found—they appear separately in Revelation 11. Here, the bowl, too, is missing.

Zechariah has no idea what he is seeing, so he asks for clarification. Through the angel, God gives His answer: “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Zerubbabel, a type of Christ, had been given the work of building the Temple after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. God’s answer to Zechariah is that His work is done through His Spirit.

Applying this to the vision, we are to see that the oil that drains from the bowl into the seven lamps represents God’s Spirit manifested in works (I Corinthians 12:7-11). We never see the Holy Spirit, since it is invisible to the eye, but we see the works done through it (John 3:8).

On this aspect of the prophecy of Zechariah 4, the Kiel and Delitzsch commentary asserts: “Oil . . . is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of the Spirit of God, not in its transcendent essence, but so far as it works in the world, and is indwelling in the church.” Simply put, oil signifies God’s Spirit in its visible works rather than in its pure form.

Jesus declares an important principle in John 6:63, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” One of the primary vehicles of the work of God’s Spirit is words—spoken or written. The Bible is inspired by God’s Spirit (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21), and it is a composition of words—God’s words, prophets’ words, and apostles’ words. In the same way, the primary job of an anointed servant of God is to speak or write words to convict people of God’s truth. In the speaking or writing of words, he witnesses for God and accomplishes a work.

In the case of the Two Witnesses, the two anointed

ones, this connection becomes critical. Zechariah 4:12 literally reads, “What are the two olive clusters which through the two golden pipes empty out of themselves the golden oil?” It is an illustration of the olive trees emptying oil *into* the bowl! How can these two men—prophets though they are—supply the seven churches with oil? Because the oil is not God’s Spirit in pure form but Spirit-inspired works, probably in the form of words—teaching, instruction.

If this is so, the Two Witnesses provide a massive amount of spiritual instruction to the seven churches just before the end.

“MY TWO WITNESSES”

Another clue to the character of these two prophets appears in God’s introduction of them in Revelation 11:3: “And I will give power to *my two witnesses*. . . .” The angel is obviously speaking for God—they are not the angel’s witnesses but God’s! We should note the use of the English possessive “My,” which suggests both personal ownership and affiliation.

However, the Greek reads more literally, “. . . the two witnesses of me.” While this rendering also imparts the idea of possession, it adds a vital element: that the Two Witnesses testify about God Himself. They are God’s direct representatives in the crucial last years of man’s civilization. And they represent Him, not just in words, but in everything they do during their prophetic ministry.

In other words, these two men are not run-of-the-mill Christians by any means! Not a single word of censure is aimed at them in either Revelation 11 or Zechariah 4. They will be model Christians, followers of Christ and His righteousness to such a degree that when the people of this world observe them, they will see human reproductions of the life of Christ. In much the same way as Jesus represented the Father during His physical life, so will the witnesses represent Jesus during the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord (see John 14:9). While they will not be perfect, they will be men of godly character and virtue.

It is no wonder, then, that they attract the wrath of Satan and the Beast, as well as the hatred of the whole world! Just as Jesus was opposed, mocked, persecuted, and finally killed, so will these men draw the fire of the anti-Christ, end-time population of earth. Thus, Christ endues His two prophets with power to preach, to plague, and to defend themselves against harm (Revelation 11:5). In order to survive their mission during a time of Noachian-type violence, God will give them the tools and protection to reveal Him for a final time as a witness before Christ intervenes in world affairs.

Therefore, we should not be looking necessarily for great signs and wonders being done by two prophets, as that activity will likely be confined to the final three and a half years. By that point, it will be obvious to the enlight-

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A Life of

King Herod “the Great” makes only a cameo appearance in the Bible, as the conniving and cruel killer of Bethlehem’s little boys, yet his mark on Judea in that period is colossal. He reigned as a Roman-appointed king over Judea from 37 to 4 BC. The son of Antipater the Edomite, he was responsible for changing the political rule of Judea from the Levite Hasmoneans—the royal family descended from the Maccabees—to the Edomite, or Idumean, Herodians. He was an intelligent and charismatic figure, but he used these attributes to conspire his way to the throne.

Once he had achieved his political aspirations and Caesar Augustus at Rome had appointed him as king of Judea, Herod took steps to change Judea. Through massive building projects, including the Temple at Jerusalem, and systematically introducing Greek culture into Judea—a process called “Hellenization”—Herod radically changed the Jewish world that our Savior was born into.

Herod’s story begins with his father, Antipater. A civil war erupted in Judea between the supporters of two brothers, Aristobulus II, the last Hasmonean king, who reigned from 66 to 63 BC, and John Hyrcanus II, the high priest from 76 to 40 BC. The brothers created enough tension that Rome intervened, taking away Judea’s sovereignty and making the region a Roman province.

As a result of Roman rule, Gabinius, a Roman statesman and military commander, divided Judea into five legal districts. Pompey, another Roman statesman and military commander of Rome’s eastern kingdom, removed Aristobulus from Judea and imprisoned him in Rome. Hyrcanus II was left as high priest with ruling authority.

