

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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The family has been an enduring institution throughout history. In fact, God ordained the family at creation with the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and it has been a hallmark of the rise of great civilizations ever since. Conversely, when families crumble, so does society. Is that why God created families? Or is there more to it? What is God's purpose for the family? The answers are found in studying the principles of the fifth commandment.

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The Fifth Commandment

Moses writes in Deuteronomy 4:39-40:

Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.

Among this world's versions of what is commonly called "Christianity," keeping God's commandments is considered with varying degrees of suspicion, at the least, all the way to some being outright hostile, almost as if keeping them were some kind of a curse. Yet, God Himself urges His children to keep them "that it may go well with [them]." He does not say that keeping them will produce spiritual salvation, but that they will produce a pattern of life that results in stability, safety, and enjoyment in personal and community life.

This series on the Ten Commandments began with the statement that the commandments seem to be arranged in an order, beginning with the most important. That is, they start with the one that, if broken, will inevitably lead to breaking the others, resulting in chaos in a person's worship of God.

The *first commandment* presents God as the sovereign Creator and Ruler of His creation. He will not allow the worship and honor due to Him to be given to others because it would only result in misdirection of life's purpose, frustration, emotional and physical pain, and ultimately death to those who worship any but Him. It therefore deals with *what* we worship. Most of the time, the "god" who gets between the true God and us is the self. We are to worship the Creator, the Author of a way of life that will produce right relationships. This commandment demands that we make Him the source of our values and practices.

The *second commandment* teaches that He wants no one to be concerned about what He looks like. He has purposefully hidden this knowledge except to tell us that we generally look like Him. However, we do not know specifics. He has done this because physical attributes can be misleading about character. In our relationship with Him, He wants us to emphasize the spiritual—His character, the qualities of His spiritual attributes, and His purpose. The second commandment, then, involves the *way* we are to worship Him—in spirit and in truth, always aware that man does not live by bread alone.

The *third commandment* emphasizes the holy quality of His character and offices as identified by His names. His names reveal what He is. It is

personal *The Fifth Commandment*

the Christian's responsibility to adorn and uphold the reputation and glory of all that those names imply. When we were begotten, His Family name—God—became our Family name! We were baptized by the Spirit of God into that name. The third commandment therefore covers the *quality* of our witness in bearing that name.

The *fourth commandment* provides the means by which His Family members can guard and maintain things pertaining to His purpose, keeping them aligned with His creative purpose. The Sabbath provides a more formal environment for coming to know more clearly the truth regarding God's plan, His purpose, His character and personality, and the right and true goals toward which we are to expend time and energy. His Word shows that when Israel failed to keep the Sabbath, they lost track of the wholesome qualities of His purpose. Sabbath-breaking and idolatry go hand in hand.

The first four commandments define our relationship with God. They encompass the magnitude of God's power and name, and they exhort us to focus our time and energies on His purpose, plan, character, and promises, as well as on our vital part in the completion of His creation in us as individuals. He is our all in all.

The Second Tablet Begins

The fifth commandment begins the second section of the ten. It is placed, as the first commandment is toward God, first among those commands that govern our relationships with other men. The effect that keeping or failing to keep the fifth commandment has on those relationships is huge. Not only is it chief in importance in this regard, but it also acts as a bridge between the Commandment's two sections. This is vital because, when the fifth commandment is properly kept, it leads to reverence for and obedience to God Himself, the ultimate Parent.

As we begin we need to define three important words. The commandment as written in Exodus 20:12 states, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." The Hebrew word underlying "honor" suggests heaviness, weightiness, severity, and richness, all in a long-lasting, continuing sense. It implies an important or significant, lifelong responsibility, thus it is used in the sense of honoring, glorifying, imposing, or being weighty. As an adjective, it magnifies the implications of a noun. In English, *honor* means "to give high regard, respect, and esteem to; give special recognition to; to bring or give respect or credit to; an outward token, sign or act that manifests high regard for."

Two English synonyms help to focus the implications of this commandment. *Respect* means "to have deferential regard for; to treat with propriety and consideration; to regard as inviolable." *Reverence* indicates "to

show deferential respect." It is respect turned a notch higher because it is combined with adoration or awe, in a good sense, or great shame, in a bad one.

It is helpful further to understand that, though this commandment is primarily aimed at the function of parenting, it is certainly not limited to it. The keeping of this law also includes within its spirit the honor and respect that should be given to civil and teaching figures.

Why does God want a person to honor his parents and other authority figures? First, the family is the basic building block of society. The stability of the family is essential to the stability of the community. The more respectful each family member is of other family members, especially of parents, the greater the degree of respect that will carry beyond the immediate family and into strengthening the community.

The family is also the basic building block of government. The lessons and principles learned from honoring, respecting, and submitting to one's parents result in a society stable enough to promote the development of the whole person.

Seeds of a Dysfunctional Community

Isaiah 3:1-5, 12 provides us this record:

For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. The people will be oppressed, everyone by another and every one by his neighbor; the child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable. . . . As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths."

The issue in this context concerns adults in positions of authority, but these adults never truly matured. When dishonoring parents is taken to an extreme, it produces an anarchy that will reach out to infect the community as well. "Anarchy" describes an absence of government; it defines general disorder, a time when each person does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

Those trained in the home to dishonor parents will resist authority on every front, whether civic authorities, supervisors on the job, teachers in school, or coaches of a team. Self-centeredness stands at the foundation of this action. Those so created will pay little attention to

honoring community standards because they do not respect them. Thus, they will not discipline themselves to submit to them. They always think they know what is best for them and for everybody else too. They will follow whatever impulse drives them, regardless of how it affects others.

This rebellious liberalism first produces an irritated grumbling in others, but it can soon build into general disorder and confusion. Ultimately, if unchecked, chaos results. In due course, a whole culture's energies are expended merely to survive, effectively destroying the development of spiritual, creative, and intellectual qualities essential to an individual's and to society's well-being. This is the very path America is following.

