

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Job, Self-Righteousness, and Humility

James 4:5-6 reads, “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Proverbs 23:6-7 adds this thought on the heart of man: “Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.” The apostle Paul in Romans 12:3 contributes his perspective: “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

These three verses indicate that what a person thinks of himself is clearly important to God. We all have an image of ourselves that we carry about in our heart. We tend to think of ourselves in a certain way, a persona that we want to project to others. This is not wrong of and by itself. Because we love God, we should greatly desire to project to others an image of Him that is pleasing to Him. What is wrong, though, is that too often the image we project has its basis in some area of pride.

Most of us do not really understand exactly what image we project to others. In other words, we often do not succeed in projecting the impression we want others to have of us. For instance, it is easy for a person to think he is projecting an

image of one who is serious, quiet, and contemplative, when the reality is that others consider him to be stern and condemning. A wide divergence of conclusions about an individual is actually quite common. While those who know us may see the same person, they take away different impressions, which results in different assessments.

The image that we try to project is what we think we ought to project for someone in our position. As mentioned earlier, the problem in most of this image-projection is that it is driven by pride, and “God resists the proud.”

Since so many commentators believe that pride is the father of all sins, it is surprising that “pride” appears only 49 times in Scripture and only three times in the New Testament. The Hebrew term *ga'on* in a good sense indicates “majesty” or “excellence.” However, most of its usages are negative, as the antonym of “humility.” It is associated with arrogance, insolence, evil behavior, and perverse speech.

The Greek word translated pride is *tuphoo*. Its literal meaning is “to envelop in smoke,” but metaphorically, it indicates “conceit,” “lifted up,” and “high-mindedness.” The word pictures a person using smoke as a screen to conceal the image he does not want the public to see.

Pride includes a degree of haughtiness, a measure of contempt for others. It is a matter of the

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heart that is buried under the surface. However, though the one who suffers from it may appear to walk in downcast humility, all the while in his heart he has vast contempt for God and fellow man, which is revealed in his lack of the fear of God and general overall disobedience.

Why is God so against pride? A person infected by this deadly quality so admires himself that he is unaware of his paucity of vastly more important qualities. A proud person cherishes independence so that he will not be beholden to others. He is so preoccupied with his self-proclaimed goodness that he never realizes that he has any sin from which he needs to be saved, and thus he will not be corrected. He believes that he is above it all.

Job's Self-Image

Job tried hard to project a certain image. This was not entirely wrong, but despite his righteousness, his projection was far from the perfection that he may have thought he was showing, as the testimony of his three "friends" indicates. In fact, it was fraught with a major failure in his heart, which God clearly saw and determined to cleanse him of.

In Job 3:23-26, as his tremendous personal calamity rolled like a thunderclap over his life, he asks:

Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.

Suddenly, Job's image of himself is shattered before his eyes. What is he to do? Should he defend his image of himself or repent? To repent may have been quite embarrassing, but as the story unfolds, we see that Job does not perceive that anything is wrong with him. Even if something were wrong, it would have been a major embarrassment to have it exposed. He is so aware of himself as a human being that, for quite a while, he does not perceive that the problem resides in his heart. Therefore, he does what we all do: He defends and justifies himself.

The book of Job is the story of the destruction of Job's self-image. It can also be summed up as the book of human nature. His friends are unsuccessful in their efforts because they perceive his condition as being the result of the sins that he has committed; what he is going through is just retribution for conduct that Job has managed to hide from others for many years. However, God's comments to Satan in Job 1:8 and 2:3 reveal that this is not so: Job is an unusually righteous person, as far as the conduct of his life is concerned.

The problem is not what Job *was* doing but a flaw in what he was. His defect is not one of outward action but

of inward thought, especially in how he perceived himself in relation to God, but also to fellow man. It is a matter of the heart.

Job 29 presents a revealing picture of what Job thought he was projecting to others. It is basically true: His conduct was above reproach. However, it includes a great deal of self-exaltation. Job uses the personal pronouns "I," "me," and "my" in excess of forty times in this brief chapter:

When I went out to the gate by the city, when I took my seat in the open square, the young men saw me and hid, and the aged arose and stood; the princes refrained from talking, and put their hand on their mouth; the voice of nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me; because I delivered the poor who cried out, and the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth. . . .

Men listened to me and waited, and kept silence for my counsel. After my words they did not speak again, and my speech settled on them as dew. They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain. If I mocked at them, they did not believe it, and the light of my countenance they did not cast down. I chose the way for them, and sat as chief; so I dwelt as a king in the army, as one who comforts mourners. (Job 29:7-17, 21-25)

As early as Job 9:32-35, though, Job complains that what he is enduring is completely and totally unfair and that God is wrong in permitting it to occur. The *Revised English Bible* clearly exposes at least an irritation against God, showing that Job, despite admitting that God is far greater, feels a measure of equality with Him!

God is not as I am, not someone I can challenge, and say, "Let us confront one another in court." If only there were one to arbitrate between us and impose his authority on us both, so that God might take his rod from my back, and terror of him might not come on me suddenly. I should then speak out without fear of him, for I know I am not what I am thought to be.

Despite being aware that a vast difference exists between God and man, Job is nonetheless unaware of how

immeasurably different the reality is, shown in his willingness to stand with God before an umpire who would hear both sides of the case! He wants to be heard, not realizing he has no case to argue at all! He truly deserves nothing but death. At this point, Job is not yet overly concerned about God's right to do with him as He sees fit, but rather he is disturbed that God has not intervened and vindicated him before his accusing friends.