Antipater soon made his services available to the Romans, and Rome responded by appointing the Edomite as procurator (financial agent) of Judea. Antipater used

this position to make his two sons, Phasael and Herod, governors of two of Gabinius’ districts, Jerusalem and Galilee respectively. Thus Herod’s political career begins at the age of 25 as a governor.

Herod’s style of governing mirrored that of his father’s: He was an opportunist, greatly ambitious, and presumptuous. This style was exemplified in his first few years as governor of Galilee. A bandit-chief named Hezekiah led a pack of thieves who attacked Gentile towns and envoys traveling along the borders of Galilee and Syria. Herod captured Hezekiah and had him immediately put to death, an action that won him high praise from the Romans but severe criticism from Jews.

By taking such precipitous action, Herod had ignored the pre-existing law that required any criminal to be tried before the Sanhedrin, so Jewish officials perceived Herod’s act for what it was, ingratiating with the Romans. The Sanhedrin tried the young governor, but Hyrcanus, swayed by the Romans, acquitted Herod. However, the external influence was so obvious to the Jews that Herod had to flee to Damascus.

During Herod’s exile, civil wars erupted in Judea, resulting in the assassination of Antipater. Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus, seized the throne with the help of the Parthians, a rival empire to Rome. Seeing his chance, Herod immediately left Damascus and sought Roman help. Caesar Augustus responded to Herod’s plea by appointing him king over Judea. He returned to Judea with a large Roman army and deposed Antigonus.

Herod’s reign is commonly separated into three periods:

- The first, 37 to 25 BC, saw Herod removing all threats to the throne;
- The second, 25 to 13 BC, is regarded as the acme

HEROD THE GREAT

Intrigue, Architecture, and Cruelty

of his reign, when he began massive building projects and expanded Judea;

- The third and final, from 13-4 BC, is defined by Herod's tragic spiral toward death.

First Period of Herod's Reign

As a usurper, Herod's first challenge was to win over the Jewish people. Despite winning Rome's full support, he was generally despised by his subjects. He attempted to sway them to his side by imprisoning his Edomite wife, Doris, and their son, Antipater II, so that he could marry Hyrcanus' Hasmonean granddaughter, Princess Mariamne. This proved unsuccessful.

The Jews severely disapproved of Herod because he was only half-Jewish and because he had illegally executed Hezekiah, the brigand. The people, instead, placed their loyalty in the Pharisees. Realizing this, Herod used his wealth to win the Pharisees' favor, and they proclaimed that he was made king by God's judgment, thus deserving Jewish respect and obedience. Their support helped abate the Jews' hatred and calmed unrest.

The nobles of Judea, however, still disapproved of him. He quieted them, not with wealth, but with brutality. Many of the nobles supported his former adversary, Antigonus, so Herod decided to execute the 45 wealthiest and most prominent members of the noble class as traitors. He then seized their lands and wealth to pay tribute to the Romans. The remaining nobles were frightened into submission.

The Hasmoneans also disapproved of Herod because of a crucial matter, the high priesthood. In 40 BC, when the Parthians invaded Jerusalem with Antigonus, they took captive Hyrcanus, the high priest. Herod replaced him

with a Babylonian Jew, Ananel, of whom Alexandra, the prominent Hasmonean grandmother of Mariamne, highly disapproved. Alexandra petitioned the famous Cleopatra, the wife of Marc Antony, Herod's Roman patron, to persuade her husband to force Herod to replace Ananel with Aristobulus, Mariamne's brother. Mariamne likewise urged her brother's appointment.

Under mounting pressure, in 35 BC Herod appointed Aristobulus, a seventeen-year-old at the time. In doing so, Herod broke biblical law, which states a high priest holds office for life, as well as that a high priest must be thirty years of age. Aristobulus did not officiate as high priest for long, however. He became popular with the Jews—too popular for Herod, who saw him as a potential threat to his throne. At Herod's command, the young man was assassinated at a feast in Jericho later that same year.

As mentioned above, Herod had political ties to Marc Antony, who became an enemy of Caesar Augustus. When Herod realized Augustus would defeat Antony, he feared his connection might lose him his position. In a show of loyalty, he presented himself before Augustus, but before he made the trip, he had Hyrcanus executed, just in case the aged Hasmonean tried to claim the throne. Herod returned in 30 BC with Augustus' blessings and the new districts of Jericho, Gadara, Hippos, Samaria, Gaza, Anthedon, and Joppa, all added to his domain by the generous emperor.

Upon his return, Herod's wife Mariamne was falsely accused of being unfaithful. He swiftly and without trial executed the accused man, and he had Mariamne investigated, condemned, and executed in 29 BC. His paranoia not yet quelled, between 29 and 25 BC, Herod executed every relative of Hyrcanus who may have posed even the slightest threat to his throne.

Second Period

The second period, from 25 to 13 BC, is considered by many historians to be the height of Herod's reign. During these years, the king undertook massive building projects—everything from cities to statues in Jerusalem and abroad. Beyond introducing new buildings into Judea, he aggressively pushed Greek culture on the Jews during this time to make Judea look as “Roman” as possible in order to continue his good standing with Augustus.