Immaturity is a direct result of not honoring parents. People of this mindset have a hard time cooperating because their minds are filled with insecurities, they feel they are being taken advantage of, or they feel driven to compete in everything. As they age, they feel put upon, and thus become quite defensive. Because such children are not made to respect their parents' advice, they grow up not understanding what truly works, so they lack wisdom. This failure reveals itself in self-will and self-indulgence that can be taken to the point of sheer rebellion. It condemns children to learning the lessons of life through the hard, harsh experiences of personal warfare.

Why the Family?

The second reason God wants us to learn to honor our parents is that the family is also the basic building block of the Kingdom of God. The godly principles learned and the character built within the human family unit is transferable into the spiritual family relationship of the Kingdom of God. God expects a transference from parents to Him of the character and manner of living derived from keeping this commandment.

Parents are His representatives, His agents, to begin preparations for the Kingdom of God. Thus the creative majesty and power of God is honored and revered in the parents when children obey them. The prophet writes in Malachi 2:10-16:

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and

crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

This passage is directed toward Judah generally and toward the priests specifically at a time when the institution of marriage was under attack. Idolatrous marriages with foreign women were common, as was divorce. Today, marriage is under attack generally, but specifically from perverse same-sex unions. The Jews of Malachi's day wondered why, despite giving their offerings to God, they were receiving no blessings from Him. His answer: their idolatrous marriages and covenant-breaking divorces. He specifically states that a purpose of marriage is that He wants godly children to be produced. These marriages were not producing godly children.

The Hebrew word that is translated as "godly" is *elohim*, used here as an adjective. It means "filled with reverence and love for God; devout, pious; belonging to or emanating from God." Godliness and holiness are not specifically the same: Godliness is a respectful, reverential attitude, while holiness indicates living as God does. As attributes, as qualities of character, they are absolutely inseparable.

The conclusion is inescapable. After creating Adam and Eve and announcing that He had created them in His image, God immediately establishes the family through marriage. Marriage, therefore, plays an important role in God's overall purpose of creating man in His image. This fact provides the fifth commandment with its greatest degree of significance.

Child Training and Holiness

Notice the beginnings of two very important chapters regarding family relationships in the Book of Holiness, Leviticus. The entire book of Leviticus provides specific instruction pertaining directly to the subject of holiness. Of course, the whole Bible deals with holiness, but no specific section so directly focuses on it regarding family and community relations as Leviticus 18-20.

Holiness suggests separation, of being specifically different from others because one is living much as God does. Hebrews 12:14 clearly states its importance:

(continued on page 13)

ready answer

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

Will Christ Find Faith?

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

—*Luke 18:8*

Luke 18:1-8 contains the Parable of the Persistent Widow. Luke prefaces Jesus’ narration of the story of the widow’s pestering of the unjust judge with the comment that our Lord gave this parable specifically to encourage people “to pray and not lose heart.” The basic subject of this passage of Scripture deals with the question: Will a person ultimately cave in, downcast and discouraged, because of the difficulties and trials he faces throughout his Christian life, forsaking all the truth and opportunities God has given him?

As we approach the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and the tough times ahead, this should be a focal point of our continued examination of ourselves (II Corinthians 13:5). The apostle Paul exhorts us to avail ourselves of this yearly exercise to verify “whether [we] are in the faith”! He goes on to say that it is good to re-prove to ourselves that Christ is indeed dwelling in us. We should come out of this examination encouraged and thankful, determined to press on despite the troubles before us.

Christ’s parable teaches us that we are to continue to pray and not falter or become dejected if our prayers do not seem to be answered right away. We are to come to understand that if a request is not granted immediately, God may be testing us, teaching us patience, or working out a purpose we cannot see. We must understand that He works on *His* timetable—not ours—and that He always works out what is best for us and for our particular situation (Romans 8:28). Our job, then, is to persevere in our faith in God, always trusting Him in what we ask of Him.

In the parable, we see the widow coming before the unrighteous judge with her complaint, though Christ never informs us about its specifics. We do not need to know the

details; it could be any grievance. The callous judge has no pity in him, but the widow is so persistent that the judge reasons within himself that he had better avenge her lest she wear him out with her incessant visits. The phrase “weary me” literally implies striking blows and giving the recipient a pair of black eyes! This was one persistent woman!

God Will Act

If a reader of this parable is not careful, he could judge God as being comparable to the unjust judge, that is, that He will not answer our requests promptly unless we bother Him with constant pleas for help. Actually, Jesus is *contrasting* the faithfulness of our loving God to the cynical, self-serving, unrighteous judge. The latter is not in any way a good man, but a godless one who is just trying to shield himself from being annoyed.

Jesus is trying to get us to realize God’s never-ending love and faithfulness to His children. We are to see that all that God is, the judge is not. God is always willing to hear us and to answer our prayers *if according to His will*. He always hears the cries of His own elect or chosen ones. Indeed, God will avenge or vindicate His people.

The point is that, if the unjust judge—who could not have cared less for the widow—at length responded to her cry merely to rid himself of her aggravating requests, then shall not God—who loves His chosen people and gave His Son for us—answer our prayers when we are under trial or in need?

Jesus ends verse 7 with the phrase “though He bears long with them.” This seems to imply that God bears long with His people’s cries for help. But this is not the sense.

The pronoun “them” refers, not to God’s elect, but to their oppressors, whom God endures far longer than we do. The *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “[T]he meaning is, that although He tolerates these oppressions for a long time, He will at length interpose in behalf of His own elect.”

Then, Jesus states emphatically in verse 8, “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily”! “Speedily” is probably another poor choice of words; it is better rendered “suddenly” or “unexpectedly.” When God’s tolerance of these oppressors has run its course, He will promptly act at the right time—“out of the blue,” as it were—to deliver His people.

