

Re-Embracing The Berean Model

David F. Maas

Given 02-Oct-12; Sermon #FT12-04

Proverbs 4:23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

This caution was written by the same author who illustrated what he meant by this statement by actually modeling this behavior in Ecclesiastes 2, verse 3.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind guided me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good does it do for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

The thesis of this message is as follows: As we approach the confusing, chaotic, deceptive, murky, pea-soup fog times in the near future, promised by our Elder Brother in the Olivet Prophecy, we must learn to develop the critical self-reflexive skills practiced by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2:3 and Proverbs 4:23.

Last spring I listened to a recording of the late Dr. Herman Hoeh from a sermon he delivered at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of 2003, exactly 9 years ago. He made the following poignant statement which I felt contained some extraordinary insight:

We all have a responsibility to test the things that are brought to our attention. We do not all have the same intellectual skills; we do not all have the same spiritual skills. We do not all have the same opportunity. We do not all hear well; we do not all see well. We all arrive at spiritual insights at different times. There is one thing the church must not do—draw a fence around the state of the church in its belief and practice should he (Mr. Armstrong) die. He (Herbert W. Armstrong) has known no group who has grown beyond the understanding laid out by the leadership. As a result of the crisis that did affect the church at beginning of the last decade, and at the end of the past century, many individuals ceased to be Bereans and sought to become authorities.

Many self-proclaimed experts have emerged focusing on one twiggy bit of expertise or another twiggy bit of expertise, while totally missing the trunk of the tree.

If you take a look at the contents of *The Journal*, you will grasp the accuracy of his observations. If you have followed the intrigues of the sheep wars which have ravaged continually for the last 30 years in the Greater Church of God, you will appreciate Dr. Hoeh's insights. My friend Donald Ward recently e-mailed me that "it seems like everybody wants to be his own minister."

Back in Herman Hoeh's message, he characterized the Bereans as having an open mind, but understanding clearly the need to guard the mind, preventing heretic distortions. Today, I would like to encourage all of us to re-embrace the Berean model in our approach to the Scriptures and doctrines—or as Julie added, if we have not previously embraced the Berean model that we begin now.

I make no apology in quoting and referencing Dr. Herman Hoeh. Some people have spread some vicious and untrue rumors about Herman Hoeh such as he was a closet Buddhist, surreptitiously attending Buddhist services. As I was preparing to write the article "Purging the Rumor Bug in the Body of Christ" which appeared in the Forerunner in December of 1999, I called Herman Hoeh, and asked him to spike or confirm the rumor that he had become a closet Buddhist. He set my mind at ease about not only that rumor, but a number of other rumors which still continue to recycle even after his death.

Did Herman Hoeh have flaws—yes, many errors and speculations which later proved to be errors. But he was also a sterling example of admitting and repenting of errors. When I first attended the Minneapolis congregation of the Radio Church of God in the winter of 1965, Herman Hoeh's *Compendium of World History* had already attained the status of the Book of Mormon of the Radio Church of God. Herman Hoeh was called Mr. Plain Truth.

As the years progressed, major and minor flaws were found in his speculations. He grew ten feet in my estimation when in front of the entire student body in Big Sandy in the spring of 1976 he said, "Frankly, brethren, I was wrong." The ability to admit error and push on for better insight is rare, perhaps non-existent, in some of the major splinter groups of the Greater Church of God. I have listened to the sermons he gave just prior to his death, and I am convinced that, to the best of his ability, he followed the Berean model right up to his death and deserves our respect for having taught us to do so also.

As Bibi Netanyahu mentioned in his United Nations speech, an attack on one NATO

country is an attack on the entire NATO block. Similarly, if anyone in the sound of my voice makes a disparaging comment about Herman Hoeh, I consider it a personal attack on myself.

We need to develop the Berean quality of continually searching, retesting, and retesting. That does not mean never coming to the knowledge of the truth, but we must realize that our current knowledge is made on the basis of what we have mulled over in the past, and sometimes we were in error.

