

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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A monarch butterfly awaits the final stage of its metamorphosis. The Christian life is similar: a series of changes from our sinful, carnal nature to the righteous spiritual nature of God. However, we tend to resist change, satisfied with the way we are. How do we prepare ourselves to make those necessary changes?
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The Fourth Commandment

Frank Sheedy, a Catholic priest, made the following statement in *Our Sunday Visitor*, August 12, 1984, p. 11:

First, there is no commandment that Saturday should be the Sabbath. The six days when we labor and the seventh when we rest (Dt 5:13) is the commandment. The Jews chose what we now call Saturday to be their Sabbath.

Is this statement correct? According to this priest, God was not involved in this commandment; it was entirely the work of the Jews. His answer represents a clever deviation from truth that he can get away with only because his audience had little or no respect for God and the Scriptures in the first place.

In Romans 3:18, the apostle Paul gives us a snapshot confirmation of what has led to this world's tumultuous condition. "There is no fear of God before their eyes." His statement concludes a vivid and fairly detailed overview of human attitudes and conduct toward God. It captures and concisely summarizes why this dangerously violent, war-filled world exists as it is. A person's conduct about or toward something captures the essence of its perceived value to him. If he does not believe the Sabbath has value to him, or that

it is of no particular importance in God's eyes, that person will not observe it.

The Negative Force of Idolatry

Over the past few issues, I have stressed the impact of idolatry as a negative force that draws us away from the one true God, the Source of truth, beauty, goodness, and the way of life that produces right relationships by means of a relationship with Him.

Beginning with the fact that mankind generally shows no fear of God, Romans 1:24-25 illuminates how this lack of respect for Him has produced what we now observe in the world every day:

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

In examining the central issue of the first few commandments, we find that the first concerns *what* we worship. These verses in Romans 1 recap what the first commandment forbids, the worship of someone or something other than the

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Creator. Worship is the devoted service that an individual gives to what he regards above all. It is most assuredly not restricted to activity done on only one day of the week. As verse 25 shows, a person can give devoted service to created things as well as to the Creator. In addition, Paul observes in Colossians 3:5 that covetousness is also idolatry, amplifying the fact that a person can give unlawful respect and thus devotion to things other than the Creator God.

We have all heard the argument that “all religions are good,” but this is simply not true. Based on what it produces as a way of life in countries where it dominates, is militant Islam good? Are this world’s many variations of what is called Christianity good? This world’s religions can be evaluated as good or bad only in relation to each other. Not one of them is good when evaluated against Jesus’ religion, the one He passed on to the apostles.

Paul’s argument in Romans 1 is that God abandoned to uncleanness those addressed as idolaters. The term “uncleanness” indicates immorality and strongly implies sexual immorality. Based on these few verses, the conclusion is that any religion other than the true one is in reality a curse—actually, in some ways a punishment—even though it may occasionally produce some good effects!

The context pinpoints their sin in verse 25: “They exchanged *the* truth for *the* lie.” Notice the definite articles. Here, God and His way is “*the* truth,” and the people’s idolatry is “*the* lie.” How can that be good? Paul is showing that only the Creator God can be worshipped profitably. Worshipping someone or some thing other than the Creator subtly turns the thrust and direction of a person’s life off the true path of God’s purpose because the source of the authority permitting or guiding his conduct is not the true God. Even though the object of devotion may be otherwise harmless, it is sin to give it that level of respect because it absolutely cannot produce anything good toward God’s purpose.

Recall that idolatry is a sin whose fruit is almost never immediately seen. It is like a cancer that destroys by slow increments. Life’s direction and any course corrections must come from within one’s relationship with the Creator God. The wrong source will lead one astray. Clearly, properly keeping the first commandment requires a great deal of soul-searching evaluation of the true value of what we hold dear.

“You Are My Witnesses”

In John 4:24, Jesus adds more definition to the proper worship of God: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The second commandment deals with *how* we worship. The worship of God involves the totality of life, and thus it cannot be confined to a particular location or concentrated in a mere hour or two on a given day.

Our focus in worship is to be on imitating Him in the totality of life. We are to use no material aids in doing this because no one can capture in a work of art what God is. God wants us to concentrate on what He is, not on what He looks like. However, given human nature’s strong attraction to the physical, it is not easy for a person to surrender the dominance of the physical over his life. A person’s first step backward from conversion is usually to become grudgingly willing to share time and energy that should go to God with someone or something else.

When asked what the first and great commandment of the law is, Jesus replied, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Anything less will affect the quality of our worship. This is a high pinnacle to reach for, requiring a lifetime of growth in wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and character built by overcoming the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

These are included in the third commandment, which involves the *quality* of our personal witness of everything that the name of God implies. His names stand for His position as Creator, Giver of life, His character, His power, and His offices as the great Ruler, Sustainer, and Provider of this universe. In addition, He is our spiritual Father, as He has placed us into His Family. Jesus says in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

At baptism, His name becomes our spiritual family name through begetting by His Spirit, or adoption. Paul writes in Romans 8:14, 16: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. . . . The Spirit [it]self bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” By God’s adoption of us, it becomes our responsibility to grow in godly character, upholding His name and bringing honor upon it by our words, attitudes, and deeds.

Isaiah 43:10-12 instructs us in our responsibility before God:

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “that I am God.”

The church is not a great nation, military power, or cultural institution organized to change this world. We exist solely to

grow, overcome, and glorify God primarily through the witness of our lives lived in preparing for God's Kingdom.

The illustration Isaiah uses portrays us on trial and standing before a court of law. The primary witness is one's life. Even so, some of God's children are specifically chosen to witness through their words as well as through their lives. Each believer is a witness before the world of the worth of His Lord, Jesus Christ, and His purpose. Those living by faith make the witness.

How can one witness well unless he knows what to do? How can he know what to do unless he is taught? This is a major purpose of the fourth commandment. God established it to provide a means of unified instruction, and it is therefore a major player in the process of conversion and witnessing for Him.

Should We Keep the Sabbath?

However, most do not even believe that a Christian is required to keep the Sabbath. If interested in religion at all, such people are taught that the Sabbath has been done away. Are any of the other of the Ten Commandments done away? Is it now permissible for a Christian to murder, steal, and lie?

Jesus Himself says in Mark 2:27-28: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." A number of important aspects are of note here. The first is that the Sabbath was not made for its own sake, as with the other days of the week, but with the specific purpose of being a service to mankind. An alternate translation is that it was made "on account of man."

The Sabbath, then, is a specific, thoughtful gift of the Creator to serve His creation. If it were to be used by mankind merely for physical rest, any one of the seven days of the week would be acceptable. Yet, God set apart the seventh day specifically and linked it to creation (Genesis 2:1-3). Therefore, God's purpose in establishing the Sabbath is primarily to support man's part in God's spiritual creation. Such use goes far beyond mere bodily rest.