Job and Sin

Job's complaint also reveals that he thought of sin merely in terms of an unrighteous act. He does not yet grasp that sin is more than a transgression of a code; it is a breaking of our covenant relationship with God that distorts life itself. Sin is the distortion, and whether it is an act visible on the outside or one of heart and motivation, the relationship with God is damaged because all sin is against Him. Jeremiah 17:9 reads, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

To speak or act of sin as though it is of no account to God, as though He is indifferent to it, to disclaim responsibility, strikes at the very core of our relationship with Him. This is what Job was doing in claiming that God did not care about him. The reality is that God was putting Job through this rigorous trial because He did care and did not want to lose the relationship with him.

Job's trial thus becomes a witness to us of the vast difference between God and us. Besides God's being eternal spirit and our being flesh, the greatest difference between Him and us is in our hearts. Jesus points out in Matthew 15:18-20 that sin begins in the heart. It is man's heart that needs changing. For one thing, its pride needs to be wrung from it.

Does Job perceive Satan's involvement? The reader knows this from the outset, but it is possible that by Job 16:9-14, Job himself has become aware. Commentators have argued whether God, Eliphaz, or Satan is the adversary or enemy that Job refers to. *The Amplified Bible* inserts that it was Satan, which seems closer to reality than the other two. God is not his adversary but his best friend, and Eliphaz simply does not fit the descriptions of power attributed to the enemy.

In Job 17:1-4, Job exclaims:

My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me. Are not mockers with me? And does not my eye dwell on their provocation? Now put down a pledge for me with Yourself. Who is he who will shake hands with me? For You have hidden their heart from understanding; therefore You will not exalt them.

Job has not yielded any ground, and now he asks God to put up bail for him to rescue him from his predicament. In addition, he is now not only accusing God for his plight, but he is also accusing Him of closing the minds of his friends so that they cannot judge fairly.

Something deep and wonderful is beginning to happen to Job. He does not yet "see" his sin, but he is vaguely realizing that he cannot justify himself before God or man by his works. He wants their former relationship restored—he wants to be reconciled to the One against whom he has sinned—so that he, in desperation or defiance, almost even as a challenge, asks the One he sinned against to set him free! This is exactly what God does through Christ.

However, in Job's case, his condition continues to worsen before it gets better. He says in Job 19:15-20:

Those who dwell in my house, and my maidservants, count me as a stranger; I am an alien in their sight. I call my servant, but he gives no answer; I beg him with my mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am repulsive to the children of my own body. Even young children despise me; I arise, and they speak against me. All my close friends abhor me, and those whom I love have turned against me. My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

In Job 24:1, 12, he accuses God and those who know Him of seeing what is happening on the streets of the city but not caring: "Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, why do those who know Him see not His days? . . . The dying groan in the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out; yet God does not charge them with wrong." Notice that the intensity of Job's complaints have reached out to his seeing problems everywhere—and they are all God's fault!

Job 30:18-25 adds more complaints that essentially claim, "If I, Job, can see these problems, why can't God? And yet He does nothing!"

By great force my garment is disfigured; it binds me about as the collar of my coat. He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry out to You, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You regard me. But You have become cruel to me; with the strength of Your hand You oppose me. You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride on it; you spoil my success. For I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living. Surely He would not stretch out His hand against a heap of ruins, if they cry out when He destroys it. Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?

His mindset is such now that he is blaming God for everything that goes wrong in his life. The sum of these charges is that God is guilty while Job is an innocent victim of God's blind, uncaring negligence.

Elihu Speaks

Job 32 introduces Elihu, a sixth character in this unfolding drama, the lessons of which are critical to all mankind. He

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is a much younger man who has listened intently to the arguments flowing back and forth. The context reveals that he is patient but is also incensed at the four men whose arguments are recorded. He clearly perceives that Job's friends' arguments were condemnatory, but had not answered him correctly. He is angry at Job because his arguments claim himself to be more righteous than God. Job's attitude placed himself above God by denying that He has the right to deal with Job as He sees fit. In Job 33:1, 8-14, Elihu quotes Job:

But please, Job, hear my speech, and listen to all my words. . . . Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying, "I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me. Yet He finds occasions against me. He counts me as His enemy; He puts my feet in the stocks, He watches all my paths." Look, in this you are not righteous. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words. For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it.

Job demands his "rights," as though he somehow deserves them. Elihu's approach, however, is interesting and pertinent. "God is greater!" he exclaims, which is absolutely correct. It should have been Job's mindset from the beginning, but he approaches God as an equal or perhaps even lower!

Job's primary concern is "Why?" Job's three "friends'" primary concern is God's justice. Yet Elihu argues that God is inscrutable and far greater by any human standard of measurement. So to compare God's judgments against man's familiar standards lessens God from what He is.

Paul in Romans 11:33-36 provides some insight here:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

God Speaks

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said; "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,

when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:1-7)

God approaches Job in a way calculated to chop him down to the humanity to which he belonged. How could Job possibly conclude that he was anything close to what God is! Such presumptuousness! Had Job ever created anything remotely like this earth? How could he even begin to think he was somehow God's equal? Job had a highly exaggerated opinion of himself. He had somehow managed to outgrow his humanity or lost it on this trip to call God into condemnation!

Just as surely as there was an awesome difference between God's creation of the heavens and earth and what Job had accomplished, there was at least that much difference between God and Job spiritually.

Humbled!

Job 40:1-14 continues God's cross-examination of Job.

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said: "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it."

Then Job answered the LORD and said: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in hidden darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you."

Job is confronted with overwhelming evidence that had him tightly backed into an inescapable corner. He is honest enough and loves truth enough that he does not even attempt to escape. With a mountain of truth and logic, God smashes Job's image of himself into a million pieces.

Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I

have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6)

The images Job held of both God in His relationship with Job and of himself in his relationship with God and fellow man are shattered into an unrecognizable mass of pulp. Above all, he now knows that God owes Job only what He determines that He owes him. God is not beholden to mankind for anything.