A Question of Faith

Then at the end of verse 8 comes the question that pertains to each one of us now, today, in this season. Based on the above parable promising God’s faithfulness, Jesus asks the question, “Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

The implication seems to be that very few will have the strength of faith that Jesus is talking about. As the God of the Old Testament, Jesus, having looked into man’s heart from Creation and seeing humanity’s trajectory to our day, had every reason to ask if there would be faith at the end time! Even the Jews of His lifetime, full of Messianic fervor, did not have the faith He is seeking! Would even His chosen people—Christians, the followers of Christ—have saving faith?

Do we have this faith? What, then, is the evidence Jesus is looking for that will establish that we have the faith He is looking for? Some might view this “faith” as a powerful individual faith to move mountains or to perform some other great miracle. Yet, what Jesus is looking for are those who completely trust Him as God, and based on that trust, are living by faith according to God’s revealed truth despite all of the pulls and pressures from the world.

In Luke 4:4, Jesus tells the Devil, in response to the first of his temptations, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’” This is not some general statement that allows us to choose what we will and will not obey, but a *requirement* for each of us, to the best of our ability, to follow every word of God in living our lives before Him. To do this takes real faith.

As we examine ourselves during this season of the year, we tend to look at individual sins and flaws that we see in ourselves, and that of itself is not at all wrong. We should be recognizing all manner of sin in us and striving to overcome it. However, in asking this question in Luke 18:8, Jesus is giving us a much larger picture to consider in our examination. In short, God has given us “the way of righteousness,” a revelation this world just cannot comprehend, and He is looking for evidence that we not only assent to it but are also living it.

This is the season when all of us should deeply consider the evidence that we present to God and to the world that shows that we belong to Him. For some, just coming to

church weekly, keeping the holy days, and tithing would seem to be all that is needed. For others, their understanding of God’s plan can make them feel secure that they are on the right track.

Though these things are important, it is the works of obedience that change us, that reflect that we are striving to live as God lives. This is what God counts as proper evidence of our faith. In James 2:17, 20, 26, the apostle informs us that, without works, our faith is dead, and these works are defined as putting into practice the instructions of God in our lives, just as Abraham did on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:2-12).

When God saw Abraham’s obedience to His instructions, He said, “Now I know that you fear Me!” As hard as it is for us to measure up to what Abraham did in being willing to sacrifice his only son in obedience to God’s command, God should be able to say this about each one of us. Do we have the faith to live by every word of God?

Humbling ourselves in obedience—especially when it hurts—makes a powerful statement to God.

Works and Fruit

This leads to another question: What works, evidences, or proofs must we exhibit so that we will be pleasing to Jesus Christ at His return?

Even though everyone has the same commandments and teachings to obey, because of the variety of people God calls into His church, each of us will have our individual challenges. Not only that, we are all at different levels of understanding and ability. Nevertheless, God knows both our weaknesses and what we need to overcome them.

For some, overcoming a particular lust of the flesh will seem like climbing Mount Everest in a driving snowstorm. For others, truly forgiving another person will seem an impossible task, even though God warns us that, if we will not forgive another, He will not forgive us (Matthew 18:21-35; 6:12, 14-15). Keeping the Sabbath and holy days in the face of losing a job can be a real trial. Faithfully tithing to God when there does not seem to be enough to go around can test us right in the pocketbook.

Learning to be kind and patient with others when doing so does not come naturally. Trying to raise our children “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), striving to love each other as God commands over and over, watching what comes out of our mouths, learning to conduct ourselves in wisdom, etc.—all of these and many more can be high hurdles to cross. Yet, every one of us has our peculiar areas of difficulty to overcome; none of us is perfect.

The churches of this world generally teach that all a person has to do is to believe on Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, intellectual and even emotional beliefs on their own produce the static, idle faith that James speaks about—dead faith. However, in one who is truly called by God—an individual who has *living* faith—his belief galvanizes into a conviction that will produce righteous works. These

works ultimately produce the “much fruit” that will glorify God the Father (John 15:8).

Just what *is* the faith that Jesus Christ is looking for? It is a faith far greater than we might imagine. It is faith, not just in individual truths or doctrines, but in an entire way of life—the righteous, holy way that God Himself lives. God wants us to accept and follow the whole package of Christian living that He reveals in His Word.

Granted, it is very hard to do. We live in one of the most sinful, evil, corrupt, self-centered societies of all times, and our patience and conversion are being severely tested. The world wants us to come out of the *narrow way* that protects us, teaches us, and prepares us for our future. It is pushing and enticing us to accept the broad way that will pull us down to failure and destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

But the life that God has called us to is truly awesome! In John 17:3, Jesus declares the kind of life we have been chosen to live by faith: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Living this eternal life gives us the ability to know God: how He thinks, makes decisions, shows His love, feels for others, extends mercy and forgives, etc. In other words, living God’s way now allows us—as much as is humanly possible—to know the mind and ways of God. It is in God and His incredible way that we must have faith.

Because our calling and potential are so tremendous, God gives us a warning to consider in II Peter 2:20-21:

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Once we start down this road, we have committed ourselves to following it to the very end.

For this reason, Paul challenges us in II Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith. He tells us to test ourselves to prove that Christ lives in us. We will not fail the test if we draw close to Him and truly work to make the changes we need to make as individuals to take on the very nature and life of God.

Then, when the question arises, “When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” the answer will be a resounding, “Yes!”

—John Reid

So Much

If nothing else, it would be great theater to watch Al Gore and all the other apostles of global warming have to explain before Congress why America should spend billions of dollars on “green” initiatives like “cap and trade” when the data show the earth has not experienced overall warming since 2001. Of course, this will never happen because, as Gore and the mainstream media have already stated, the debate is over. Global warming, caused by human activity, is a fact and here to stay, whether we like it or not and all facts to the contrary notwithstanding.