A second item is that God made the Sabbath for humanity, not just for the Jews. As God created it, its intention is universal. He made it to ensure mankind's physical and spiritual well-being.

A third point is that Jesus claims the authority as its Lord to teach us *how* to keep it, not whether to keep it. Both the immediate context and the gospels as a whole show that Jesus expected it to be kept and offered no alternatives.

Nations routinely honor citizens they believe have made significant contributions to the well-being of their people, and they often do this by setting apart a day as a memorial to them so that others will remember their contributions. For example, in this nation George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King have been so honored.

God says in Exodus 31:13: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you."

By God's own words, He is memorialized and therefore honored by our observance of the Sabbath. Compared to any man, God's contributions to the well-being of every living thing are beyond counting, but one stands out as witness to all: He is Creator. What an awesome statement to consider. Everything in and on this fantastic, floating greenhouse we call Earth is a tribute to and witnesses of His genius, power, and loving providence.

Mankind, on the other hand, has yet to create its first flea! Yet, if a man did create one, how much publicity would he want? What might he demand?

The Sabbath is a Specific Day

Genesis 2:2-3 sets the tone and establishes the first reason for Sabbath-keeping:

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

The first reason is that we are to follow His example. Because He specifically rested on the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath has universal validity. It is an example from creation, not from one of the Patriarchs, nor from Moses, nor from any Jews—because there were no Jews then.

The Scripture clearly states that this was *the* seventh day, not *a* seventh day. Though Genesis 2 is not the theological beginning of the Sabbath, yet without doubt, Exodus 20:11 shows that the keeping of it as a religious day of worship has its foundation firmly anchored in Genesis 1 and 2.

Sabbath does not literally mean "to rest." Instead, it means "to stop" or "to cease." Resting is the result of stopping what one does on the other six days. God could have rested at any time, or He need not have rested at all. He could have ended the creative cycle at the end of the sixth day, but He did not. The Sabbath is, in fact, His final creative act of that week. He created by resting.

The writer draws attention to what God did on that day even as it is drawn to what He did on the other six days. In reality, the Sabbath is the very crown of the creation week. He topped His creative activities off by creating a specific period of time sanctified for rest. It was as specifically created as what He did on the other six days. On the Sabbath, the creating continued, but took on a different form than it had on the other days, a form not outwardly visible.

As a believer gradually learns, the Sabbath symbolizes

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to God's children the fact that God is still creating (John 5:16-17). The Sabbath is an integral part of the process of creation. The physical part was finished at the end of the sixth day, but the spiritual aspect began with the creation of the Sabbath and continues to this day, even as the effects of creation on the other six days continue to this day.

At the end of the creation sequence, God created and sanctified an environment to play a major role in producing eternal and everlasting life. Through the creation of the Sabbath, God shows that the life-producing process is not complete with just the physical environment. The Sabbath plays an important role in producing spiritual life, a quality of life having a dimension that the physical alone cannot supply. Toward this end, no other day can be employed with the Sabbath's quality of effectiveness.

There is a valid reason for this. The Sabbath is not a mere afterthought of a tremendous creation, but a deliberate memorializing of the most enduring thing man knows: time. Sabbath time plays an especially important role in God's spiritual creation. Through the Sabbath, it is as if God says, "Look at what I have made, and consider that I am not yet finished creating. I am reproducing Myself, and you can be a part of My spiritual creation."

A Sanctified Day

God created the Sabbath by ceasing from His physical exertion, setting the example for man also to cease from the normal activities of the other six workdays. He also specifically blessed and sanctified it. He did this to no other day, yet men argue against keeping it—even though Jesus, like His Father, kept it. It is truly the least of the commandments to men.

"Sanctified" in Genesis 2:3 and "holy" in Exodus 20:8 are the same word in Hebrew though in different tenses. In Genesis 2, God makes the seventh day holy; in Exodus 20, He commands us to keep holy what He has already made holy. A holy God is required to make holy time, and He made no time holy other than His Sabbaths. God can make man holy, but man cannot confer holiness to the degree God does. Any other day of worship has a mere manmade holiness and is not holy as God's Sabbaths are holy. The Sabbath, then, is worthy of respect, deference, even devotion not given to other periods of time. It is set apart for sacred use because it derives from God.

The underlying implication of the usage of "holy" is *difference*. The verbal root literally means "to cut," "to cut out," "to separate from," or it can imply "to make a cut above," thus "to make special." A holy thing is an object that is different from that to which it is compared. In this case, the other six days are common and are given to the use and pursuit of the common, ordinary activities of life. Practically, it means that when the

Sabbath arrives, we should stop doing and avoid the mundane things that make or promote turning the Sabbath into an ordinary day.

Exodus 3:1-5 provides a clear illustration of what the word "holy" implies:

Now Moses . . . came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

The principle shown here is what makes the Sabbath holy, different. Because God was present, Moses had to treat the ground differently, with a respect or a deference that he would not give to ordinary ground. For the called of God, this difference, this holiness, is a spiritual thing; it is not physically discerned.

Notice that, even though Moses was aware that there was something unusual about what He was observing, God had to tell him that he stood on holy ground. It is a spiritual state that cannot be physically discerned. As for the Sabbath, God puts His presence into the day for the sake of His people and His spiritual creation.

Consider the scenario Amos 3:3 presents: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" If we want to be in God's presence in this special way and in agreement with Him, no other day will do. God has an appointment with us to meet with Him on a specific day, on Sabbath time. It is time, different from other time, just as an appointment time with a dentist is different from other time in one's life, as well as from another person's scheduled time.

A Sign

Exodus 35:1-3, which appears at the beginning of God's instructions on building the Tabernacle in the wilderness, intensifies the significance of the Sabbath's holiness:

Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said to them, "These are the words which the LORD has commanded you to do: Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a

(continued on page 16)

THE OTHER GREAT TRIBULATION

Christ prophesies in Matthew 24:21 about a coming Great Tribulation “such as had not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

He refers to an extraordinary end-time event—one that most readers will be familiar with—and He uses comparative language in doing so. It is plain from His comments that other tribulations have occurred in the past, and that they will continue into the future until this final, consummate one brings an end to all tribulations.

This passage refers to the Tribulation to end all tribulations, the greatest of them all.

However, let us consider another great tribulation and look at some of its parallels in the modern American experience. In Acts 7, at the beginning of his famous apologia, Stephen uses exactly the same words that Christ does in Matthew 24. The word order is the same, even the inflections are the same. Word for word, he uses exactly the same words to describe another great tribulation, one that happened in the past. “Now a famine and great trouble [*great affliction*, KJV] came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance” (Acts 7:11).

The Greek words are the same as in Matthew 24, but obviously, the great tribulation suffered by

Egypt in Joseph’s time is not at all the same as the future Tribulation that Christ mentions in Matthew 24. The use of identical language is, of course, not accidental and begs our attention.