Will we claim that God owes us anything because of our good works? God does not owe us a thing, even if we do obey Him perfectly! Our covenant with Him is not made on that basis. The covenant is made knowing that we owe Him *everything*. We have nothing to bargain with. Do we receive salvation because we trade keeping the Sabbath or paying tithes for it?

Job is truly humbled. Do we recognize humility when we see it? Do we know what it really is? Humility is an internal matter, one of the heart, not one of outside appearance. Moses was a humble man, but he also had a commanding presence. However, a person’s humility greatly affects what those watching him see and hear emanate from him.

Godly humility is not a giant inferiority complex, as some believe it to be. Man by nature is not humble; by nature, we are well-pleased with ourselves and insane enough to think that we deserve something good from the hand of God. This describes almost exactly what Job thought of himself in his relationship with God. Men think that as long as God allows them to conduct their lives in a civil way, keeping themselves from the grosser sins, then everything is fine in their relationship with Him. The important reality of true humility is far from what men think, as Job certainly discovered.

Poor in Spirit

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Being poor in spirit is a far cry from being strapped in one’s financial circumstances. Poverty of spirit is a change in a person’s heart made by the great God Almighty when He awakens the mind to His reality and begins revealing the greatness of His person and purpose. The individual begins to become aware of his own puny character defiled by vanity and to realize that he is in the presence of brilliant intellect, power, and holiness. What happens to Job in Job 38-42 is not an ordinary change of mind but on the order of a miraculous divine intervention.

Until God intervenes, Job argues vehemently that he is not a sinner; in fact, he contends that he is a man of purity and good works. What he sees revealed about himself in comparison to God causes him great disgust: Now he realizes that he is a loud-mouthed braggart with a sky-high opinion of himself. It causes him such revulsion that he

comes to abhor himself as a fool. In his own eyes barely moments before, he thought of himself as a shining jewel representing God before men. Moments later, he is a burned-out, worthless hunk of junk.

As one who thought highly of himself, he had argued with everyone to defend himself. Now, deflated, he admits, “I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” A powerful change had taken place in his attitude toward God and fellow man. He thought he knew everything worthwhile and shouted it to the high heavens, but the reality is that he knows nothing of what is truly important. He is broken.

Poverty of spirit occurs when a person empties himself of all desire to exercise personal self-will, and just as important, renounces all preconceived opinions in a wholehearted search for God. A person who is poor in spirit is willing to set aside his present habits, views, prejudices, and way of life if necessary—to jettison anything and everything that might stand between himself and God. To the mind of one poor of spirit, God, above all, must be pleased.

To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It is the mind of one who confesses his unworthiness before God and realizes that he is utterly dependent on Him in every facet of life. Job had been a wealthy man accustomed to ordering others about. He depended on no one. He now discovers that he is totally dependent on God for every breath of life, and God must be acknowledged, beginning with his personal relationship with Him and then extending out to the ways he perceived and dealt with other men.

For the first time in his life, Job fully understands that without God, he could do nothing of value toward an eternal relationship with Him (John 15:5). Poverty of spirit is foundational to everything that proceeds from a person’s relationship with God from that point forward. It is indispensable to continuing and growing the relationship, otherwise the ego becomes a major hindrance.

Jesus teaches on this in Matthew 19:16-23:

Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

(continued on page 14)

A Distant Reflection

Since the early 1970s, the modern church of God has been in turmoil. This turmoil has not been constant, and the reasons for it are many—personal, doctrinal, governmental, cultural, political, etc. Attendance at church services and feasts have surged and retreated like the tide. Over the past more than two decades, the number of churches claiming to be a part of the church of God has swelled from one to a handful and then to literally hundreds of large and small organizations scattered all over the world. Unfortunately, there is no sign that the process of disintegration is slowing.

These many splinter groups separated from the Worldwide Church of God (WCG)—and each other—for sundry reasons, most of them ostensibly doctrinal, but not all. Among later splits, some have resulted from clashes of personality between church leaders. Others have formed new groups to “correct” a fault in church government—lurching from hierarchy to congregationalism or presbyterianism and back to hierarchy. Yet others have driving prophetic beliefs that cause them to break away from a larger group, sequestering themselves in preparation for the end or following some new prophet, witness, or anointed leader. Churches have broken up over the use of funds, over the approach to “The Work,” over paying the ministry, over church property—people will divide a church over just about anything!

The fact is, while most church members believe this to be an aberration, it is actually the norm. The unity under one large, worldwide church, which many experienced in WCG, is the rarity. Church history shows that the various congregations of the true church down the centuries were separated by great distances and probably did not know any others existed. Nor did they have the same beliefs or structures beyond the basics of Sabbath- and Passover-keeping, full-immersion water baptism, and separateness from the religious views of the world around them. These groups—whose existence we know about mainly through their enemies’ writings—were so small, scattered, and often remote that it is often difficult to determine just what

they believed, and therefore, whether they were actually part of the true church or merely a heretical Catholic or Protestant sect.

It is a truism that history tends to repeat itself—or, perhaps more accurately, as the French philosopher Voltaire wrote, “History never repeats itself. Man always does.” People, following the perverse guidance of human nature, make mistakes similar to those their forefathers made. This is what has happened in the church of God down the centuries since the time of the original apostles. Today’s church, sadly, is walking the same path.

A LITTLE CHURCH HISTORY

Because we regularly study the Bible and hear sermons about Jesus and the apostles’ works, we are generally familiar with the history of the first-century church from the New Testament’s point of view. In case some are unsure, here is a summary:

On Pentecost of the year that Christ was crucified, God’s Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and the small group of disciples that had remained faithful, and the church of God was founded. Thousands were baptized in short order.