In this, Herod succeeded. He visited Augustus numerous times during this period, and Caesar gave him additional provinces, doubling Judean territory by 13 BC. However, his real success was dependent upon peace in his region, which he won by taking away power from the Jews.

Herod constructed a number of important cities, and named most of them either in honor of Caesar or his own Edomite family. Perhaps most famous of these is the important coastal city of Caesarea, where Pontius Pilate eventually lived. In addition, Herod had a temple erected in honor of Augustus there. North of Jericho, he founded the city of Phasaelis, named after his brother, and to honor his father, he built Antipatris, where the Romans later held Paul captive (Acts 23). Besides these cities, Herod also built or restored a number of fortresses across Judea to strengthen its defenses.

Herod's best-known building projects were in Jerusalem. Within its walls, he built a theater, and in a valley just outside, an amphitheater, introducing Greek arts. For himself, he built an ornate palace of gold and marble in the city's western district. North of the Temple, he raised a massive citadel, Fortress Antonia, in honor of his patron, Marc Antony.

Of course, his most important and well-known project was the Temple in Jerusalem. Deciding that the Temple built by Zerubbabel no longer matched the quality of its surrounding architecture, he undertook a massive rebuilding project in 20 BC. The project was so extensive that the Temple was not truly completed until AD 64, only six years before its destruction. The Temple's beauty was acknowledged throughout the Roman world, and even became proverbial: “He who has not seen Herod's building has never seen anything beautiful.”

The Jews were not particularly supportive of his ventures. He tried to follow biblical criteria in his construction of the Temple, such as not including any images, allowing only priests to work on the Temple proper, and never entering the inner rooms himself. Yet, late in the construction, Herod enraged the Jews by placing the image of an eagle on the entrance gates. The Jews also found it hypocritical that Herod, only half-Jewish, claimed piety in this work, despite building numerous temples in honor of other gods in other Roman provinces, including a temple to Apollo and even one to Baal.

The Jews were also suspicious of his aggressive marketing of Greek culture. He not only introduced Greek theater, but also began hosting Olympic-style games in Jerusalem in honor of Caesar. He also syncretized Greek and Jewish culture in every possible area. He surrounded himself with a cabinet of Greek orators and philosophers as advisors, and he replaced state officials with Greek politicians. One historian claims that Herod “boasted of being more nearly related to the Greeks than to the Jews.”

Herod's Hellenization was an effort to further ingratiate himself with Augustus, proving his loyalty to Caesar above his loyalty to God. The Jews recognized where his devotion lay and grew restless. The king responded by increasing taxes, banning any kind of public assembly, and quickly imprisoning any critic of his reign in one of his many fortresses.

This period may have been both the pinnacle of Herod's splendor and Judea's power, but it came with a grave price. During this time, his homicidal atrocities were masked by his building projects, but they resurfaced with renewed tragedy in his final years, from 13 to 4 BC.

Final Period

The final period of Herod's reign, up to his death, is defined by family betrayal, sickness, and more bloodshed. Herod became suspicious of Alexander and Aristobulus, his two sons by Mariamne, whom he suspected were conspiring against him for the throne in revenge for executing their mother. In an attempt to counter their suspected plot, he allowed Antipater, his son by his first wife, Doris, to return from exile. Whether Alexander and Aristobulus actually plotted against Herod is questionable, but Antipater's hatred for Herod was unequivocal. He conspired to take the throne and began by slandering his step-brothers. Convinced, Herod imprisoned and executed Alexander and Aristobulus in 7 BC.

Antipater had won support in the courts of Judea, but he was not satisfied. Next, he sought to poison his father. He sent poison to his ally, Pheroras, one of Herod's brothers, who dined with the king often enough to carry out the assassination. The king, however, discovered the plot only when, mistaking Antipater's intentions, Pheroras drank the poison himself. When Pheroras' servants informed Herod about the plot, Antipater was executed.

Between then and his death, Herod ordered a massacre for which he would be reviled throughout the professing Christian world. The old, paranoid king, after hearing from the visiting magi that a new King of the Jews had been born in Nazareth, ordered all male children under the age of two to be killed (Matthew 2:16). Having been confronted with imagined and unimagined threats for many years, Herod dealt with this threat with unprecedented cruelty.

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Should a Christian Play Devil’s Advocate?

“Let your light so
shine before men,
that they may see
your good works and
glorify your Father
in heaven.”
—Matthew 5:16

Have you ever used a phrase or saying that you do not fully understand? We all have and do. We too frequently use idioms, especially, in our everyday conversation without the foggiest idea of where the particular expression originated or what it really means.

For instance, we might tell our children to “pipe down” when they are being a bit too noisy, and we need quiet to study. Most of us probably do not realize that this idiomatic statement comes from life aboard naval ships. The boatswain would blow various signals on a pipe or whistle to command the crew to do various things. Among the signals he blew were orders to “turn in” for the night and blow the “lights out” for sleep, when it was time for quiet.