Stephen says that Egypt and Canaan suffered greatly from two things: first, from “famine,” and second, from “great trouble.” The sense of the Greek is that the famine, the lack of food, *caused* the great trouble that Stephen speaks of here. The tribulation does not stand alone. J.B. Phillips translates Stephen’s statement as, “Then came the famine over all the land of Egypt and Canaan which caused great suffering.”

The tribulation of which Stephen speaks went beyond the famine itself. After all, the people, because of Joseph’s planning, did have access to some food. Apparently, there was not mass starvation at this time in Egypt. What form did this famine-induced great tribulation take in Egypt? Today, we would say that the famine caused economic, social, and political upheaval. “Upheaval” is a slightly weak word, and by the conclusion of this study, we will see that the word “revolution” is more accurate.

prophecy watch *The Other Great Tribulation*

MONEY FAILED

In just seven years—the seven years of famine—the Egyptians saw their freedoms and economic prerogatives fly away and their lifestyles change dramatically. The first listed casualty of this famine-triggered tribulation was monetary.

And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. (Genesis 47:14)

The Egyptians were not a bunch of degenerate Bedouins living on the edge, caught in the backwaters of civilization, and laboring under some inefficient and very limiting bartering system. Nothing like that! Rather, as one of the chief nations on the earth at the time, theirs was a complex society with some sort of monetary system. That monetary system completely collapsed due to the repeated crop failures in Egypt.

Joseph's response was to sell Egypt's grain on the spot market. All transactions were cash-and-carry. There was no credit. What occurred was, effectively, centralized control of the money supply. The government came into ownership of all the money, and the people had virtually none at all. However, note verses 15-16, for the people lost far more than their medium of exchange:

So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed." Then Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and I will give you bread for your livestock, if the money is gone."

So the people at this point sold their means of livelihood—their livestock in this case—to the government. Matters worsened the next year:

When that year had ended, they came to [Joseph] the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we will be servants of Pharaoh; give us seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate." (Genesis 47:18-19)

Many people conceive of ancient Egypt as having a

small ruling aristocracy, a priestly caste, and a military class, and then millions and millions of slaves. Yet, that is not how it was at all—at least not before this tribulation. What we witness in the story of the seven years of famine is instead a picture of a free people who became slaves, selling their livelihoods, their land, and finally themselves to the government. The tribulation of that day was so great that the Egyptians literally "sold the farm" to Pharaoh.

Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's. (Genesis 47:20)

The economic change was dramatic, and it was widespread. It was not local but national.

And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end. . . . Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh." . . . And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, which did not become Pharaoh's. (Genesis 47:21, 23-24, 26)

Before God instituted this great tribulation in Egypt, the people were a relatively free people, living where they wished and enjoying the private ownership of land. They also owned the means of production; in this case, the livestock. Egypt was not, at this time, a socialist state. Yet, as a result of this great distress that they were suffering, the money supply dried up, and the people became serfs. They became slaves to the government.

They were relocated at the will of the government that owned them. Their basically capitalistic system—capitalistic because capitalism is connected with the ownership of land—gave way to a far more limiting and inefficient means of allocating goods and services called "feudalism." The people became serfs, sharecroppers. All of this in seven years!

This is why the word "upheaval" seems so weak. What happened in Egypt can only be described as a time of social and economic *revolution*. It was indeed a great tribulation.

PARALLELS TO RECENT TIMES

Intriguing parallels exist between the Egyptian great

tribulation in Joseph's time and the American experience in the 1900s, particularly focusing on the 1930s. This is not to argue that the troubles in Egypt were a type of the Great Depression because there are some major differences, especially in the area of credit availability. Nevertheless, the parallels between these two eras are unmistakable. Four of them are worthy of note.

First, as in Egypt, the failure of America's monetary supply in the 1930s started on the farm. It did not start on Wall Street—it *ended* on Wall Street. The agricultural failures of the '30s, during the drought of the Dust Bowl years, eventually reverberated throughout the entire economy. Those years of drought-caused tribulation brought revolutionary changes both in the money supply and in the social policy of the United States.

For instance, the federal bureaucracy grew in that time probably about as fast as Egypt's did in Joseph's day. At the same time, Americans witnessed a major abridgement of their freedoms, one of which continues unabated to this day. Just as in Joseph's day, when the Egyptians volunteered to sell their livestock, lands, and lives to the government, Americans of the Depression Era seemed to ask for increased government involvement in and control of their lives. They voted for Franklin Roosevelt, as he would say it, "Again and again and again and again." Today, the Constitution with its Bill of Rights counts for little more than a piece of memorabilia.

Second, like Egypt, America has undergone a revolutionary urbanization over the past one hundred years or so. American farmers by the millions have vacated their land and moved into the cities, usually for economic reasons—to find better jobs. In many cases—and this is true not only for the 1930s but before and after that decade—they were forced to move off the land because they could not pay the mortgage. Even today, the confiscatory federal inheritance tax forces heirs literally to sell the farm of their deceased parents.

Urbanization has been forced on Americans by the government's tax and banking policies. Americans have become tax slaves forced to give Pharaoh, as it were, far more than the twenty percent that Joseph asked. (By the way, a number of monographs written by economists over the years argue that the income tax in fact puts American workers under forced labor. This is an area of economic theory into which we will not stray.)

Third, as in Joseph's time, twentieth-century Americans experienced government control of monetary policy to an extent that was not even dreamed of by this nation's Founding Fathers. Probably the best example is certainly the most heavy-handed one: Franklin Roosevelt's calling in of the gold in the 1930s, in the early years of that decade's banking crisis. It is an

obvious parallel to Joseph's gathering of "all the money that was found in the land of Egypt," as we read in Genesis 47:14.

Fourth, today as in Joseph's day, the word of the ruler has become law. Notice that Joseph was not just the chief administrator in Egypt. Rather, he had the prerogative of establishing laws (Genesis 41:40), which changed the very fabric of Egyptian society.

It is an education to read Franklin Roosevelt's second inaugural address. In it, he issued a veiled—but unmistakable—threat to the Congress of the United States. He said in so many words, "Support my programs to socialize and federalize the American economy, or I will establish a dictatorship." Congress got the message. The President became a virtual king and began to issue a flow of executive orders that has not abated to this very day.

Today, America is wealthy, but only because plastic has replaced gold as money, just as it has replaced steel in industry. America is a society founded on credit and hydrocarbons, not gold and not iron. Look under the veneer of her paper/plastic wealth, and one finds an America in great tribulation to this very day.

THE FINAL DISTRESS

Of course, this is not that final distress, that mother of all tribulations that Christ spoke of in Matthew 24. That will occur later. However, it is clear that Genesis 47 does etch out in faint outlines the nature of that last Tribulation.

Herbert Armstrong often preached on Matthew 24, and he taught us that the famines, the pestilences, the earthquakes, and the wars that are mentioned in verse 7 are not the Tribulation in itself (which is mentioned in verse 21). They are simply precursors to it, and in a sense, they are causes of that Tribulation.