Over the next decade or so, though some newly converted church members returned to their homes in far-flung parts of the Roman Empire and beyond (see Acts 2:9-11), the bulk of the church remained in the land of Israel. The Bible and history provide either sketchy or no information about the travels of the apostles during this time, except for the few chapters in Acts on Peter and John traveling to nearby places like Samaria and Joppa. It seems that the apostles did not venture too far until God revealed that salvation was open to the Gentiles in Acts 10-11. In fact, Jesus seems to have set His plan for them before His final ascension: “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Once Saul/Paul was converted on the Damascus Road and given instruction in the gospel (Acts 9), large-scale evangelism began in earnest. Acts chronicles the “missionary journeys” of Paul and Barnabas, along with others, to Antioch in Syria and then on to Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and finally to Rome itself. Church tradition and legend tell of the journeys of various apostles to Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Babylon, Armenia, Persia, and even to India! Other tales tell of Joseph of Arimathea, Paul, and Peter relocating to or visiting Spain, Gaul, and Britain. The work of the first-century apostles truly covered the known world.

Yet the Bible also informs us that not all was well in the congregations of the church. Fractures in church unity are apparent in the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. As early as about AD 53, Paul warns the Corinthian church about divisions among them over their ministerial preferences: “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (I Corinthians 1:12). In I Corinthians 3:3, he castigates them, “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” Other epistles reveal similar cracks in church unity.

His later epistles—those written in prison before his death—show that division and heresy had not abated. He warns Timothy against false doctrines, which he groups with “fables and endless genealogies,” saying that some have strayed from the faith, “desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say or the things which they affirm” (I Timothy 1:3-7; see also II Timothy 4:3-4).

James admonishes the recipients of his letter, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” (James 4:1). Peter (II Peter 2) and Jude warn about destructive doctrines and false teachers. For example, Jude writes, “For certain men have crept in unawares, . . . ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

Finally, John, the last of the original apostles, does his best to warn the shrinking flock of faithful Christians about the deceivers in the church: “Little children, . . . as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. . . . They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (I John 2:18-19). He makes a similar warning in II John 7, 10, and another in III John 9-10.

As biblical history closes, we see a dwindling church under attack, many following false teachers against the apostles, and Christ’s original teachings being perverted. Thus, just as the modern church cracked and splintered upon the death of Herbert Armstrong, so did the first-century church apostatize and shatter as the original apostles aged and died.

CLUES TO THE CHURCH’S FUTURE

Mr. Armstrong often quoted Christian historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut regarding the stark difference between the first-century church and the one history remembers from the second century:

For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the Church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D., with the writings of the earliest church-father, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul. (*The Story of the Christian*, 1954, p. 41.)

Historians have learned a great deal about Christian history in the intervening six decades since the publication of Hurlbut’s book, but his conclusion remains accurate. The historic second-century church bears little resemblance to the apostolic church, and in fact, it is mostly an apostate church evolving into what would become the Roman Catholic Church in succeeding centuries. However, what historians have gleaned from that time is instructive, providing us dismaying clues regarding what could be the future of today’s church organizations.

What is clear from second-century history is that the church that kept the Sabbath and the festivals, particularly Passover, and maintained the bulk of New Testament doctrine, diminished almost to obscurity except for a few prominent leaders such as Polycarp of Smyrna, one of the apostle John’s protégés. We hear of these mostly from their enemies, other “church” leaders—many of whom are now styled as Catholic “early church fathers.”

An example of this is the controversy over Passover, which raged until the late-100s, as Polycarp and his disciple, Polycrates of Ephesus, argued unsuccessfully to retain its celebration on Nisan 14 (thus, it is called the Quartodeciman—meaning “fourteenth”—Controversy). Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, who died at the beginning of the third century, maintains that the Roman church had celebrated a Sunday Easter rather than the Passover since at least the time of Bishop Sixtus I (AD 115-125). Thus, within about two decades of John’s death, the truth about the Passover had already been changed in Christianity’s most powerful church.

The works of these “early church fathers” along with some apocryphal writings inform us that the change from keeping the Sabbath to observing “the Lord’s Day,” Sunday, was already underway as well. Before the end of the second century, Pseudo-Barnabas (AD 100), Ignatius of Antioch (107), Justin Martyr (145), Bardaisan (154), Irenaeus (178), Tertullian (180), and Cyprian (200) had all mentioned that their churches—or Christians in general—kept the first day of the week as a day of worship.

prophecy watch *A Distant Reflection*

There are also the apocryphal gospels that historians and archeologists are continuing to unearth. While their apocryphal and heretical nature discounts them from being theologically useful, they do reflect the wildly divergent views of confessed Christians of the time. For instance, “The Infancy Gospel of James,” written about AD 145, not only adds to what Matthew and Luke write about Jesus’ birth, but also teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary, a doctrine that is still fundamental to Catholicism. “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” dated to the middle of the century, imagines Jesus using His divine power to create birds from clay, wither and kill another child, and blind complaining neighbors. This Jesus is not at all sinless and perfect!

“The Gospel of the Ebionites,” composed before AD 150, holds that Mary was not a virgin, that Jesus was not divine but chosen by God at His baptism, and that His task was merely to abolish the Jewish sacrifices. “The Gospel of the Hebrews,” written about the same time, has Jesus say that the Holy Spirit is His mother, and it also holds that His half-brother, James, was present at the Last Supper.

Then there is “The Gospel of Thomas,” most likely an early second-century composition, which is a compilation of Jesus’ supposed sayings. While most critical scholars today believe it is not a Gnostic text *per se*, early Gnostics—many “Christians” among them—interpreted it in a Gnostic way. The text shows little or no interest in doctrine. Instead, it concentrates on a disciple having unique insight—secret knowledge—into Jesus’ sayings as the way to eternal life. Jesus is reduced to a mere conveyor of enlightenment.