Other than this “debate is over” statement being an out-and-out lie, it is audacious and tyrannical in its dismissal of the opposing viewpoint and its adherents. The idea of imminent and catastrophic climate change has become so politically correct that any naysaying is summarily condemned as heresy—and the naysayer, be he genius or merely commonsensical, is hysterically tagged as a “climate-change skeptic,” a label that will kill any of his hopes for promotion, grant money, or media attention, should he desire it.

But the rest of us, the average Joe and Jane Public, have noticed that the weather patterns over the past few years have not supported all the hot air coming from the global warming crowd. In fact, Lord Christopher Monckton, who once advised British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, reported in his keynote address to the 2009 International Conference on Climate Change that temperatures “have been plummeting at a rate equivalent to 11 Fahrenheit degrees per century throughout the four years since Gore launched his mawkish, sci-fi comedy horror B-movie [*An Inconvenient Truth*].”¹ In other words, the earth is *cooling* faster than it was warming!

How has this happened? Clearly, despite humanity’s tendency to pollute and corrupt various areas on the planet—a tendency God promises to punish mankind for (Revelation 11:18)—the ability of man to effect drastic, catastrophic climate change, short of a nuclear exchange, is nominal. While many scientists *claim* that routine human activities like driving automobiles and mowing lawns cause global warming, they have so far been unable to marshal the facts to support this assertion. Even adding bovine flatulence to the mix—an action gaining support among greens worldwide—cannot account for climate change.

David mused, though admittedly on another subject, “What is man?” (Psalm 8:4). Next to the great processes

ch for Global Warming

of nature that God designed and that we still do not understand or appreciate, mankind stands puny and weak. It would take a force of far greater energy and magnitude to produce sudden, global climate change. That colossal force is our own sun.

Recent observations of the sun, compared to historical records of sunspot activity, tell us what is actually happening. John L. Casey, Director of the Space and Science Research Center, states in a January 1, 2009, letter to then-President-elect Barack Obama's nominated science adviser, Dr. John Holdren, and nominated NOAA administrator, Dr. Jane Lubchenco: "[G]lobal warming is over; a new cold climate has arrived."

Casey's letter explains that our instruments are detecting no significant sunspot or solar flare activity. Solar activity is a measure of the sun's overall power output, which varies in cycles of 11 years. Yet, in this cycle, the sun has been alarmingly quiet—so quiet that some scientists wonder if we are entering a new Maunder Minimum, a climate event that signals frigid winters and cold summers and that can last as long as a century. Writes Casey:

According to national and international sources that monitor the Sun, what is happening on and in the Sun is nothing short of record setting, astounding, and at the same time worrisome. The solar wind is at its lowest level in fifty years. The surface movement on the Sun has slowed to record rates and according to NASA's previous announcements is "off the bottom of the charts." Most telling is the current prolonged lack of sunspots between the normal 11 year solar cycles 23 and 24 which is about to set a one hundred year record for time without sunspots. NASA also has long since forecast that cycle 25 will be "one of the weakest in centuries." All of these events in combination leave little doubt that a "solar hibernation" lasting several decades delivering the coldest weather in over two centuries has in fact arrived.²

The unfortunate—and perhaps ultimately tragic—reality is that these scientific facts make no difference to those pushing the global warming agenda. The reason for this political shrug of the shoulders is that for a long time the environmental movement has been less interested in nature than in money and control. Its adherents

have rather used nature to their advantage to extort money from both the public and private sectors and to wrest political control to force draconian changes on governments, particularly the United States. That nature is not cooperating by cooling instead of warming has forced the environmental movement cynically to change its focus from "global warming" to "climate change."

This means that its aims to legislate "cap and trade" rules will move forward. Its insistence on often unreliable³ compact fluorescent light bulbs—which due to containing five milligrams of mercury are themselves hazardous if broken, and thus they cannot simply be thrown away⁴—will continue. Though on-site measurements show the opposite, its hysterical claims that sea levels are rising and that various Pacific islands such as the Maldives and Tuvalu will succumb to the waves will still be brought forward as "proof" of catastrophic climate change.⁵ And most famously, pictures of polar bears on supposedly shrinking icebergs will still be used to tug at our heartstrings (of course, data that the polar bear population is actually holding steady or even rising slightly will go unmentioned).⁶

In the meantime, we might do well to buy a good coat.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Endnotes

¹ Lord Christopher Monckton, "Great Is Truth, and Mighty Above All Things," *Telegraph.co.uk*, March 12, 2009 (http://www.heartland.org/full/24881/Great_Is_Truth_and_Mighty_Above_All_Things.html).

² John L. Casey, Space and Science Research Center Press Release, January 8, 2009 (<http://www.spaceandscience.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/ssrcpressrelease12009.doc>).

³ Leora Broydo Vestel, "Do New Bulbs Save Energy if They Don't Work?" *NYTimes.com*, March 27, 2009 (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/28/business/energy-environment/28bulbs.html?_r=2&hp).

⁴ Joseph Farah, "Consumers in dark over risks of new light bulbs," *WND.com*, March 16, 2007 (http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=55213).

⁵ Christopher Booker, "Rise of sea levels is 'the greatest lie ever told,'" *Telegraph.co.uk*, March 28, 2009 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/christopherbooker/5067351/Rise-of-sea-levels-is-the-greatest-lie-ever-told.html>).

⁶ Juliet O'Neill, "Canada not holding back on polar bear protection: Prentice," *Canwest News Service*, March 19, 2009 (<http://www.canada.com/Technology/story.html?id=1406966>).

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Three of our four daughters have been married over the past few years. We think the world of our three sons-in-law and are now eagerly looking forward to a fourth! All three weddings were very lovely and, as is usual, took lots of planning.

Many “marriage” scriptures ran through my mind as our daughters’ weddings were coming together. One of them—a somewhat sombre one, considering the subject—was Matthew 24:37-39:

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Two major questions arise from these verses. The first is this: What was wrong with marrying and giving in marriage (as well as eating and drinking) in the days that preceded the Deluge?