Recently, I realized that, when I spoke of “playing devil’s advocate,” I had been using a phrase without really knowing what it entailed. Immediately after using it, I was left wondering what it really means.

Where did this phrase come from? What is its meaning today? More importantly, should we as Christians personify this phrase in our daily lives?

A little thought and study shows that a Christian faces real dangers in playing the role of “Devil’s Advocate.” It is time that we learned what it is all about.

Origins and Meaning

The term “Devil’s Advocate” dates back to the sixteenth century to an official office within the Roman Catholic Church known in Latin as the *Advocatus Diaboli*—literally, “Devil’s Advocate.” This person was a canon lawyer appointed by that church to raise doubts against the genuineness of the miracles of a candidate for canonization. He was to expose any lack of formality in the investigation of the miracles, and to

ready answer *Should a Christian Play Devil's Advocate?*

assail the general merits of the candidate, whose cause is sustained by an *Advocatus Dei*—literally, “God’s Advocate.” The position was established in 1587 during the reign of Pope Sixtus V, and it was not abolished until 1983 by Pope John Paul II.

According to thefreedictionary.com, *Devil’s advocate* is today primarily defined as “one who argues against a cause or position, not as a committed opponent but simply for the sake of argument or to determine the validity of the cause or position.” Since the Roman Catholic Church office has been abolished, and with the passage of time, the modern-day usage of this phrase has become more general, simply to identify a contrarian of sorts.

However, its origins cannot be ignored. Is it harmless in this day for us to play Devil’s advocate? After all, is it just someone who argues the other side of a cause or position, or should we be conscious of something more?

We need to consider the question: Do we, as Christians, actually want to advocate for Satan the Devil? To provide another level of clarity, let us ask one more question: What is an “advocate”?

Using the same online dictionary, we find that an *advocate* is defined as “one that pleads the cause of another, specifically one that pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court; one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal; or one that supports or promotes the interests of another.”

Using just the verbs in these definitions, we can see that an advocate is one who pleads, defends, supports, or promotes the interests of another. In this case, the “other” is Satan, the Adversary of God, His Son, and His true church! Do we really want to see things from his side? Or worse, take his side, even in argument?

While the Roman Catholic Church may have instituted an official Devil’s Advocate more than four centuries ago, playing “Devil’s Advocate” predates that church’s practice by nearly 5,600 years. Interestingly enough, mankind has unwittingly played this role since the Garden of Eden.

Let the Games Begin!

Genesis 3 is the famous chapter that is referred to as “The Temptation and Fall of Man” in many Bibles. It could also be rightly named “Mankind Deceived into Playing Devil’s Advocate.” Here are the first seven verses:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said,

‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

In verse 4, Satan slyly convinces Eve that God has lied to them by withholding from them the ability to become “like God, knowing good and evil.” God was being unfair, he argues, keeping them from their potential. The passage suggests that, after hearing this, Eve did not hesitate one bit in making her decision. She took the bait without even flinching and ignorantly promoted the interests of Satan by giving the forbidden fruit to her husband. In effect, she signed on to advance Satan’s objective—to derail God’s plan to create mankind in His spiritual image.

Satan’s tack has been the same ever since, even though he must realize that, due to Christ’s death and resurrection, he will ultimately lose (Revelation 20:10). While he still has time, he will try to make as many people as he can fail to reach their incredible human potential. He will do whatever is in his power—whatever God allows him to do—to convince them that his way is superior to God’s.

For those that have been called by God in this lifetime, we have far more at stake here. If Satan can succeed in deceiving us to advocate for him more and more, he greatly increases our chances of being subject to the second death, the eternal death in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

Peter warns us of the dangers that Satan poses to God’s people: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8). According to the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, “sober” (Greek *nepho*) is a verb found in the New Testament only in the figurative sense, implying “sober watchfulness.” In addition, “vigilant” (Greek *gregoreuo*) means “to keep awake, i.e., watch (literally or figuratively).”

Combining “sober” and “vigilant” paints an interesting word-picture for us. When a person is heavily intoxicated, he wants nothing more than to sleep it off, so it is impossible for the sleeping drunkard to be vigilant about anything. The message for us is that we must be attentive to our physical and spiritual condition so that we do not become spiritually intoxicated.

This type of person is exactly the kind whom Satan seeks. If we enter this state, then we make ourselves a prime target to be devoured by the “roaring lion.”

Both Ends Against the Middle

Another factor that can enter this equation is that Satan likes to “play both ends against the middle.” This expression describes a person encouraging two people or groups to compete with each other in order to gain an advantage for himself. Satan is always trying to gain an advantage, and he even had the audacity to try this with his own Creator, Jesus Christ.