Finally, “The Gospel of Peter,” from the late second century, is a Docetic work, depicting Jesus as a pure, incorporeal spirit, and thus His body and all that happened to it were illusions. It also claims that Herod gave the order to crucify Christ, not Pilate, and that the cross floated out of the tomb with Jesus and spoke in response to a heavenly voice!

“. . . DOOMED TO REPEAT IT”?

With just these few examples at hand, it is not difficult to trace the course of “Christian” belief once the original apostles were no longer an authoritative bulwark against heresy. The scattered churches, disunited and not at all “speak[ing] the same thing” (I Corinthians 1:10), began to entertain ideas brought in by the kind of false teachers that the apostles warned against. Since many of these ideas paralleled concepts in the world—whether Gnostic-like philosophies, Jewish legalism, or Greek mythological norms applied to Jesus—they were welcomed over time by weak members who wished to fit in to

the surrounding culture. Faithful members and ministers left or were forced out of these apostatizing churches (III John 9-10).

We should not miss the larger point: A similar process is taking place in today’s church of God. Rather than unite, the churches are continuing to fragment. The situation is swiftly progressing to the point, as Daniel 12:7 puts it, “when the power of the holy people [will be] completely shattered.”

The reasons given for leaving a group are becoming more picayune and less justifiable. Papers fly at light speed over the Internet, castigating Minister X and his group for some supposed heresy, while others are flung out with equal speed in defense, in unconscious imitation of the polemical and apologetic writings of the “early church fathers.” In similar imitation, some leaders have declared other ministers and even whole churches excommunicated because they will not submit to their assumed authority. And new “gospels” (see Galatians 1:6-9) and teachings that we never entertained before are moving too many far from the “trunk of the tree.”

While Scripture prophesies of the disintegration of the end-time church (see II Thessalonians 2:3; I Timothy 4:1-3), we as individuals are not doomed to be part of it. Jesus’ first command in speaking about the last days is, “Take heed that no one deceives you.” (Matthew 24:4). In verse 24, He warns, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (see also verse 11). We must be constantly on guard against deception, especially of the “Christian” variety, since it is an unmistakable hallmark of the end time.

More importantly, we need to be growing ever closer to the Father and Jesus Christ, for a maturing, intimate relationship with God is the key factor in enduring to the end (Matthew 10:22; 24:13). Jude writes, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20-21).

As the times become ever more dangerous to true Christianity, our prayer needs to be like David’s, a man who faced frequent peril:

I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies. (Psalm 18:1-3)

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

ready answer

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

Could You Be a Spiritual Terrorist?

“He who is slothful in
his work is a brother
to him who is a great
destroyer.”

—*Proverbs 18:9*

Could we picture ourselves strapping on a bomb under our coats, walking into a crowded shopping mall, and blowing ourselves to smithereens along with several hundred innocent victims? Could we imagine ourselves as hostage takers, poised with a scimitar to decapitate a helpless prisoner? Could we picture ourselves cowardly donning ski masks and kidnapping women and children to use as human shields to accomplish our sinister objectives?

Most of us would loathe having to perform what these disgusting images portray, yet amazingly, we may have unwittingly brought such a judgment upon ourselves. Proverbs 18:9 reveals that the slothful or lazy man “is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” In other words, the sluggard or lackadaisical person is just as culpable in the act of destruction as one who ignites a car bomb.

The word “destroyer” in this scripture is from the Hebrew *mashchiyth* (Strong’s #4889) whose verb, *shachath* (Strong’s #7843), denotes “to corrupt, spoil, ruin, mar, destroy.” This verb appears 150 times in the Old Testament, and *mashchiyth*, twelve times, including describing the angel of death, “the destroyer,” that God sent to devastate Egypt’s firstborn (Exodus 12:23).

Sin and evil have an active and a passive component, often referred to as “sins of commission” and “sins of omission.” Interestingly, the first two of the capital sins listed in Revelation 21:8, “cowardly” and “unbelieving,” are sins of omission calling for execution in the Lake of Fire. Likewise, Jesus warns in Luke 9:61 of the person who begins the conversion process but then reconsiders: “But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:62).

As much as we may think to the contrary, passivity and neglect can destroy as thoroughly as active terrorism or militant aggression.

Consequences of Neglect

Consider the classic consequences of neglect as described in Proverbs 24:30-34:

I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands

ready answer *Could You Be a Spiritual Terrorist?*

to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

Many proverbs refer to the deleterious effects of neglect or passivity involving the sluggard as both the perpetrator and recipient of ruin and waste. It is a perennial theme throughout the wisdom literature of the Bible:

- **Proverbs 15:19:** The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway.
- **Proverbs 12:27:** The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession.
- **Ecclesiastes 10:18:** Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.

In each of these examples, destruction, decay, or corruption are shown to be the cumulative effects of neglect. A modest coat of paint will protect metal and wood surfaces from rust, rot, and the ravages of weather. However, doing nothing will cause structures to decay incrementally, looking as though terrorists had intended to destroy them. Who needs bombs and explosives when the same effect can be accomplished by doing absolutely nothing?

It is a fact that, ultimately, disease and degeneration are products of neglect. Heart disease and diabetes, for example, are often exacerbated by obesity, which has as its contributory causes, inaction and lack of exercise. In his article, "Alzheimer's as a Cost of Passivity and Laziness," Loyd Fueston suggests:

I think there is a strong connection between the decrease in literacy and the increase in Alzheimer's. Most modern human beings don't use their brains actively in the way of farmers or skilled pre-industrial workers. They pretend to a literate style of brain use, but the reality is that most of us use our brains the way a couch-potato uses his lungs and skeletal muscles.