In that final distress, that final Tribulation, Israelites—not only Americans but all Israelites—having cast their gold in the street, will be bereft of money (Ezekiel 7:19; Zephaniah 1:18). At that time, the credit system will be defunct. They will be without property, without homes, without cars, and without the means of production. Lacking personal freedoms, they will be slaves, moved at the will of the malevolent state, which owns them.

That malevolent state will perpetuate all of this with the terrible efficiency that history records former heads of the Beast utilizing (Revelation 17:7-18). The horrors of Auschwitz will appear tame. Let us "watch therefore, and pray always" (Luke 21:36) that we may be reckoned worthy to escape all these things, and to find a place of safety, as God wills.

—Charles F. Whitaker

ARE WE READY

We have heard a great deal lately about change. Politicians tell the nation that it needs a change of leadership, a change of ideas, and change in outlook. And we do not just need change for the sake of change, but we need “change we can believe in.” While they promise blue skies and rainbows in exchange for votes, very little change actually happens. As the saying goes, “The more things change, the more they remain the same.”

The apostle Paul writes to the church—those he considered to be true Christians—in Ephesians 4:22-24:

[P]ut off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Paul tells us that Christians must change—but the change he advocates is not just any change. He qualifies the change by stating, “Put off . . . the old man . . . , and . . . put on the new man.” The change he commands is a complete change of heart, a change from corruption toward inward purity.

This change is so severe that it is as if we have been totally renewed or become a completely new person. We are to have new attitudes, new desires, new habits, and new behaviors. The apostle further clarifies for us that the goal of this radical change is to be modeled after God’s righteous and holy character. It is a transformation that is a fundamental part of God’s purpose: creating sons and daughters in His image (Genesis 1:26).

To change is to cause to be different. In its simplest form, a change can fall into one of four categories:

1. We can *start* doing something that we should already be doing, say, fasting or serving.
2. We can *do more* of something that we are

already doing but currently not doing enough of, for instance, Bible study or prayer.

3. We can *stop* doing something that we currently do but should not be doing at all, for example, gossiping or stealing office supplies.

4. We can *do less* of something that we are already doing and that is fine to do but not if done in excess. Perhaps it is something we are currently doing too much of, like watching television.

The Biggest Change

With that backdrop, let us imagine for a moment that we can hear God’s thoughts, and right now He is looking at each of us individually and evaluating our hearts, just as He tells us He does. We hear Him say to us, “I sure do love you, and I want you in my Family. However, before you can enter My Family, you must make changes, and the biggest change you need to make is”

Now we need to complete that sentence using one of the four possible changes—start doing, do more, stop doing, or do less of something—and hold that thought for a minute. While we all have many changes to make, we should be focusing now on the number-one change, the top-priority change that we need to make. Envision for a minute what it would be like—what would be different—when we have successfully completed this change.

We certainly cannot assume that we are thinking as God thinks, for we know that even the wisest of men are but fools when compared to the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:25). More likely than not, the particular change that we are thinking about right now is nothing new to us. We all need to make changes, and we know what many of those changes are. In many instances we have been trying to make this exact change for some time, but for whatever

FOR CHANGE?

reason, we have been unsuccessful thus far.

Why? Why is change so difficult?

To answer this question, we must each turn back the clock. From the time we were born, all of our experiences have been shaping and molding our hearts and minds. Our personalities and habits have gradually formed and been cast as a result of our own personal histories. None of us has experienced exactly the same things, and we are all somewhat unique in our behaviors. This is why it is so difficult to know someone unless we know his life's story: where he grew up, what his childhood was like, what school he went to, how often he moved, what his father or mother did for a living, and so on.

It is during this process of living that people develop behavior patterns and habits. These patterns are performed so often that they become almost involuntary responses. They are deeply entrenched and therefore difficult to break. We can think of them as being like a 5-inch strip of a rubber tire. We can stretch, twist, or compress it, but as soon as we let it go, it snaps back to its original shape. The harder we stretch one of these patterns, the more uncomfortable we become, and likewise the more resistance we feel.

Herein lies the difficulty with change. Often, we think we want to change, yet inwardly our human nature, our carnality, suggests that we really want to remain the same. This is our internal resistance to change. It is like a spring stretched out, struggling to return to its former shape—in our case, to the old man. Our resistance to putting on the new man of Ephesians 4 is indeed our carnality. Our carnal minds have a proclivity to embrace any other option rather than changing what is comfortable to us.

In Romans 7:15, Paul relates his struggle with change: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." The things we hate are habits or behaviors that resist change, even when we know that we should have discarded them long ago.

The power of longstanding habits and behaviors can be overwhelming. We try with all of our might to establish a new way of doing things, while the cognitive processes, which are now automatic, are working behind the scenes to undermine our efforts. They continuously work against us to create and promote an emotional drive that urges us to behave in the familiar, albeit undesired way.

The only way out of this trap is the same way we got into it, and that happened oh-so-gradually. We must consciously retrain our minds and develop new habits, new behaviors.

But how?

Making Change Happen

Before we can begin to go down the road of making successful changes, we must recognize and be convicted of the need to change. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 4, we must evaluate ourselves against God's righteousness and true holiness to identify the specific changes we need to make.

However, we cannot stop there. We need to write them down, and we should categorize them into one of the four actions identified above: Start, Do More, Stop, Do Less.

We also must understand and truly believe the reasons for making the change. We need to envision what life will be like—what *we* will be like—when we have made this change. What differences will we notice in ourselves and in our relationships with our mates, our families, our coworkers, and our friends?

The biggest barrier to change is a lack of motivation or conviction to start the change process. But as Christians in God's church, we have an incredible motivation in the prospect of the future inheritance as sons of God. For instance, Paul writes in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (see I John 3:1-2). We have an awesome potential!

So, the first attribute of successful change is *change readiness*. We must be ready to change, and we must ask God to help us identify changes that need to be made. If we have the willingness to improve, the understanding of the changes that we need to make, and the underlying reasons why we need to make them, then we have a solid start towards making change happen.

However, human nature is impatient when it comes to change. Change is uncomfortable, and research indicates that it takes on average 21 days to create or change habits. The human mind wants to see instantaneous results, but we must remember that change is hard work. There are no short cuts to successful change.

After all, God created time for our benefit. He is outside of the constraints of time, and with His speed of thought, He could certainly transform us instantly. However, in His wisdom our Almighty Creator knows that instantaneous change would come too easy for us, and it would probably not be everlasting. He is not willing to take this risk.

The changing-over-time part of this equation for man is crucial. It takes time for us to overcome our weaknesses and to put on the new man. Realizing that it takes time, we must stay the course of change. Notice Paul's encouragement in II Corinthians 4:16-18:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We must stay focused on the need for change. We will need endurance and commitment, not just to change, but to *complete the change*—to take the process all the way to the end. While the outward, physical man may be growing weak, the inward, spiritual man—our hearts—will be renewed. The trials, the difficulties of our changes, while severe, will produce for us a far more exceeding and eternal joy and glory.