Jesus could be implying that there may have been some people who might have been listening seriously to God’s warning message through Noah but were diverted from doing anything about it. Perhaps they believed—falsely—that God’s intervention in human affairs was not imminent. Maybe they were putting much of their precious time into arranging marriages instead of joining Noah in his preparation for God’s intervention. They were eating and drinking—feasting—instead of participating in solemn fasts, which would have helped them to humble themselves before God.

MARRYING AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE

The second question is this: What will be wrong with marrying and giving in marriage (as well as eating and drink-

ing) in the days that will precede the coming of the Son of Man?

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with marriage, giving in marriage, or of wedding preparation. Marriage is a wonderful institution, a great and meaningful blessing given to man by God. As the writer of the book of Hebrews confirms, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

A wedding should be a well-planned, joyous occasion, especially between two converted people. Every physical benefit of marriage God has given us pictures something spiritual of His. The spiritual symbolism of marriage is indeed astonishing when one first hears and understands it. How flabbergasted we all were when we first learned of this symbolism in Herbert Armstrong’s books, *God Speaks Out on the New Morality* and *The Missing Dimension in Sex*.

But, like so much in today’s money-grabbing world, with all the pushing and prodding and chiding from the commercial sector, our weddings can

be overdone: “You gotta have tuxedos, you gotta have a candle ceremony, you gotta have a cake-cutting ceremony, you gotta have multiple showers for the bride, you gotta have a bachelors’ night out for the groom, you gotta have limousines, you gotta have a rehearsal dinner, you gotta have a lavish honeymoon,” and so on! Modern weddings can soon run into the tens of thousands of dollars!

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these things of themselves, but if the couple and their families try to cram too much into too short a time, the happy occasion can turn into a fiasco. Pressure to include too many confusing details can cause the wedding day and preceding days to be exceedingly stressful to all concerned.

The big question for God’s people, however, is this: Are we—collectively the Bride of Jesus Christ—putting the same time, thought, preparation, effort, and detail into our preparations for our marriage to Him as we put into our own family weddings? I am sorry to have to admit that my prayer and study time suffered during the hectic days immediately leading up to our daughters’ weddings. Other family members have told me the same story. We should be putting more—nay, much more—preparation into our marriage to the Lamb, of which all other weddings and marriages, no matter how beautiful, are mere physical symbols!

END-TIME PRIORITIES

This question of marriage at the very end of the end times is one of logical priorities:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: . . . A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; . . . a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; . . . a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4-5, 8)

The last decade’s terrorist attacks

here and abroad have given us an ominous foretaste that the days, weeks, and months immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ will be no time to laugh. Nor will it be a time to dance. It will not even be a time for marital love and embracing. And it will certainly not be a time of peace.

In the first chapter of Job, we read of the feasting of Job’s children, which was so excessive, inappropriate, and untimely that Job felt that he needed to atone for it:

And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did regularly. . . . Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house. . . . While he was still speaking, another [servant] also came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!” (Job 1:4-5, 13, 18-19)

Likewise, the days immediately before the return of Jesus Christ will not be an appropriate time for preparation for physical weddings. Despite the recent major downturn of the world’s economies, we still cannot be totally sure how close we are to the end of this age. This being the case, how will we know the cut-off time when marriages and feasting are to end? God’s Word reveals that He

will make the time clear to His people—to those who are watching and praying:

Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate. (Jeremiah 7:34)

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.” (Jeremiah 16:9)

At that solemn hour, absolutely nothing should be taking our valuable time and our minds off our preparation for the most important wedding ever: the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride, the church.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Let us take a closer look at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Bride of Christ is mentioned in Revelation 21:2, 9 and 22:17, but the main description of the marriage itself is to be found in Revelation 19:7-9. The apostle John writes that he heard a great multitude saying: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

When the time of the marriage of Jesus Christ to His Bride has arrived, then will be the time for the resumption of gladness and rejoicing. Not forgetting that it will also be a time for giving additional glory and honor to the great God, this gladness and rejoicing—shared with God the Father, His Son, and all the angelic host of heaven—will exceed anything that we have ever experienced. It is very important to note that Christ’s Bride will have “made herself ready” for the wedding. She will

prophecy watch *The Marriage of the Lamb*

not have allowed anything to sidetrack her from her preparation for this most wonderful occasion.

John then informs us, “And to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of saints” (verse 8). At this wonderful ceremony, the Bride will be given a very special privilege—that of being able to wear fine, clean, white linen. This raiment is so much more beautiful, important, and meaningful than even the loveliest of today’s physical wedding gowns.

A study of fine, clean, white linen in the Bible reveals that this fabric (or more correctly, a spiritual version of it) is the material worn by angels. It was also worn by royalty and by God’s priests, and it was also used extensively in the construction of the Tabernacle. At the marriage of the Lamb the children of God who make up His Bride will become worthy to wear this fine, clean, white linen because, as well as becoming like angels (as Jesus describes their state in Matthew 22:30), they will become kings, priests, and pillars in God’s Temple. Here in Revelation 19:8, fine linen is described as symbolic of “the righteous acts of the saints.”

After this, John writes, “Then [the angel] said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (verse 9). It will be one of eternity’s supreme blessings to be called to this Marriage Supper. But who are these blessed ones? Who will be called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Who will be there?

Of course, God the Father and Jesus Christ will be there. They will be doing the inviting—the calling. God’s angels, archangels, twenty-four elders, and four living creatures will all be there. And it cannot be a wedding without a bride—the Bride of Christ will be there, collectively made up of the resurrected and changed members of God’s true church from

throughout the generations.

But who will not be there? The church members who make up the five foolish virgins will not be there, because they will have not adequately prepared (Matthew 25:1-13). Satan and his demons will not be there. They will have been banned from even visiting heaven, as they had been able to do before (Revelation 12:8).

WHERE AND WHEN?

Banned from visiting heaven? Heaven? Will the wedding ceremony and the Marriage Supper really take place in heaven? A careful study of the timing of the book of Revelation strongly suggests that it will. However, this in no way implies that heaven is the eternal reward or dwelling place of God’s people.