Both Matthew 4 and Luke 4 record for us Satan’s attempts to separate the Son from the Father—dividing the Family of God for all eternity in order to gain the advantage for himself. Luke 4:3-4 records his first temptation:

And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’”

Satan knew the power within Jesus’ grasp, and by appealing to His physical need, His great hunger, he tried to persuade Him to rely on His own power. Obviously, his first attempt failed spectacularly, so he tried another approach:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” (Luke 4:5-8)

Here, Satan tried to exploit his position and authority as the god of this age (II Corinthians 4:4) by promising authority and glory to Christ, the One who granted him the position he now fills! The price was that Jesus would have to worship him. The Devil’s pride is mind-boggling—to think that he, Satan, a created being, would try to bribe his Creator to worship him! This was a second stunning failure. Satan makes a third attempt:

Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you

up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:9-13)

Even in His weakened state, Jesus knew that no physical harm would come to Him, as He drew His strength from His close relationship with His Father. His response shows for whom Jesus was advocating, His Father. Thus, Satan’s third and final attempt fails just as completely as the other two had.

Many times, as physical human beings, we take Satan for granted—and this is exactly what he wants us to do. He hopes that we will underestimate him, and he works hard in the world to make his very existence a matter of superstition and primitive belief. He knows that when we take him too lightly, we let our guard down, and he can strike.

We must never forget that, if Satan had the arrogance to try this with Jesus Himself, he will not hesitate to try to separate us from the Father and Christ.

Without a doubt, to gain an advantage for himself, Satan would love nothing more than to make two of God’s people or church groups compete with each other. As a result, he creates the element of distraction, and by becoming distracted from our true focal point, we have effectively allowed our spiritual armor to fall off. Jesus, in Luke 11:17, warns us of the fruit of such action: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.” It is a recipe for spiritual disaster!

Ambassadors for Christ

An *ambassador* is “a diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative-in-residence by one government or sovereign to another; an authorized messenger or representative.” Scripture confirms that, after being called and baptized, we as ambassadors and citizens represent the greatest government the earth will ever see (II Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20). We know this intellectually, but how often do we consciously force ourselves—in thought, speech, and action—to advocate for God and His way?

Matthew records Jesus’ encouraging words that teach us for whom and how we are to advocate. Remember, an advocate is one that pleads, defends, supports, or promotes the interests of another. Our advocacy is intended to point others to the Source of our light—our heavenly Father—and we accomplish this by our godly examples:

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personal *The First Commandment*

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and obey the true God on their own, the best they can do in regard to a standard of values is their own experience, and that has produced this perverted and violent world. That is the story of idolatry in Romans 1.

Our Values Must Change

Acts 26:12-19 provides us with an example of how misled a sincerely wrong person can be:

While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So I said, "Who are you Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Here is a virtually perfect example for us. Paul, despite his zeal, did not know the true God even though he was sincerely religious. He was sincerely deceived. Jesus basically asked him, "Paul, why do you continue to beat your head against the wall by following the path you are on?"

Can we hear in that question His expectation even of the unconverted? There is in the unconverted some minimal level of understanding and repentance that enables them to see that their values are wrong and to change to those coming from a different, far better Source—Him. If He expects that of them, what does He expect of us whose minds have been opened?

Paul's conversion led to many being given the opportunity to change their values more fully. However, the fact remains to this day what king David wrote and that Paul later quoted in Romans 3:11, "There is none who seeks after God." Carnal people are so imbued with their own systems that they will not change unless essentially forced to.

Satan has the world so deceived that God is veiled from the eyes of their understanding, so Satan is the god of this world and the source of its ways of living. He is worshipped and responded to by all of mankind. Unless God

moves to change our values, we rarely change for the better. When God does move, He demands repentance of us and then loyalty to Him in our lives from then on.

Notice the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:19-24:

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

In this episode, the woman represents the unconverted person who is confronted by Jesus' truth. She is informed of changes she must make if she is to follow Christ. If a person truly wants to change once he realizes that all his life he has been sincerely ignorant regarding God and his values, the newly converted individual must seek to make whatever changes are necessary. Jesus shows her God expects this.

Does Anyone Measure Up to God?

In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus provides us with the commandment that lays the foundation for all others: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.'" This command leaves very little out in terms of our devotion to God. It involves the fear, service, obedience, and worship of the great God who is the Creator. The dictionary definition of *worship* says it involves intense admiration, adoration, honor, and devotion to someone or something. Practically, worship is our response to our god.

If we respect someone greatly, does not our respect cause us to behave differently because of him? If we know he will be in our area, do we not try to spend some time with him or at least see him? Maybe we plan to give him a gift. If we know his habits, do we not try to emulate him, such as copying his manner of dress or his speech? Whole industries are built on this reality, which is why promoters attempt to get celebrities to use and endorse their products. Finally, when we are in his company and he suggests we do something, are we not moved to submit?

In Western civilization, people and institutions reach heights of admiration that drive some to do all sorts of unusual things. Teens, mothers, and even grandmothers will swoon over a crooning singer. Fans will practically

tear the clothing from a rock star. Boys and men idolize athletic heroes. At political conventions, grown adults will act like mindless fools in behalf of their candidate.

It is this principle that is involved in keeping the first commandment. The respect and response we give to men, things, or the self should be given to God.

The KJV and the NKJV both translate Exodus 20:3 as, "You shall have no other gods before Me." It is better understood as, "You shall have no other gods *in place of* Me." The term "before Me" allows enough wiggle room that it can be argued that other gods are permitted as long as God comes first. In reality, God permits no other gods at all!