The final and most important attribute of successful change is *maintaining faith* in God the Father and Jesus Christ. It is through them and with them that all change is possible. Our carnal minds provide the greatest resistance to spiritual change, and therefore we cannot go it alone.

Successful change requires our Helper, God's Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). We must ask for God's help, His strength, to keep our hearts and minds focused on positive change even though we are in the midst of trials. The apostle Paul declares in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And so can we. Our need for change and our need for the strength and guidance to change should be a part of our daily prayer. Through constant contact with God—who is driving these necessary, spiritual changes—we will maintain our faith in Him.

Called to Change

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul instructs us to change: to put off the old man and to put on the new man. We must change our heart. We need to develop new attitudes, desires, and behaviors modeled after God's holy character.

God is creating us in His image, and this process of change to this end is difficult and uncomfortable for our carnal minds. Yet, to continue without change is, in effect, to ensure failure! God has given us incredible motivation in the prospect of being His heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. What an astounding goal!

Before we can start to change, we must recognize the need to change through self-evaluation. We should ask God for help in identifying the changes that we need to make. Whatever the change—Start, Do More, Stop, Do Less—we should write it down and the reasons why we need to change it. We should vividly envision what will be different when the change is made.

No change happens overnight, and we must with endurance and commitment remain focused on our need for change—our need to put off the old man and put on the new one—because our carnality vigorously resists spiritual change. To overcome, we must work diligently, asking God daily for His help. For us, successful change is a requirement, not just an option: God has called us to this process of spiritual preparation for His Kingdom.

Paul proclaims in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." To be in Christ is to be united to Him by faith. If we are united to Christ by faith, we will live like Him. Of necessity, changes will be produced in our renewed hearts, and we will become new, a work of God's divine, creative power even more magnificent than when He created the universe out of nothing.

—Bill Onisick

ready answer

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

From Sheriff to Shepherd: Are We Willing to Be Defrauded?

“Why do you not rather accept wrong?

Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded?” —I Corinthians 6:7

Probably the most beloved peace officer in the entire state of North Carolina was the mythical Sheriff Andy Taylor of Mayberry, a soft-spoken big man with a big heart. He seldom wore his service revolver, and he would allow the town drunk, Otis, to have his own passkey to the jail cell, allowing him to let himself in and out of the jail to sleep off his intoxication. Sheriff Taylor, mindful of the town’s blue laws, nevertheless would tolerate a couple of old maids to serve their special “recipe,” obviously laced with potent moonshine. Even so, Sheriff Taylor always received the maximum respect from the citizenry of Mayberry and the surrounding county.

Juxtaposed to the easy-going Andy Taylor was the no-nonsense, bulgy-eyed, stoop-shouldered Barney Fife, an intense, by-the-book peace officer, who was the butt of jokes throughout the community. With great dispatch, Deputy Fife would round up a truant youngster for jaywalking, or with alacrity, he would write out a string of parking tickets. Though Barney sported a sidearm, Sheriff Taylor would not let him carry a loaded gun, but allowed him one bullet in his shirt pocket pending a real emergency. The harder Barney tried to act like a sheriff, the less respect he received from his constituents.

While *The Andy Griffith Show* was a popular TV sitcom in its middle-1960s heyday, I was commencing my first role as an English teacher in a small rural community in northern Minnesota. Because of my then-skinny physical features, stoop-shouldered appearance, and facial features quite similar to Don Knotts, the actor who played the bumbling deputy, my students would mockingly call me Barney Fife. Even more similar to his physical appearance, my operating procedure and philosophical approach were a lot closer to Barney Fife’s than to Andy Taylor’s.

About eight years later, as I began my college teaching career at Ambassador College, my *modus operandi* had not changed much. During my first semester, I remember boasting to my supervisor, Dr. Lynn Torrance, “These students are going to learn that they can’t pull anything over me.”

Dr. Torrance chuckled, “Someday you’ll find it wiser to let them think they’ve pulled something over on you.” It took me well over 33 years to learn the wisdom of his counsel.

A Life of Metamorphosis

The apostle Paul spent his entire life going through a metamorphosis from his initial behavior like that of a sheriff (not allowing anyone to pull anything over on him) to filling the role of a shepherd. He changed so much that he counseled the Corinthian church members that on certain occasions, it is better to be defrauded:

Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren. (I Corinthians 6:7-8)

In our hopelessly litigious society, Americans sue for trivial reasons, not realizing the bitter consequences of erecting adversarial barriers, even between heretofore close family members. In like manner, members in some of the splinter groups of the greater church of God, citing Ezekiel 34:1-6, blamed shepherds acting like sheriffs for scattering God’s sheep.

ready answer *From Sheriff to Shepherd*

Scripture is replete with commentary on God's patience and longsuffering. For instance, before the Flood, He did not retaliate on mankind's wickedness until "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" and "the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:5, 11). Later, the Lord revealed his longsuffering to Moses: "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth . . .'" (Exodus 34:6; see Numbers 14:18; Psalm 103:8; 145:8). It is part of His perfect character.

Nehemiah emphasizes God's slow retaliation even in the midst of continuous stiff-necked rebellion on the part of His chosen people:

They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them. (Nehemiah 9:17; see Acts 13:18)

Similarly, the minor prophets repeatedly emphasize God's longsuffering, mercy, and patience:

- **Joel 2:13** So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.
- **Jonah 4:2** ". . . for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."

Practice of the Patriarchs

God's traits of mercy and longsuffering have been faithfully demonstrated and practiced in the people He has called into His service. One of the classic examples of big-hearted tolerance and mercy is seen in Abraham's deference to his nephew Lot's choice of the grazing lands in Genesis 13:8-9:

Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.

Lot took what he believed to be the choicest, while Abraham allowed himself to be cheated or defrauded, refusing to pull rank on his presumptuous nephew. God blessed him for his gracious behavior. Abraham's godly

trait of longsuffering and patience was passed on to Isaac, who would rather move than engage in endless, unproductive fighting.

And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. . . . But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." (Genesis 26:18-22)

Like his father Abraham, Isaac instinctively trusted meekness and diplomacy over strife and conflict, and he was blessed for his peacemaking. By exercising godly tact and diplomacy, Isaac pleased God, and even his former enemies dwelt in peace next to him (Genesis 26:26-29).

In his sermon at Antioch, Paul reiterates God's appraisal of David as a man after His own heart, a man who would do God's will (Acts 13:22; I Samuel 13:13-14). One thing that God evidently found commendable in David, even though at times he took it to an unfortunate extreme, was his sense of compassion, mercy, longsuffering, and incredible tolerance for insult. In both the episodes of David and Nabal in I Samuel 25 and David and Shimei in II Samuel 16, David exercised an incredible sense of self-control.