The first five verses of Revelation 14 tell us of a time following the first resurrection and the meeting of Christ and His Bride, but preceding their descent to earth, when God’s 144,000 firstfruits will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. This is not referring to the earthly Mount Zion in Jerusalem, but the one in heaven where God’s Temple is (verse 17). These firstfruits are pictured as standing before the throne of God (verses 3, 5) and as having already been redeemed from the earth and from among men (verses 3-4). In Revelation 15:2, they are seen standing on the sea of glass, which is before God’s throne (Revelation 4:6).

God’s heavenly Temple will then be briefly opened to allow the seven angels to leave on their mission to pour out the seven last plagues upon the earth (Revelation 15:5-6, also called the vials or bowls of God’s wrath). It will then be closed again (verse 8). It appears that the 144,000 will remain in heaven during the pouring out of the seven last plagues and during the suppression of the great whore (Satan’s counterfeit bride, otherwise known as Babylon the Great) and the Beast, which are described in Revelation 16-18. Then, in Revelation

19:7-9, as we have seen, we read of the wedding and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Immediately after the Marriage Supper, heaven will be opened once again (Revelation 19:11). The Bridegroom—His garment dipped in blood—and His Bride and His angels—clothed in fine, white, clean linen—will then descend to earth (verses 12-16).

But how long will the wedding and the Marriage Supper take? How long will the interval be between the first resurrection and the descent of Christ and His armies? Have we not always understood that the first resurrection and the return of Christ both take place on the same day in fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets?

We must remember that Jesus Christ is not bound by human conceptions of time. Neither will His Bride be, once we are resurrected or changed to be like He is. We can speculate that, if one earthly day can be to Him as a thousand years (II Peter 3:8), then one of His days—His wedding day—may be a thousandth of one of our days, that is, 86.4 seconds. Perhaps He can fit the magnificent celebrations of a whole 24-hour wedding day into less than two minutes of earthly time!

The timing and the location of the marriage of the Lamb are interesting details to study and ponder and speculate upon, but the main point for us to remember is that, if we wish to be included in this most wonderful of weddings as part of the Bride of Christ, we must be diligently preparing for it *right now*. We must not allow Satan to divert us from our preparation.

Just think of it! We are engaged to be married in a ceremony so marvelous that it will pale even the most fabulous royal weddings of Europe into insignificance. We must be spending as much time as we possibly can with our glorious Fiancé every single day, and even more as we see the wedding day approaching.

—John Plunkett

personal *The Fifth Commandment*

(continued from page 5)

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” If we are not separated from the world by our conduct, we will not be in God’s Kingdom. Leviticus 18:1-5 declares:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘I am the LORD your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doing of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.’”

Notice that in this five-verse prelude God emphasizes, “Don’t copy the people of those nations outside of Israel. Be different by keeping My laws.” It becomes clear when this introduction is read along with the laws that follow in this and the next two chapters that God intends that separation from the world begin in the home at the very earliest point in time possible. It should begin in a child’s infancy with a right example from the parents combined with their positive instruction. Leviticus 19:2-4 adds:

Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the LORD your God.”

These introductory verses provide the starting point for more specific commands. It is as though God is saying, “This is the foundation of good family and community relationships. Aim to be holy, to be different from other nations, to be clean in My eyes through your conduct of obeying My laws. This will separate you.”

Note an interesting feature. God draws attention to the fifth, the fourth, and to the first and second commandments as His keys to accomplishing the activation and growth of holiness, first in a family setting and then its spread into the community. This indicates that in God’s eyes—in terms of holiness and good family and community relationships—keeping these commands are the major guides and regulators, actually necessities, toward producing family and community success. They provide a foundation for regulating social relationships within both family and community.

Of special interest is the order God sets them in. Both honoring parents—and most specifically the mother, as she is mentioned first—and Sabbath-keeping are mentioned before idolatry. In terms of good family relation-

ships, this is the order the child is introduced to them. In an infant or young child’s life, mother is primary. Do not forget, God gives all of this instruction with one common goal in mind: to produce holiness and good family relationships.

Why does God say, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy”? It is His way of pointing out to us, His converted children, that He Himself is the Model, the Standard, we are to follow in our child-training practices. As His children, He is the One we are to imitate.

The Importance of Parents

How important to God’s purpose are the parents in this mix? God records in Exodus 21:15, 17, “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. . . . And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” To modern child psychologists, these are shocking statements. At the very least, they ought to give us pause to realize the seriousness of being constantly concerned about our child-training responsibilities!

These verses do not in any way imply a child is to be beaten into submission. They do mean that it is a tremendously serious responsibility to produce a godly child who glorifies God. Our responsibility is to follow God’s patterns in child-training. He is patient and generous with His affections and mercies, yet He also gives correction in due season and in right measure.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 adds:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city. “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.

Here, the laws given in Exodus 21 are expanded on as the Israelites are about to enter the Land of Promise. If a child were unmanageable and stubbornly disobedient, the judges had a responsibility to back up the parents. However, the right to kill was not given to the parents. This passage indicates a process of evaluation by people not directly, and thus less emotionally, involved. Interestingly, the addictions in the child are directly named. One is a drug addiction, a major problem in our time.

Does it offend us that God’s standard is so stern? Do we pass it off as being of little consequence or significance? We should perhaps rethink this. Consider what poor child-training is causing in Britain and America! Does not God prophesy against “the drunkards of Ephraim” (Isaiah 28:1, 3)?

personal *The Fifth Commandment*

God adds in Deuteronomy 27:16, “Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.” Ephraim (Israel) is under divine punishment, cursed, because parenting and parents are considered to be so unimportant. Why is God so concerned? Notice this comment concerning Exodus 21:12-17 in the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*:

Maltreatment of a father and mother through striking (v. 15), man-stealing (v. 16), and cursing parents (v. 17, cf. Lev 20:9), were all to be placed on a par with murder, and punished in the same way. By the “smiting” (*hikaah*) of parents we are not to understand smiting to death, for in that case *waameet* would be added as in v. 12, but any kind of maltreatment. The murder of parents is not mentioned at all, as not likely to occur and hardly conceivable. The cursing (*qaleel* as in Gen 12:3) of parents is placed on a par with smiting, because it proceeds from the same disposition; and both were to be punished with death, because the majesty of God was violated in the persons of the parents (cf. Ex 20:12). (Vol. 1, p. 133.)