Genesis 1:1 informs us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God is Creator. This is how God introduces Himself in His Book. Paul directs our attention to this very point in Romans 1 as where men stumble by not truly acknowledging Him as Creator God, sovereign over every aspect of what He had made.

But "Creator" can be just as vague as "ballplayer," "rock star," or "actor," if we never show enough interest to study and observe the awesomely beautiful distinctiveness of His character, power, and way He reveals regarding His Person. Do we devote as much time, concern, or effort in admiring God's great ability as Creator as we do the men we admire? Using Himself as the Model, God created the potential for the qualities and abilities we admire in others to be in us, and He has far more and better in Himself than we can comprehend.

What a Great God!

The world has conditioned us to think of worship as something we do once a week. This is woefully inadequate in terms of what God expects. Is God merely on an ego trip to receive "Hallelujahs!" from His worshippers?

No! Everything He asks of us is for our good because of what it motivates us to do and become. American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming." This is true. Because a person becomes or does what his god is, he must be careful regarding his reaction to this commandment because it affects every area of life, thoughts, and action. It is not just a tiny sidebar of life. If kept as it should, it becomes part of the very foundation of what we are becoming.

Exodus 34:5-8 reveals this of God:

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

What man or institution has these qualities? In addition, He is the eternal Creator, Healer, Savior, Judge, and the very pinnacle of wisdom, understanding, and grace.

Yet, mankind is so deluded that, without realizing it, many worship their consciences formed by their own earthly experiences. Their consciences are nothing more than an inner voice, a sort of a moral policeman that has taken up residence within. Can it be trusted? Do we trust ours? This is better than nothing, but conscience is easily perverted and often abnormally developed because it is almost entirely dependent upon upbringing and propaganda from this world's media. Since this is Satan's world, there is little chance that a person's conscience will be entirely aligned with God's standards.

Others superimpose on God their conceptions of a human father, but this, too, is woefully inadequate. What if one has no father as part of his life? What if the father was stupid, foolish, tyrannical, or over-indulgent? What kind of positive impression will that leave? Is God merely a grand old man, a head-patting, gray-headed, somewhat doddering person whose mind wanders back to better times, forgetful of what is occurring on the earth and in our lives?

God's name is "I was, I am, I will be." He has lived for eternity, but He is not old; He is every bit as modern as tomorrow. When God came as a man, He showed He did not have a completely placid temperament, a God who would not say, "Boo!" He did not just let sleeping dogs lie. He was not uninspired and uninspiring; Jesus stirred people up so that they said, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46). He challenged and exposed the hypocrisies of the religion of His day and was moved to deep anger by the shameless exploitation taking place at the Temple. He was of such personality that He walked unscathed through hostile crowds. Jesus was meek, but the term indicates that He had the power to use as He willed, restraining it as an act of mercy, wisdom, and love.

Christianity is not for the soft and sentimental. We have a war on our hands, and our God is a powerful warrior—the Lord of Hosts is His name. He is on our side, but He demands our loyalty.

Idolatry Underpins Sin

Isaiah 57:15 makes an incredible statement about Him, one that is really incomprehensible to us:

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

He put this in His Word to impress us and thus encourage us with the greatness of His power, wisdom, and humility. If we are so impressed and encouraged, we respond by honoring Him through our humble obedience, thus glorifying Him and enabling Him to form us into His image.

I Corinthians 10:12-14 urges us to take stock of our relationship with Him:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

This passage appears in the midst of an epistle detailing the problems of a tumultuous congregation. Paul draws on the experiences of Israel in the wilderness as examples to us. He concludes by telling them, despite what manner of sin each individual was involved in, to turn their attention to overcoming idolatry. In other words, idolatry sat at the foundation and was ultimately the cause of whatever their sin happened to be.

God must be the Source of everything we think, say, and do for us to have a fighting chance to overcome this persistent sin. More to come.

In Christian love,



Herod the Great

(continued from page 12)

Shortly after this “Massacre of the Innocents,” Herod died of an agonizing sickness. Rewriting his will just days before his death, he made Archelaus heir to his throne and ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; his brother Antipas, tetrarch over Galilee and Perea; and his son Philip, tetrarch of the regions east of Galilee. According to orders made before Herod’s death, soldiers were to round up many of Judea’s most distinguished men into Jerusalem’s theater and execute them all. Herod justified this final act of cruelty by saying that it would ensure that the Jews lamented his passing. Happily, this order was not carried out.

By increasing Rome’s involvement in Judea; expanding the nation’s size, power, and wealth; and mixing an exclusive Jewish culture with Gentile Greek culture, Herod shaped the political, economic, and cultural world in which Jesus Christ lived. Longer-term, he also appointed men into power who would later encounter and affect the early Christian church. Despite being morally repulsive, King Herod was a towering figure in the history of Judea.

—Joseph Bowling

GOD’S TWO WITNESSES

(continued from page 9)

ened who they are. As Revelation 11:9-10 suggests, by the time they are finished with their work, the whole world will know who they are.