In the first example, when David's overtures for peace with Nabal were met with jeers and mocking insult, David was initially provoked to revenge, but he was quickly assuaged to tolerance when entreated by Nabal's wife, Abigail. David's latent diplomacy and tact were re-ignited by her selfless request for tolerance for her husband's foolishness:

Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!" (I Samuel 25:32-34)

In the second example, David, realizing that the anger expressed by Shimei may have had some basis in fact, put

away his pride and acquiesced to what he ultimately considered to be a judgment from God:

But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ . . . Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day.” (II Samuel 16:10-12)

David had thoroughly inculcated the godly principle that revenge belongs to God and not to man: “Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them” (Deuteronomy 32:35). In Romans 12:19, Paul repeats this instruction to Christians: “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Sterling Examples

Though Saul of Tarsus started out as a zealous hothead, he ended his life a sterling example of forbearance. He was so transformed that his sense of territoriality was in no way offended when his detractors started to preach the gospel with the motive of humiliating him:

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)

Evidently, he had no concerns about who would “get the credit.” Occasionally internecine squabbles emerge within the greater church of God, resulting in needless “sheep wars” battling over who will “get the credit” for doing “the work.” Over thirty years ago, I was playing the electric piano in our local church band. At one point, I plugged the amplifier cord into the amplifier. A super-deacon appeared seemingly from nowhere and yelled, “I’m in charge of the electronics!” promptly pulling the cord out of the amplifier and plugging it right back in! In protecting our spheres of “responsibility,” we can become estranged from some of our fellow parts in the Body of Christ.

Of course, Jesus gave us the most focused example of meekness and slowness to anger. In I Peter 2:21-23, the apostle comments on His remarkable sense of self-control and His reluctance to retaliate:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. . . .

Human nature, perpetually at enmity with God and His law, finds the idea of non-retaliation repulsive. Students in today’s high schools and colleges do not like the idea of being “dissed” (disrespected) and will do everything in their power to “get even,” leading to gang wars and homicides.

Avoiding Altercation

As a teacher in institutions where the reaction to “dissing” was quite intense, I mistakenly adopted the modus operandi of Deputy Barney Fife, desperately trying to maintain control at all costs, including my blood pressure and adrenals. I was determined that nothing would escape my attention. I wish that I had read the article by Dr. S. I. McMillen on “Getting Even,” one abstracted from his 1962 book, *None of These Diseases*:

Have you ever observed the grizzly bear feeding area at Yellowstone Park? The park ranger dumps garbage into a clearing and it isn’t long before a grizzly bear arrives. Soon he is joined by the one animal he allows to eat with him—a skunk. The grizzly is one of the strongest animals in the West and could easily win in any fight with a skunk. Yet the grizzly leaves the skunk alone. Surely the grizzly resents the skunk and yearns to get even with him for his brazen impudence. But he doesn’t. Why? Because he knows there is a *high cost in getting even*. Smart grizzly! Certainly much smarter than many human beings who spend weary days and sleepless nights brooding over their resentments and trying to hatch ways to squelch someone. Man doesn’t seem to learn that the high cost of getting even may be ulcers, colitis, toxic goiter, strokes or even fatal heart attacks. The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. I cannot enjoy working anymore because he even controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too many stress hormones in my body, and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work.

When I was in undergraduate school, my violin instructor, Dr. John Shepard, suffered a massive heart attack. Before this episode, he had been a rather high-strung individual with fastidious attention to minute details and a low tolerance for his students’ mistakes. Afterward, he

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personal *The Fourth Commandment*

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Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.”

Even though the Israelites were constructing an important edifice devoted to the worship of God, they were not to desecrate this holy time by working on it.

Exodus 31:13, 17 adds further weight to the importance of the Sabbath:

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. . . . It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

An interesting and significant term is used in both of these verses: The Sabbath is a *sign*, not a mark. Bible usage shows that a sign is something voluntarily accepted, whereas a mark is placed on a person against his will. The Sabbath is a special sign of a special covenant between God and His people. In the wilderness, His people were the Israelites; today, it is the Israel of God, the church of God (Galatians 6:16).

A sign can identify a person’s occupation or an individual’s or group’s purpose. Signs can give directions (like traffic signs), or they can bring people together with shared interests and a common purpose (like flags). A sign can be the pledge of mutual fidelity and commitment (as in putting a hand over one’s heart). Organizations use signs to designate membership so that members can recognize each other (as with secret handshakes).

In the church’s case, the Sabbath serves as an external and visible bond that simultaneously unites and sanctifies us from everyone else. Almost everybody else keeps Sunday or nothing. Through the Sabbath, the Christian knows that God is sanctifying him. Everyone who has kept both Sabbath and Sunday knows this. Sunday sets no one apart from this world because so many in this world observe it.

God has a purpose He is working out. He has made a tremendous investment in us, in His creation, and in the death of His Son. The Sabbath is a major means by which He identifies and protects His investment.

Why Keep It?

If the only reason He created the Sabbath were because we need physical rest, any old time would do. Ultimately, however, the real sign appears in how and why one keeps the Sabbath. Thus, God made a specific period of time

special so that He could meet with His people during that sanctified period to help them become even more different for their benefit.

What is His major goal in doing this? He educates His people in His way of life. In part, He prepares His people to witness for Him by this means. As an analogy, suppose a basketball coach told his players, “Come to the gym at 8 AM Monday, and I will teach you how my team plays ball.” Yet, what if some players went to a different gym at a different time with a different coach?

Players on a team who take the game seriously begin to take on the qualities and philosophy of their coach. People who involve themselves deeply in athletics say they can often tell by a player’s characteristics that he has trained under a certain coach. They remark that he has the John Wooden or John Thompson “way” about him. What has happened is that the player has taken on the “sign” of his coach, and it has “sanctified” him from other players who were not trained by that particular coach.

The Sabbath was created because it both enhances and protects a Christian’s relationship with God. It also provides a witness to God, to the person keeping it, and to the world. It exists to help keep a Christian pointed in the right direction and in a proper frame of mind, and it provides him with the right knowledge and understanding to negotiate the way to God’s Kingdom.

We live in a grubby, grasping, material world. Every day challenges us with its built-in bias toward material things. With human nature ever-present within us, it is not hard to overlook spiritual things in the pressured rush to accomplish each day’s work.

The Sabbath, though, almost forces us to think about the spiritual—about God and His ongoing spiritual creation in us. It presents us with the opportunity to consider the *whys* of life, to orient ourselves properly so that we can best use our time during the other six days. The Sabbath is the kernel, the nucleus, from which proper worship—our response to God—grows.

Existentialist philosophers say that life is absurd, that it is but a prelude to death. All of life, they proclaim, is virtually empty of value because it has no ultimate goal better than what one already has. Life is going nowhere. Yet, keeping the Sabbath is in fact a celebration of just the opposite: It is all about life and its great goal as planned by the very Creator! It concerns His ongoing creative process toward our being made into the spiritual image of His Son.