Many so-called "progressive" politicians claim that broken families, drug abuse, and single-family households are caused by poverty. Poverty, though, is not so much an economic condition as it is a twisted state of mind. Peter and Helen Evans, in their article, "Having No Money Doesn't Mean You're Poor," maintain:

There's a difference between simply being "broke" and being "poor." Almost every one of us has been broke at some point in our lives. Sometimes it was an intentional choice, like subsisting on a part time job while going to school. Sometimes it's just bad luck or the consequence of bad choices. Life sometimes has its downs and we adjust; that's broke. But, when we

give up trying to better ourselves, that's poor. And lack of money isn't the defining factor of poverty.

The difference between broke and poor is not a new concept. We've known for ages that if someone doesn't work toward something themselves they don't value it. The "greatest generation," who lived through the Depression and went on to win the second World War tried to give their kids everything they had to work hard for themselves. But they couldn't "give" them the values and stamina that made their success possible. That was the difference between the war against Hitler and the "War on Poverty." Just look at the housing projects to see what happens to something given to someone who has the poverty mindset. We've seen the same cycle with many lottery winners or rock stars; suddenly they're rich but, within a short time they're bankrupt.

Dr. D. Paul Reilly in his podcast, "Time to Think: Ghetto Is a 'State of Mind'" suggests that simply moving out of an impoverished area does not upgrade an individual's "success" potential unless the mindset is drastically altered:

... many who are born in the "Ghetto" have a most destructive "State of Mind," the type which frequently utters the following pathetic words. "Man, I was born in the 'Ghetto,' so what do you expect me to do with my life?" or "I was born in the 'Ghetto,' and I guess I'll die in the 'Ghetto.' You can't beat 'The System.'" This kind of thinking is of course deadly, and will literally keep a person down for the rest of his or her life.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the powerful, life-changing book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, said: "Change your THINKING and you change your world. Yes, My Friend, the way in which anyone finally gets out of the 'Ghetto,' out of a state of hopelessness and poverty, is by totally overhauling their THINKING."

Take Action!

The history of the children of Israel illustrates that physically emancipating people from slavery does not automatically unshackle their hearts or minds, nor does it prepare them for productive responsibility in a free society. The Israelites oscillated between acquiescing to God's law to complaining, grumbling, and finger-pointing. Unfortunately, they never overcame these faults.

Likewise, our emancipation from sin does not automatically remove our acquired spiritual shackles. We must gradually grow out of the passive, victimized slave mentality into liberty and freedom by committing our lives to the truth. Without this change of mentality, we remain stiff-necked rebels, resisting God's perfect will for us.

Many of Christ's parables condemn passivity and non-action as equivalent to active evil. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus tacitly condemns the priest and the Levite for their passivity and their refusal to get involved. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:24-30), Jesus condemns the lazy, inactive, and neglectful servant:

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the foolish virgins squander their opportunity to enter the wedding feast (symbolic of the wedding feast of the Lamb) by refusing to take action and acquiring a reserve of God's Holy Spirit. In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus condemns the slothful and negligent behavior of an invited guest who refuses to comply with the demand to put on the symbolical garments of righteousness:

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 22:11-13)

These parables all show a similar fate for neglect and inaction, punctuated by "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Sleeper Cells and Sponsors

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins could have depicted the original "sleeper cells," those groups that aid the enemy by their lethargy and inactivity. A sleeper cell is defined as a group of terrorists called "sleeper agents" that belong to a large terrorist organization. The cell "sleeps" or lies dormant, not acting until told to do so. Before the greater church of God was scattered, sleeper cells weighed it down.

Closely allied to sleeper cells are passive sponsors of terrorism. Daniel Byman, in his October 6, 2004, Massa-

chusetts Institute of Technology Security Studies Seminar address, "Passive Sponsorship of Terrorism," notes, "A regime is guilty of passive sponsorship if it knowingly allows a terrorist group to raise money, enjoy a sanctuary, recruit, or otherwise flourish but does not directly aid the group itself." Byman points out that not only are Iran and Syria on the list of "tacit" supporters of terrorism, but the Saudis have turned a blind eye to al Qaida, Pakistan has offered safe haven to the Taliban, and even certain groups in the United States offered sanctuary and economic and weapons support to the Irish Republican Army.

The greater church of God has been infiltrated with sleeper cells and passive sponsors of terrorism. After our previous fellowship was destroyed by neglect, the cells became active, endorsing the antinomian doctrine of eternal security. This false doctrine sabotages the Christian by making him believe that his salvation is eternally assured, causing him to neglect the very necessary works that strengthen his relationship with God and help him to overcome his sins and grow in character.

Interestingly, the term "sabotage" has the connotation of slowing something down. Communist Walker C. Smith, in his treatise on *Sabotage*, cites the following etymology:

A striking French weaver cast his woden [sic] shoe—called a *sabot*—into the delicate mechanism of the loom upon leaving the mill. The confusion that resulted, acting to the workers' benefit, brought to the front a line of tactics that took the name of SABOTAGE. Slow work is also said to be at the basis of the word, the idea being that wooden shoes are clumsy and so prevent quick action on the part of the workers.

Some who would not even consider bringing a plastic explosive into the workplace think nothing of spending thirty extra minutes around the water cooler or of idling away their time viewing questionable material on the company computer. Are we built-in liabilities—or worse, actual saboteurs—to our employers by just showing up to work?

As we move in our conversion process beyond justification, we dare not slumber, slow down, or do our work with slackness. The eternal security doctrine has been around since the Garden of Eden, but Jesus warns in Matthew 5:19:

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and *teaches men so*, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Emphasis ours.)