Instead, at this time we need to be looking for Christ-like servants who are fulfilling the type of the two olive trees—feeding the churches through their Holy Spirit-inspired works—and who are focused on “measur[ing] the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there” (Revelation 11:1). They will be intensely laboring to achieve the equipping of the saints (Ephesians 4:12) for the terrifying days to come and the return of Christ.

Who the Two Witnesses are has not yet been revealed, and how long we have to go before the time of their appearance no one knows. However, in looking for them, we need to concentrate on what Scripture reveals so that we might properly identify them. Ecclesiastes 3:11 in the Moffatt version declares how God works in these matters: “He assigned each [thing] to its proper time, but for the mind of man he has appointed mystery, that man may never fathom God’s own purpose from beginning to end.” God will make them known when their time has come. So, wait and watch!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Should a Christian Play Devil’s Advocate?

(continued from page 15)

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

We need to be careful to examine the meanings and origins of idiomatic phrases of our common parlance, like “Devil’s advocate,” and not just repeat them without knowledge. Our Savior warns us “that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). As we have seen, we may be playing into Satan’s hand. He is a formidable enemy whom we must never ignore nor underestimate. We must be spiritually sober and vigilant in resisting him because he is the last being for whom we should ever want to advocate.

Instead, we must follow Christ’s encouraging instruction by letting our light shine before others so that, as His ambassadors, we will be God’s advocates!

—Warren Lee

The State of the Union

For centuries now, non-Catholic Christians have been keeping an eye on Europe, expecting the ancient Roman Empire to revive and fulfill prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. Seemingly on cue, since the end of World War II, Europe's configuration has been continually shifting, growing into an increasingly more unified entity—a "European state"—that could begin to challenge the United States' position as sole-superpower. However, recent events and trends in Europe indicate that something else is happening.

After two devastating world wars, the leaders of European nations cast about for a way to restrain European savagery. In 1949, the Council of Europe was established, and the next year France proposed an economic community. The idea was that, if all the economies of Europe could be joined together, it would be counter to the interests of the individual states to go to war with one another. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1951), the Treaty of Rome (1957), and the Maastricht Treaty (1992), a framework was gradually created to bind Europe together via economic interests.

Many of the European elite, dissatisfied with the free-trade zone that the present EU is, are trying to turn it into a full-fledged state. Yet, doing so requires a founding document—a constitution—that defines the state and its government and lays out authority for unified foreign and defense policies, as well as other facets of a fully-functioning regime. In 2005, the first attempt at a European Constitution was put before the citizens, and it was rejected by the Dutch and the French (see "Is Europe Dying?" *Forerunner*, July 2005).

The Brussels bureaucracy, determined to push ahead with its vision, made some changes to the document, renaming it the Lisbon Treaty—for a treaty must be signed only by the governments. Eighteen EU members did so, but Ireland—despite not being required to—allowed her citizens to vote on it in a referendum. The Lisbon Treaty, like the Constitution before it, was rejected.

The message is clear: The people of Europe may put up with the EU bureaucracy, and may enjoy the economic benefits of the tariff-free zone, but they do not want a European regime. They are not willing to subjugate their national identities entirely (or even mostly) to a supranational government that does not have their best interests in mind. Every time the question is put to the people, they vote against a European state.

For the Lisbon Treaty to have been ratified, all 27 member states would have had to agree on it. Yet, now the EU is no closer to statehood than before—and it is becoming increasingly clear that European political union is unlikely to happen. The EU's mixture of members has economies grounded in distinctly different sectors (e.g., agriculture, industry, service), and many spent half of the last century on different sides of the Iron Curtain. National views on politics, trade, and defense vary widely, and trust is not especially high among a number of states who spent a large part of the last century at war.

In short, they can agree on basic, common economic interests, but the union seems to have achieved all it can. Now there are indications that some of the ties that have bound them together are beginning to loosen again as the states begin looking to their own interests.

The smaller EU states do not have enough clout to push through a governing document and oversee the formation of a true regime. It took the substantial heft of Germany to bring the Lisbon Treaty this far. France will hold the presidency beginning in July, but it sees itself as being in a better position if policies are loosened rather than bound together. France will not try to oversee a new constitution/treaty. The next heavy-weight country to hold the EU presidency—Britain—will not do so until 2017.

However, what will the EU look like in nine years? Present demographic trends suggest that the next nine years could bring about a sea change in the constituency of Europe.

Across the board, life-expectancy in the EU is increasing. However, the bloc has a total rate of only 1.5 births per woman—far below what is necessary to keep the population level stable (2.1 births per woman). Spain has the lowest at 1.15; the citizens of Italy are close at 1.18. France is at the high end with 1.88. With fewer people dying, and fewer babies being born, the overall population of Europe is aging—quickly.

The biggest challenge Europe faces will be maintaining the working-age population (16-24) needed to support the retired population. With so few babies being born, the only other source of new workers is immigration. To keep the EU's labor force at its present level, 1.5 million immigrants are needed annually. But to keep pace with providing for the retired populace with longer life-expectancy, 3 million immigrants per year will be needed.