Life may indeed be stressful, tiring, and sometimes even frightening, but life is not absurd. It is a prelude to life on an infinitely greater and higher level. As we proceed through the time given to us, the more we become like Him, the more sanctified we become from the world. In this mentally refreshing and elevating experience, we have a tiny foretaste of what is to come.

A Day of Freedom

In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the fourth commandment charges:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Notice *how* we are commanded to sanctify the day. The emphasis here is on being free. God says, “Remember [on this day] that you were a slave.” The implication is obvious. When the Israelites were slaves, they had no freedom to make choices. Therefore, if we keep this day properly, we can remain free. If properly used, the Sabbath compels us to remember the past as well as to look forward to where our lives are headed.

We do this through Bible study and hearing sound, inspired messages combined with meditation and conversation in fellowship. In church services we hear a great deal about the World Tomorrow and the world today. Most messages involve sin in some way. Sin is the transgression of the law (I John 3:4), but the Ten Commandments are the law of liberty (James 1:25). By keeping them, we remain free of enslavement by Satan, this world, and death. On the Sabbath, God instructs His people through His Word on how to keep His commandments and thus remain free. Exodus 16:4, 25-30 explains further:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.” . . . Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.” Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of

his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

The first commandment God specifically revealed after He freed Israel from slavery was the one intended to keep them free, the Sabbath. God gave them this witness of a double portion of manna on the sixth day and none on the seventh for forty years! Contrary to what the Catholic priest quoted at the beginning of this article said, the Sabbath is a wonderful gift of God.

Idolatry and Sabbath-Breaking

Ezekiel 20:1 reveals that while the Jews were in their captivity, the elders came to seek answers from God. What were their questions? They can be ascertained only by God’s reply. Overall, the questions seem to have been something similar to, “Why are we having all this trouble?” “What is the problem?” “When can we expect to return to Jerusalem?”

God’s answer begins to take shape in verse 7, “Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes.” The last phrase literally means “the delight of the eyes.” “His eyes” must refer to the typical Israelite’s eyes. Recall that the Israelites did what seemed right or pleasurable to them but not necessarily what was delightful to God. Since God commanded them to throw away what was a delight to them, we must understand, then, that “the delight of their eyes” was to God idolatry and rebellion.

That brief phrase contains two contrasting perspectives. It identifies what God had against them: their idolatry. The delight of their eyes was the idol that they looked at and gave their devotion to. There is yet more contained within this chapter because God continues with His answer:

Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them. Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. (Ezekiel 20:10-14)

To God, idolatry and Sabbath-breaking go hand in hand. Sabbath-breaking is shown to be idolatry because the Israelites were either using it in idolatrous devotion to a

personal *The Fourth Commandment*

false god or not keeping it at all.

The Sabbath was given so that Israel would know the true God, so that they could fulfill their purpose, which was to witness for God before the world, learn more of His purpose, and work to build character so that they could be born into God's Kingdom. They failed miserably and totally.

God accomplished His goal of bringing them into their own land only to uphold the reputation of His name. But what was the overall result? The Israelites in the wilderness died there (Hebrews 3:16–4:2). Their descendants failed in the same manner, so God cut them off and sent them into captivity and slavery.

Israel's history reveals that the Creator God is the Source of the Sabbath, and God's children have the responsibility to honor Him by keeping it. In summary, why does God command the Sabbath?

1. Because He has a specific purpose that He is working out.
2. Because we need a reminder of God's spiritual creation.
3. Because we need the time to fellowship with God.
4. Because we need the time to be taught about God's way of life.

5. Because we need the time to contemplate its application and meaning.

6. Because we need the time to evaluate our progress or lack thereof.

7. Because without it we are completely bound up in the physical world.

8. Because we need the time to fellowship with those of like mind.

9. Because we need the time to escape the social inequities of this world.

10. Because we are human and we need the physical rest.

No other commandment so directly and clearly identifies with God's purpose. What a blessing it is! Let us celebrate this memorial to our Creator and His purpose so that we might also share in the glory of its honor.

In Christian love,



From Sheriff to Shepherd

(continued from page 15)

developed a more easy-going personality, even tolerating mistakes. When I commented on the change, he replied, "Since I came so close to facing the ultimate, nothing bothers me anymore."

In the spring of 2006, excessive stress put some intense demands on my nervous system, causing a metaphorical "shutdown of the machinery." After this episode, I started to metamorphose from a type A (high-strung control freak) to a type B (tolerant, live-and-let-live) personality. Previously, I would react with a trigger-like response when students would talk, pass notes, or send text messages, raising my voice and pointing a threatening finger, inevitably leading to two or three altercations with a "debriefing" in the dean's office every year. One of my supervisors, Dr. Robert Watkins, a former high school principal, cautioned me that even a dog will respond with hostility to a pointed finger. As Proverbs 30:33 puts it, "For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife."

Since the spring of 2006, I have had no altercations with students. I have used student aides, whom I have encour-

aged to occupy the lecture podium, while I sat in the classroom at eye-level, talking to the students in a conversational voice rather than as a stentorian, authoritative lecturer. When discipline is called for, I defer to my aides, who still use the Barney Fife approach, giving me the opportunity to come to the student's rescue when the aide becomes too harsh.

With this arrangement, I am able to practice our Elder Brother's formula for servant leadership found in Matthew 20:25-28:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

—David F. Maas

The European Financial Crisis

As the world's recession continues to expand and the United States' plight becomes more evident, in some circles the conventional wisdom holds that as America stumbles financially, a united Europe—with Germany at its head—will quickly arise to take America's place as the dominant economy, and thus the dominant power. While this view may be propped up with cherry-picked anecdotes, it overlooks a number of key factors.

Even though America has been the focus of most financial headlines of late, Europe is experiencing its own versions of a “sub-prime mortgage” and unemployment crisis. For starters, major European financial institutions have suffered almost as much in write-downs and losses (\$138-200 billion) as U.S. financial institutions (\$145-246 billion). Similarly, the eurozone's unemployment rate is slightly higher than the U.S. rate (8.0% vs. 7.2%).

More than this, the eurozone allowed its smaller countries to grow abnormally by setting interest rates much lower than they would have been able to sustain on their own—and now the bubble is bursting. The epitome of this has been Spain: By adopting the euro, this once credit-starved nation suddenly had cheap credit, leading to a real-estate boom in which more houses were built in one year than in Germany, France, and Britain *combined*. This fueled phenomenal growth in the banking and construction industries. However, lending policies that were as liberal as America's were allowed, and credit checks were often waived. At one point, 98% of new mortgages in Spain had variable rates—meaning that within a few years, their rates will rise dramatically, forcing many into foreclosure. This comes at a time when Spain has a 14.4% unemployment rate. On top of this, most European housing markets have been overheated even more than the U.S. housing market—and many have yet to go through a price correction.