Those who teach that God's law has been done away are spiritual murderers, attempting to destroy for eternity those who have God's Holy Spirit. We have been called to overcome and grow, going through trials and tests, conforming to the image of Christ, meeting the requirements to be members of God's Family to the extent that we discipline ourselves, subduing our carnal natures, and taking on God's characteristics.

Our Quality Enhancement Project

One of the current buzzwords in higher education today is “quality enhancement projects,” defined as designing programs to improve public education by improving teacher effectiveness. The sanctification process, with its tests and trials, is similar, enabling God’s called-out ones to become priests and kings in God’s Kingdom, having developed empathy like our Elder Brother, learning through the things He had suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

In his Harvard Divinity School Address, essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson realized the value of a minister undergoing life’s trials in order to teach more effectively, describing one who has not undergone these quality enhancement projects:

He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned.

Overcoming is an active process—resisting the Devil, the world, and our own flesh. By piecemeal passive compromise, and by doing absolutely nothing, children of God can sabotage their spiritual futures, allowing proponents of the once-saved, always-saved doctrine to execute a spiritual son or daughter of God—the ultimate act of terrorism.

—David F. Maas

personal *Job, Self-Righteousness, and Humility*

(continued from page 7)

This event took place in the life of a wealthy man, a person we might think had no poverty of spirit due to his wealth. Surely, none of us would fit into that category! But is that so? Could we, too, be rejecting the Kingdom of God because we have great possessions—possessions in terms of preconceived ideas, confidence in our own judgment, and familiar and traditional beliefs? Do we always seek God’s counsel first when these come into question?

How about intellectual pride born of academic distinction in school? Knowledge puffs up (I Corinthians 8:1). How about habits of life that we have no desire to give up and never consider that they may not glorify God? What about the fear of public ridicule because we are too interested in worldly honor and distinction? Are any of these less important barriers to full access to God than the rich young man’s trust in his wealth?

The rich young man is a tragic figure not because he was rich. Wealth is neither good nor evil of itself. However, his barrier was that he was enslaved to his wealth. He was not free to give himself to God unreservedly. He had an unrealistic appraisal of himself and his money; both were too important to his sense of well-being. He could have been a multibillionaire in silver and gold, as long as his heart was not set on them. In this attitude, he would have been just as free as the poorest beggar to enter God’s Kingdom. Yet, when the opportunity arose, he could not bring himself to submit to God in the flesh.

Godly humility is based on a true appraisal of ourselves in relation to God, and this must be combined with willing submission to Him, the self being a secondary consideration. Before he abhorred himself, Job was not this way, arguing with God and His laws.

II Corinthians 10:12, 17-18 provides interesting insight:

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they,

measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise. . . . But “he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

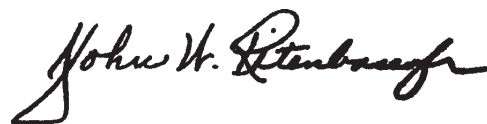
As we evaluate ourselves during this season, what can we do about this? Paul advises in Romans 12:3, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Add to this James 4:7-10:

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Think—examine yourself—repent—humble yourself—submit. We should be able to control ourselves to do this because God has already granted us the ability and power to do it. Humility is a choice given to a godly person. Do not be stiff-necked like Job, churning up justifications. We need to make the sacrifices and discipline ourselves to make the right choices.

True success in marriage, in childrearing, in money matters, in health, and in emotions is the result of humbly submitting ourselves to God. There is everything to gain and nothing to lose, except what is passing away anyway.

In Christian love,



Fukushima: Aftermath and Implications

“The current situation of the earthquake, tsunami, and the nuclear plants is in a way the most severe crisis in the past 65 years since World War II,” Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan said at a press conference on March 13, two days after being hit by its most destructive quake and tsunami on record. “Whether we Japanese can overcome this crisis depends on each of us,” he continued. “I strongly believe that we can get over this great earthquake and tsunami by joining together.”

Though the events of March 11 did not leave Japan devastated, they have the potential for wide-ranging effects, both in the near-term and into the foreseeable future. The ongoing crisis with several nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant is the most pressing concern, and Japanese officials have outlined a plan to bring the plant to a cold shutdown within nine months—though that may be optimistic, depending on how much damage has been sustained. Meanwhile, an unknown amount of radiation and radioactive particles is continuing to be released into the air and water around Fukushima, and radioactive particles from Fukushima have been found in varying levels throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

In addition to the danger to health, the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster are also the most expensive natural disaster on record. The financial cost of direct loss is estimated to fall between a conservative \$200 billion (Goldman Sachs) and \$300 billion (Japan’s government). These estimates do not include the ongoing business losses due to power shortages or to repercussions throughout the global economy.

Though heavily debt-laden, Japan’s economy is the third-largest in the world, and it is also the third-largest industrial producer (behind the United States and China). In particular, Japan has specialized in automobile manufacturing, telecommunications, computers, and other industries dependent on microchips. Not only have factories in Japan been shuttered due to direct damage or insufficient power, but U.S. and European factories have also been taken offline, as the parts they need are produced in the closed Japanese factories. This is resulting in economic loss both in terms of the wages of the factory workers as well as not producing goods to sell.

A number of analysts are predicting the contagion to spread further when lower second-quarter corporate earnings are announced on July 1, and the results of the various industrial shutdowns become apparent. This reduced industrial output is not expected to be permanent, though; the most important Japanese prefecture in terms of economic output is the least damaged, and so its economic and industrial output are expected to bounce back as it has from other earthquakes.

