



"A weak mind is like a microscope, which magnifies trifling things but cannot receive great ones."  
—G.K. Chesterton

05-Jan-07

## *Big-Picture Thinking*

It has become traditional as we flip our Gregorian calendars from December to January each year to assess the old year and resolve to amend our faults and shortcomings in the new. Unfortunately, the assessing has devolved into a series of meaningless "Best of" and "Worst of" lists, while the amending of our ways chiefly concerns foods we love to eat, liquids we like to drink, weight we need to lose, and exercise we ought to do. As for real soul-searching and determination to improve one's character, for most that has passed from the scene with the dodo bird and the passenger pigeon.

In the church, we often relegate these exercises to the run-up to Passover, as we follow the dictate in [II Corinthians 13:5](#) to examine ourselves. We consider our spiritual growth over the past year—or lack thereof—and resolve to pursue real change with zeal and humility. This is all to the good. As anyone who has ever tackled a long-term project knows, frequent evaluation and subsequent course-correction help to keep the project on track and focused on the goal. The process we are involved with in cooperation with the [God](#) of the universe is essentially the same with the exception that it is far more important.

Most of us, it seems, tend to approach this annual self-evaluation from a micro rather than macro perspective. In other words, we ignore the big questions of life to focus on the details of our personal circumstances. Instead of stepping back and trying to see how the whole fits together, we stoop down to examine the minutest pieces individually

and separately. As [Jesus](#) instructed on an entirely different topic, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" ([Matthew 23:23](#)).

This oft-repeated tendency is not surprising, since [the world](#) routinely takes the same path. It is, frankly, an offshoot of the selfishness, the self-centeredness, of human nature. We are so often involved in our own thoughts and feelings—all of the time, really—that we naturally gravitate toward I, me, and mine to the *n*th degree. And I, me, and mine so interest us that we are likely to pursue what we think is best for them with such attention and devotion that all else is diminished, ignored, or even forgotten as of little account. Thus, our age is marked with the stain of narcissism, and its blot has bled through into God's church to no small extent.

A few decades ago, the church was frequently reminded of some of the big issues of life through the preaching of Herbert W. Armstrong. Each holy day, or at least each Feast of Tabernacles, he would force us to ask ourselves, "Why are we here?" He meant, not just "Why are we celebrating this holy time?" but also "Why do we exist?" "Why has God called us?" "Why have the events of our lives, ordained and manipulated by our sovereign God, brought us to this point?" "Where are we headed?" "Where does God want us to go, and what is He doing to get us there?" Too often, having heard the sermon many times before, we listened politely but took little of it to heart.

How true is the saying, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else"! Pursuing the answers to the big questions should determine the goal. If we fail to revisit the overarching principles from time to time, we are liable to stray from the most direct course toward their achievement. Once we begin to wander from the path, sin—missing the mark—enters into the picture.

In Old Testament times, God commanded Israel to do certain things so that they would remember that they were part of a people who had made a covenant with God and that this agreement constrained them to live differently than all other peoples on earth. For instance, God ordered the people to wear tassels on the corners of their garments to remember who they were, how they were to behave, and who was their God:

Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the

land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God. ([Numbers 15:38-41](#))

Under the New Covenant, Christians are not required to do this, but the principle it expresses is still apropos. We need to be reminded frequently to take a step back, to remember our place and mission before God, and to evaluate how well we have followed His lead. This points out the tragedy in the loss of the [Sabbath](#) in the Christianity of this world, for though Christians do not have to wear tassels, the [fourth commandment](#) reads, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" ([Exodus 20:8](#)). The Sabbath day is a weekly reminder of God, His creation (both the physical creation and the ongoing spiritual creation), His [holiness](#), and our participation with Him in His plan. These are all big-picture items.

Once each year is not enough to evaluate our course. God provides us an opportunity once each *week* to do some big-picture thinking, to take a measurement and re-orient our prow toward the one point on the horizon that will bring us to our predetermined destination, the Kingdom of God.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Examine and Come Out](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh insists that we must be aware of our awesome status as a unique, called-out, chosen, royal priesthood—teachers of a way of life and builders of bridges between people and God. Because God owns us, we differ from the rest of the people of this earth. We need to seriously think of what we are now (His chosen people) and also what we have been (children of Satan). As former bond-slaves of satanic human nature, we effortlessly have given ourselves over to excesses and unrestraint. The Old Testament examples were given to show us what God had to do (the tremendous cost in life) to pave the way for our calling, sanctification, and ultimate glorification. Reflecting on the awesome cost of our calling, we must resolve not to go back into the slavery of sin.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

**It's Not Our Time**

by David C. Grabbe

We live in a society that is increasingly concerned about ownership. We have a proclivity to assume ownership over things we find in our grasp. David Grabbe considers this principle in relation to the Sabbath. Who owns it—and how does the answer to this question affect our keeping of it?

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