Banks in Europe play a much more central role to the overall economy than in the United States. In Europe, links between banks and businesses are encouraged, whereas the U.S. is continually trying to keep the government, industry, and banks separate. This means that what affects the banking industry affects essentially *all* business in Europe, while in the U.S. problems in the housing or banking sectors are more contained (since the preferred method of financing is through the stock market). The direct links between European banks and businesses are quite helpful in protecting against minor shocks to the system, but when European banks write-down hundreds of billions of dollars, it means that funds needed to keep businesses running will dry up quickly.

How well equipped is the eurozone or the EU to deal effectively with the present crisis? Its peculiar structure greatly hinders its ability to forge a common solution. The EU has 27 very different economies (15 of which make up the eurozone), and 27 bureaucracies, all of which have to

agree to accomplish anything. The European Central Bank (ECB) does not set European financial policy—it essentially only has power to fend off inflation through raising or lowering the interest rate. Because the various economies are so divergent, every time the ECB raises or lowers the rate, some nations are helped, while others are hurt.

As reported in the last issue (“The Rise (Again) of Nations,” *Forerunner*, September-October 2008), when the eurozone nations met on October 12, nationalism was on display rather than solidarity or sacrifice for the common good. No Europe-wide solutions were presented—only guidelines for member states as they pursue their own solutions. It is essentially each nation for itself, even though there is an overarching policy that sometimes helps and sometimes hinders. The ECB (and the Brussels bureaucracy in general) was designed for times of growth and prosperity. In times of crisis, it has little—if any—real power, and is forced to defer to Berlin, Paris, Rome, *et al.* The EU is far from being a federalized state that can act cohesively; it cannot even gather enough consent to forge a founding document (see “The State of the Union,” *Forerunner*, May-June 2008).

Many prophecy enthusiasts are watching for Germany to rise to head the EU. It is worth noting that Germany effectively had this opportunity but declined it. On October 21, French President Nicolas Sarkozy suggested that the eurozone needs an “economic government” that could provide political direction and leadership to the eurozone—something the ECB cannot do. German Economic Minister Michael Glos immediately and firmly rejected this idea, showing that Germany is not ready to subjugate its national sovereignty, nor are many other eurozone members.

An “economic government” would be one that would arbitrate in areas such as eurozone taxation—and, by extension, financial relief. Under such a system, Germany would be a primary financial contributor, while many of the smaller (or economically sicker) states would be primary beneficiaries. When Germany was given the chance to be the head—which it would be, as Europe's largest and healthiest economy—it rejected it because such a role would essentially hobble Germany (by forcing it to prop up the rest of the eurozone) rather than benefit it.

When we add to this dismal picture the fact that Europe lies at the mercy of a resurgent Russia—which has demonstrated that it is not afraid to use its natural gas exports as a weapon, forcing EU members to strike individual energy deals with Moscow—it becomes evident that Europe is neither united, nor immune to the same market forces and inherent weaknesses of the fractional reserve economy that it and the U.S. have adopted. Europe at present is not poised to rise, nor is Germany in a position to assume effective leadership while it is lashed to a mired eurozone economy.

—David C. Grabbe

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Centurion's Servant (Part One)

Only Matthew and Luke record the miracle of the healing of a centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). Both accounts indicate that the afflicted servant who needed Jesus Christ's help was young. Luke uses the Greek word *doulos*, meaning bond slave, someone born into slavery (Luke 7:2). Matthew, however, uses *pias*, meaning a child or young person (Matthew 8:6). The context indicates that this servant was not a little boy but a young man still in his teens.

The servant's master was a centurion, a Roman soldier in charge of one hundred soldiers of the Roman garrison in Capernaum. Several centurions recognized Christ's special purpose and honored Him (Mark 15:39; Acts 10:1; 22:25-26; 27:1, 43; 28:16). This miracle reveals that faith is sometimes found where we least expect it.



1. Why do Matthew's and Luke's accounts differ?

COMMENT: Although Matthew and Luke generally agree in their accounts of this incident, some differences occur. Matthew, a Jew, seems to have Israel in mind as he records Christ's somber warning to the nation not to neglect personal responsibility and to put their faith and hope in God instead of civil and religious institutions of man. They were in serious need of humility (Romans 12:16).

On the other hand, Luke, a Greek, had fellow Gentiles in mind, so excluding the warning to Israel, he instead encourages the proud Gentiles to ask for the help they needed for their problems. He does this by showing that a centurion was able to persuade the Jewish elders to help in pleading to Jesus for his servant. Humility is necessary for happiness in life (Psalm 69:32).

2. What is the relationship between the centurion and his servant? Luke 7:2.

COMMENT: The centurion's servant "was dear to him." His affection for his young servant suggests that he thought of him with respect and as important. The centurion's character reveals that he not only thought of his servant as valuable, but also that he was concerned for his well-being as a key member of his household. Apparently, the servant was cherished by the centurion because he had endeared himself to his master through noble service. He must have been diligent and faithful to his master since he received his master's esteem and concern. A good employee has a good relationship with his employer and vice-versa.

3. How serious is the servant's condition? Matthew 8:6; Luke 7:2.

COMMENT: The servant is "lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented" and "sick and ready to die." Three words describe the servant's sickness: *paralyzed*, *pain*, and *danger*. His paralysis could have been the result of any number of life-threatening diseases. With this paralysis came horrible pain, and with the pain came misery. "Ready to die" (Luke 7:2) reveals how grave the danger was for him. Jesus acts at the proper time to save

us from suffering and danger: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

4. What responsibility do the messengers have? Luke 7:3-4.

COMMENT: The centurion gives the messengers the responsibility to go to Jesus, not to sorcerers or pagan gods—He is the One the centurion seeks for help. The messengers are to seek Him earnestly and formally on his behalf. The centurion's approach to Christ is not casual but committed and respectful. He desires a blessing, and to secure it, he knows he has to demonstrate earnest commitment.

To convey the centurion's faithful attitude, the messengers have to present the centurion's request carefully and accurately to Jesus to heal his servant. The centurion does not ask in a general or indirect way that would be unclear; the messengers are to be detailed and clear. They present the centurion's request enthusiastically and promptly, as the Greek text indicates. They were committed and faithful in carrying out their responsibility.

They set an excellent example for members of God's church today. When we are asked to pray for people who are suffering from illness or injury, are we as diligent and earnest as these messengers were? When we ask others to pray for us, are we as faithful as the centurion was?

The messengers, in appealing to Christ to come and heal the servant, highly praise the centurion (Luke 7:4-5). The centurion's attitude shows that he was a man who loved those under his authority. In addition, he loved the Jews, which was quite unusual since the Romans did not normally even like the Jews. His love for the Jews was more than just talk; it was combined with action. He gave generously of his resources to build a synagogue for them in Capernaum.

Likewise, God expects love to flow from His church in generous and caring actions. He sets the example for us in that God demonstrates His love by giving. He gave us the greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ, our Savior (John 3:16). Never has there been a greater love.

—Martin G. Collins