Thus, by 2017—when the EU would be in a position to try to form another government—if it is to keep its current workforce and support its retirees, it will need to "import" between 13.5 and 27 million immigrants. To date, immigrants have mostly been coming from Middle Eastern and North African (read: Muslim) nations. In nine years, then, in order to maintain the status quo, France will have needed to augment its immigrant population by 1.6%-4.7% (France is already 8%-10% Muslim); Germany, by 5.4%-8.9% (currently 3.7% Muslim); and Italy, by 5.6%-10.7% (currently 1.5% Muslim).

As the cartoon riots and nightly car burnings in the Paris suburbs in 2005 plainly showed, cultural integration and assimilation is not Europe's strong suit. A culture war is taking place that, though relatively quiet right now, will only increase in its intensity as more Muslim immigrants are brought in to solve the demographic problem and prop up the EU's bloated pension system. If the EU continues for another nine years, ratifying a super-state constitution may be the least of its concerns.

—David C. Grabbe

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Cripple by a Pool (Part Three)

After the healing of the crippled man (John 5:1-16), the Jews do not ask him, “Who healed you?” but “Who told you to carry your bed?” (verses 11-12). They are not in the least interested in the wonderful miracle that had been performed to make this man whole and vigorous. They are focused on what they perceive to be an offense against themselves—against their laws, power, desires, and pride. Essentially, if it meant breaking their rules, they would rather let people suffer than have them healed on the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders’ laws had become their god. They had long since forgotten that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). They were unable to recognize that the Sabbath is given to provide rest from an exhausting world and to rejuvenate people’s relationship with God. Also, as this miracle typifies, healing brings rest from spiritual pain and suffering. However, these Jewish critics prefer the role of religious dictators and policemen oppressing the people. If enforcement of law only tyrannizes people and increases unnecessary suffering, it becomes harmful and worthless.



1. Is the Jews’ reaction justified? John 5:16.

COMMENT: Once the Jewish critics learn that Jesus had ordered the man to carry his bed, their criticism and attack are aimed at Him. Their ruthless reaction is to seek to murder Him, the height of hypocrisy. While they attack Christ for healing on the Sabbath, they see nothing wrong with seeking to murder the One who healed a man who had been crippled for 38 years! They consistently show no judgment or mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Hundreds of years earlier, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had seen hypocrisy in Israel, declaring it to be a problem of the heart (Jeremiah 42:20; Matthew 15:7-9). Human nature is full of hypocrisy, as can be seen in current laws that protect homosexuals and abortionists from criticism, even though they pervert and debase society and murder the unborn. At the same time, Christians are attacked and criticized for trying to raise their children to live moral and ethical lives for the benefit of all!

2. What is significant about the healed man speaking with Jesus in the Temple? John 5:13-14.

COMMENT: After his miraculous healing, the man heads to the Temple, probably to praise and thank God for his wonderful blessing. There, Christ instructs him in the spiritual principle of overcoming sin. The Jews viewed the Temple, not only as a place of thanksgiving, but also one of spiritual teaching and learning. Similarly, worship on the Sabbath with others of like mind creates a place of essential spiritual instruction for living God’s way of life. People who avoid formal worship of God miss out on vital instruction and will be spiritually unprepared for God’s Kingdom.

The man’s healing was instantaneous, but the learning is not. It is a long process that requires both instruction (hearing) and application (doing). It takes time to grow in grace and knowledge (James 1:23-25; II Peter 3:17-18; Isaiah 28:9-10), as well as patience and discipline.

Christ warns the healed man not to go back to sinful conduct, indicating that his crippled condition resulted from sin. All sickness is not caused by our own personal sin, as John 9 shows in the example of the man blind from birth. Sometimes ill health is the effect of our forebears’ sins or the accumulated sins of a whole society.

Jesus’ warning, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you,” is always apt because human nature, especially when encouraged by Satan, easily degenerates into sin. The experience of renewed health should instill in us a deeper repulsion of sin, a greater watchfulness for its pitfalls, and a more purposeful determination to overcome it. When we experience healing, we would all do well to remember Christ’s warning.

3. Why are the healed man’s words to the Jewish critics noteworthy? John 5:15.

COMMENT: The healed man tells the critics that Jesus had made him whole, or healed him, dismissing their question about who had told him to carry the bed. The Jewish critics had emphasized his carrying the bed, but the healed man (after Christ’s revelation of Himself to him) put the emphasis on the Healer, suggesting which was more important. The spiritual priority was the healing, the work of Christ.

When people criticize God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the church, it is often because they have trouble recognizing what is truly important. Ignoring God’s grace and mercy, they instead focus on a supposed violation of law, usually one they have perverted or made up, as the Pharisees did. They attack the Word of God, ignoring its important messages, and focus on picky, alleged discrepancies or fine points of the letter of the law. We must have the right priorities clearly in our minds if we are to serve and revere the sovereign God accurately and diligently.

—Martin G. Collins