Therein lies a major reason for keeping this commandment. The relationship God intends within the family is an exact type of the Christian’s spiritual relationship with God the Father and the church as mother. In the eyes of God and in the eyes of a small child, a parent stands in the place of God Himself. In the physical sense, the parents are the child’s creator, provider, lawgiver, teacher, and protector. A child’s response to this relationship will in large measure determine his later response to broader relationships in society and beyond that to God Himself.

By direct implication, then, if as parents we represent God, it becomes our obligation to live lives worthy of honor to Him. Ultimately, the responsibility for keeping this commandment falls on the child. However, by carrying out their responsibilities, the parents clearly lay the foundation for the child keeping the commandment.

Parental Example

The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1, 4: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. . . . And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” The context obviously addresses children and parents. Paul makes it clear that children have a responsibility before God and that keeping the commandment has definite benefits for them to anticipate receiving. This is in agreement with Deuteronomy 4:39-40, with which this article began.

One of the benefits he mentions is the prospect of long life, which also contains an implication of prosperity. Not the least of the additional benefits is the gradual development of understanding and wisdom garnered from the

parents, which themselves help to produce long life and prosperity. Thus, in an overall sense, he is reminding children that obedience to truth has its rewards.

Is there an age at which or a circumstance under which the child’s responsibility to honor his parents undergoes a change? The answer is both “Yes” and “No,” which is why Paul qualifies his charge to children. His qualification is contained within the phrase “in the Lord.” It connotes what is within the boundaries of the Lord’s way. In all cases, the responsibility to honor one’s parents diminishes when a child marries, and his first attention must be given to the spouse. Cleaving to the spouse trumps the honoring of parents. Paul qualifies this a step further by implying that, if the parents demand submission beyond the bounds of Christian conduct, that is, not “in the Lord”—such as commanding a child to give up the Sabbath, lie in their behalf, steal for them, or bow down to an idol—in such cases the child’s choice should be to submit to Christ rather than to his parents. Submitting to God’s commands trumps submitting to parent’s commands that are beyond what God commands us to do in order to stay “in the Lord.”

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul directly addresses fathers. Connecting it to Colossians 3:21 will give us a broader view of what Paul is addressing: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” Mothers can also have this problem, but fathers are by nature far more likely to commit this child-training error. This verse is more clearly rendered, “Do not embitter or exasperate your children lest they become discouraged.” The words “to anger,” as in the King James Version, are not in the Greek text. The apostle is encouraging parents not to do things to their children like being overbearing, constantly finding fault, and nagging. The final phrase indicates, “. . . for fear that the child will become listless, moody, or sullen.”

Paul appeals to parents to train their children thoughtfully, so that their children’s characters and personalities are formed without self-esteem being destroyed. He allows for correction, but at the same time he urges patience with the children’s inexperience. Correction should never be revenge. It must be given for the child’s good but always within measure to the infraction.

His directive in Ephesians 6:4 is stronger; it could easily be translated, “Do not enrage your children to anger.” Discouragement, growing from exasperation, tends to lead a person to give up. By contrast, enraging inclines a person to fight back stubbornly. Neither is good, but the anger is the worse of the two.

The words translated as “provoke” and “wrath” are exactly the same word in Greek. The verse can legitimately be rendered as, “Do not enrage your children to enragement.” We might say, “Do not arouse your children to rage.” Overall, Paul is teaching us not to promote an angry mood or disposition in our children. Doing so may boomerang on us because children will eventually reflect the disposition

of the parents. Firmness in correction is fine, but men, especially, must be careful about their temperament when they give correction. Paul is talking about injustice, favoritism, over-correction, neglect, and physical cruelty in correction.

Nurture and Admonition

The English word “nurture” indicates caring for and providing supportive instruction. The underlying Greek word more specifically involves educational feeding or instruction, as if in school or for the purpose of learning a discipline. The word thus covers verbal instruction, chastening, and the use of drills needed to produce Christian character. It does not at all indicate that any of these approaches is even harsh, let alone cruel. However, it suggests that parents follow an organized and consistent plan.

The term “admonition” means a warning, drawing specific attention to verbal instruction. In summary, Paul touches on three areas vital to child training so that children keep the fifth commandment properly. “In the Lord” touches on the standard or quality one is to strive for. “Nurture” indicates what is physically done to and with the child in terms of consistent, regimented training, including discipline. “Admonition” draws attention to what is said and how it is said to the child.

Taken together, then, Paul clearly teaches that child-training is something that can neither be left to chance nor sloughed off with a careless, resigned attitude, as if it were merely a necessary evil. The parents’ vision must be long-range. From parents applying right principles consistently will come the gradual development of understanding and wisdom in the children. These are precursors that help produce the promised long life and prosperity in the commandment.

In I Thessalonians 2:7-8, Paul uses himself and his relationship with the Thessalonian congregation as an example:

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

He says he treated them with the tender affection of a nursing mother, striving hard so that no one could honestly charge him with taking anything from them. They personally witnessed how gently and consistently he dealt with them as a father does his children by appealing and encouraging them to live their lives to glorify God in their conduct.

Ephesians 6:2 states that the fifth commandment is the first commandment with promise. The second commandment contains a very general promise loosely tied to keeping all the commandments. The promise in the fifth commandment is not general but specifically tied to meeting a specific responsibility—honoring parents.