Because of Japan’s location on the Pacific Ring of Fire, earthquakes—even large ones—are fairly common. As a result of this systemic instability, Japan has been dubbed an “earthquake society”—one whose culture and mindset has been

shaped by sudden, radical change and has consequently developed the ability to adjust rapidly when a threshold is crossed. Such a threshold can come in a variety of forms, but it is worth noting that the nuclear disaster, in conjunction with the intensifying unrest around the oil-rich Persian Gulf, has revealed just how vulnerable the island nation is to circumstances outside its control.

While Japan is the third-largest industrial economy, it is entirely dependent on off-island natural resources—including, and especially, oil. This dependency became apparent during the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo, when the critical factor was not the price of oil, but the fact that Japan could not get the oil it needed at any price, leaving its industrial plants without the means to produce. Since then, Japan has invested heavily in nuclear power-generation and has become the third-largest producer of electricity from nuclear reactors (behind the U.S. and France). While nuclear power for a variety of reasons cannot completely replace oil, it accounts for one-third of Japan’s energy production.

More than this, nuclear power represents a seawall against the uncertainties of the global system. On March 11, that wall was badly cracked, and Japan has been left feeling profoundly insecure. Due to the shaky nature of its oil supply-chain, based as it is in the unpredictable Persian Gulf, its nuclear-power capacity was damaged and shown to be not as reliable as assumed. Thus, Japan has had its geographic realities revealed starkly.

Prime Minister Kan compared this time in Japan’s history to World War II, and there are some parallels. The most striking similarity is that Japan’s entrance into the war was in large part a result of an energy crisis. After Japan invaded Indochina in 1940, the United States stopped shipping oil to Japan and started buying up oil produced by the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) to keep Japan from having it. Facing an energy stranglehold, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor.

This is not to suggest that Japan’s next foreign policy move will be war. Yet, history shows that an energy crisis can strike at the very core of Japan’s existence and cause it to respond in dramatic ways (if necessary) to safeguard its energy lifeline. To this point Japan has been content to let the U.S. handle the mayhem in the Middle East, yet all this comes at a time when American allies are not feeling confident in their alliances. Japan is at its lowest point since World War II, and the events of March 11 may be the trigger for Tokyo to begin to reassert itself and modify its foreign policy. For Japan, it is less about geopolitical power than survival.

—David C. Grabbe

WORLDWATCH

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Walking on the Water (Part One)

Christ's miracle of walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21) took place soon after feeding the 5,000. The next day He preached a sermon in the synagogue that turned their rejoicing into near total rejection—almost all but the twelve disciples left Him. A representative of God must not trust in human *praise* nor withhold the truth to try to *please* people. Instead, as a true witness, he must preach God's truth regardless of the world's disapproval.

Later, Jesus told His disciples to set out in their boat for the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. At three hours after midnight, straining at the oars against the storm, they were still only halfway across the lake. In a contrary wind and tossed by the waves, the disciples did not realize that Jesus was fully aware of their difficulty. They were about to learn of His sympathy and willingness to come to their aid. He approached the distressed disciples in an entirely unexpected way, by walking on the turbulent sea as if it were stable as rock.

Clearly, He had been praying for and watching out for them while on the mountain, but when He passed near them, they did not recognize their Savior. The night was extremely black in the storm, and their nerves were on edge with fear.

Under these conditions, they thought He was a spirit, an ominous apparition of some kind. But He encouraged them immediately with familiar reassurance: "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." Later in their lives during times of anxiety, this moment probably came to mind as a lesson deeply received and continually comforting.



1. Why does Jesus force the disciples to go without Him? Matthew 14:22; Mark 6:45; John 6:15.

COMMENT: This text contains a strong sense of urgency, especially in the word "made," which implies "compelled," and "immediately" amplifies it. Only John tells why He urged His disciples to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee: to get them away from the crowd, which was so excited by the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 that they would have taken Him by force to make Him king (John 6:15). The crowd, on the verge of revolution against the Roman government, put the disciples in grave danger.

They did not fully understand that Christ's work as Savior of the world did not involve conquering governments at that time, so they were susceptible to the crowd's influence in wanting to make Him king. This influence may be why they were unwilling to leave Him at what they may have thought was His crowning moment. In their growing admiration of Jesus, the disciples were likely reluctant to be separated from Him even for a moment, yet He sent them away. The storm, then, had the effect of saving them from strong ambitions, and they would later realize that the stormy night, along with the earlier exciting day, had worked together for their good (Romans 8:28).

2. What is significant about the words "It is I"? Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 6:20.

COMMENT: These three words are in Greek only two words (*ego eimi*), and they are much more powerful and significant than most Bible readers realize. Jesus says not, "It is I" but "I am," which is a direct assertion of His deity. Moses had asked God:

"Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14).

Clearly, Jesus is declaring that He is the *Yahweh* of the Old Testament. Throughout the New Testament, there are a number of significant amplifications of this: Christ is the "I AM" that is the bread of life; the light of the world; the good shepherd; the resurrection; the way, the truth, and the life; and the Alpha and Omega, among other things (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; Revelation 1:8).

In the Garden of Gethsemane the night before the crucifixion, the "I AM" lesson was made unambiguous. When soldiers came to arrest Christ,

He went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am *He*" ["He" has been inserted by the translators]. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:4-6)

The disciples in their peril at sea needed the great "I AM." These two words alone should have removed all their fear.

In this incident, the disciples show that they were growing in faith. In the earlier miracle of Christ stilling the storm on the sea, they asked, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:27). Now they have advanced in their knowledge to recognizing Jesus as God (as "Son of God" indicates) and worshipping Him.

Recognizing that Jesus is God means that their worship was correct doctrinally. True worship cannot be separate from true doctrine. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know" (John 4:22). He could say this to some even in the greater churches of God today who sadly do not know enough about the Father and Christ. We, too, must know Him as the Son of God and fully divine to worship Him acceptably.

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