Notice that the commandment does not say, “*Obey* your father and your mother.” This is because honoring not only includes obedience but also goes beyond it. Honoring suggests adding to, glorifying, embellishing, and decorating its object. Obedience can be given in a resentful manner, but honoring requires admiration, respect, even reverence. This quality must be within one’s heart, and it is acquired and built upon through thoughtful consideration, even meditation, on the sacrifices and gifts the parents give to the child.

Honoring is something that usually does not happen in the child until adulthood, when the child has his own experiences as a parent to draw upon to appreciate his parent’s loving labors. This fact shows us that it is not too late to grow in honoring our parents, and that God is aware, noticing and rewarding with the blessing of long life. Obedience to parents as a child gets one started in the right direction and produces its own rewards.

Yet, the honoring of parents greatly increases the appreciation for them. The real rewards lie in the practice of honoring itself, rewards that affect our place in the Kingdom of God because we have transferred giving honor to our physical parents to giving spiritual and moral honor to God, our spiritual Parent.

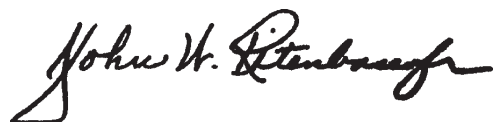
Deuteronomy 6:4-9 declares this commandment’s seriousness to us:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength. And
these words which I command you today shall be in
your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your
children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your
house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down,
and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign
on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between
your eyes. You shall write them on doorposts of your
house and on your gates.

Notice that child-training is directly linked with the first and great commandment. The fifth commandment is aimed directly at parental responsibility. If children grow up not honoring God, the blame largely falls on the parents’ shoulders. God intends this vital child-training responsibility to lead children to honoring Him.

That is its goal. It requires consistent and devoted attention. It cannot be accomplished by absent parents. If the parents do not know God, or if their knowledge of Him is shallow, and they are not practicing what they do know, what will they pass on to their children? Worldliness. Both parents must be dedicated and deeply involved in honoring God in their own lives, if their children are going to be prepared to perform the much more rewarding practice of honoring God.

In Christian love,



The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Centurion's Servant (Part Two)

Capernaum is the scene of the healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), as it is for one-third of the 33 recorded miracles that Christ performed. This one, performed shortly after the Sermon on the Mount, is one of only two miracles that He did in the presence of and for Gentiles.

Because of the centurion's faith, humility, and love, the Jews who were acquainted with him are supportive of his efforts to plead with Christ for his dying servant's healing. The centurion's action helps to break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile there—for a short time at least.

As soon as Christ hears of the servant's serious condition and discerns the centurion's humility, He promises to come and heal him. Upon observing the centurion's faith, Jesus says, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." The healing was not slow; it did not take months or weeks or days—not even hours. Matthew writes, "His servant was healed that same hour" (Matthew 8:13). As soon as Christ accepts the centurion's humility and faith, He gives the command, and the servant is completely healed. This miracle shows that humility and faith go hand in hand and are closely connected with healing.



1. What good character traits does the centurion exhibit?
COMMENT: There are several discernible character traits in the centurion as described by Matthew and Luke:

First, he cares for and is concerned about his servant. Although the servant is a slave, he does not treat him as one. In fact, he is dear to the centurion, and so his suffering moves the centurion to compassion.

Second, he is humble and sees himself as unworthy as a Gentile to approach the Jew Jesus, whether personally or through the intercession of others. Luke describes this humility more vividly than Matthew does. Christ respects the humble and acts accordingly. The centurion's humility is seen in his consciousness of his own sins and the recognition of Jesus' holiness and excellence.

Third, he has obvious faith in Christ's ability to heal. He knows not to expect a "magical" cure—rubbing an idol or touching a charm. Nor does he ask for a sign that a miracle would be performed.

2. How is the centurion's humility exceptional?

COMMENT: His humility shows his out-going concern for another human being, and it is outstanding because of his rank—people with status are rarely humble. When people are given even a low position or title, they often become inflated with pride, valuing themselves of more importance and worth than is realistic.

The centurion's humility is also unusual due to his ethnicity. Roman soldiers were trained to think of themselves as superior to those whom they conquered and presided over, especially in regard to the Jews, whom they scorned. However, the centurion humbles himself significantly before the Jewish rabbi, Jesus, giving Him great honor by abasing himself to the point that he says he is not worthy even of being in His presence.

The centurion's humility teaches us that the most faithful people frequently consider themselves the most unworthy before God. In contrast, the weakest of people often

deem themselves the most worthy. Likewise, a righteous person will readily admit his sinfulness, but the sinner will justify himself.

3. Why does Jesus consider the faith of this Gentile to be so great?

COMMENT: Jesus calls the centurion's act of faith "great" because he does not ask for any sign but believes in Christ's spiritual, supernatural ability. He does not expect anything visible. Jesus twice refers to a person having "great faith," and in both cases, the person is a Gentile: this Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman who appeals for her daughter's healing (Matthew 15:28). These two miracles show that faith transcends such things as race and birth privileges.

Since the centurion is a Gentile, he has no promise by covenant of God's mercy, as do the Israelites. Thus, for him to have this kind of faith is a rare and great thing. His faith sees Christ's power, and he declares His holiness as a witness to other Gentiles. His faith shows his acceptance and respect of Christ as Savior and his submission to His will. He even believes that no direct contact is necessary for Jesus to perform the miracle! The centurion sees no restrictions on Christ's power and ability to heal his servant. He understands that nothing limits God.

It is interesting that Christ marvels over the magnitude of the centurion's faith. He understands the difficulty with which humans struggle with faith—that we are visually oriented, seeing the physical first and the spiritual second. Indeed, with most, the physical is more real than the spiritual. Yet, the reality is that true power, glory, and love are spiritual. These spiritual things are more real than the physical world that we see and hear. This material world will one day pass away, but the spiritual Kingdom of God will last forever and ever (Luke 21:33; II Peter 3:10; Daniel 7:18).

—Martin G. Collins