I am reminded of my dental hygienist who pokes my teeth with a nut-pick device to find dental caries or cavities. I dread this procedure, but I realize it is a good proactive practice to prevent my teeth from deteriorating. Likewise, the Bereans were just as diligent in their daily hygienic practice of comparing any new practice or teaching with those things already taught in the Scriptures.

Acts 17:11 Now these [Jews] were better disposed {and} more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they were entirely ready {and} accepted {and} welcomed the message [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] with inclination of mind {and} eagerness, searching {and} examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Christopher Nye, in his article “Why the Bereans were Noble in Character,” exclaims,

“I have read that passage before and thought, Ah yes, these Bereans were solid because they received the word with eagerness.”

That is true. But it is only half of the whole truth. The Bereans were eager, but they also had a healthy skepticism, comparing new things they heard with the Scriptures. The Bereans not only received Paul's message with eagerness, but they examined the Scriptures every day to see if Paul was right about Jesus Christ or consistent with the whole counsel of the Scriptures.

Zeal coupled with a healthy skepticism, or zeal coupled with prudent caution, is something we all need in the murky, pea-soup fog we are in right now and in the stormy times ahead. As the Bereans meticulously searched the Scriptures carefully testing, testing, and retesting what was preached to them, we must also develop a discerning mind, especially as we approach the last days, which our Elder Brother teaches in the

Olivet Prophecy will be a time of deception and falsehood.

I am pleased to associate with a tiny splinter group in the greater Church of God which has taken on the task of the Bereans, uploading a new, fresh Bible study every day. As of September 1, 2012, we had 93,418 subscribers (a number as large as the population of Tyler, Texas, Duluth, Minnesota, or Sioux Falls, South Dakota.) At a recent community event in Big Sandy, one of the members of another splinter group asked me why we were not doing a work, to which I replied, "What do you call the Berean Bible study?"

A number of years ago, I mentioned to David Grabbe that we seem to have a unique niche on what we might term the Bible Genome project on our website—doing for the Scriptures what Pandora Radio is doing for music.

Just last week, my American Literature class was studying the particulars of the typical Puritan homiletic. This description was part of the discussion:

In its usual form the sermon began with a quotation from the Bible. This particular scripture was then investigated from every angle until the speaker could draw a conclusion from it. He then tried to apply these conclusions to daily life.

Back in 1993, when another American Literature class at Ambassador College examined this description of the Puritan homily, I remarked to the class that this seemed to be the model John Ritenbaugh has been following for years. When he first came to North Hollywood in 1986, his Bible studies on John, Amos, and Hebrews all followed the same Berean formula—and still follow the practice of meticulously proceeding through the verses, strategically turning the possible interpretations over and over until a plausible one is found, making it possible to go to the next point. By the way, Herman Hoeh was a regular attendee at John's Bible studies.

Please turn over to Judges 7 for what I believe constitutes an excellent metaphor for the Berean approach:

Judges 7:4-7 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The people still appear too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall come to pass that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So he brought the people down

to the water. And the LOORD said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, numbered 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. The LOORD said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home."

The candidate who laps the water with his tongue putting his face into the creek, exercises gullibility and no caution, totally oblivious to what is going on around him. The candidate who cups the water shows caution and an awareness of the context, aware of the surrounding, and an awareness of possible dangers which might befall him.

Likewise, Solomon, as we have already seen in Ecclesiastes 2:3, explored new environments cautiously as his mind guided him wisely. When we think about our thinking, when we evaluate how we are thinking, we are using what general semanticists term "self-reflexiveness," metaphorically cupping water with our hands rather than drinking like a dog or cat from the pond.

Self-reflexiveness, or systematically thinking about our thinking, is closely related to what the Victorian poet philosopher Matthew Arnold called dis-interestedness, or the ability to deal with ideas without getting caught up in the emotional passion. There are times in our studies that we need to get off the emotional jet stream and look at the whole issue with detachment and disinterestedness. Arnold maintained that we must strive to keep "aloof from what is called the practical [or parochial] view of things" by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a "free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches." It is resolutely to avoid political polemics of the sort which dominate criticism in the late 20th century: "Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical [parochial or partisan] spirit and its axioms." I am reminded of a Baptist classmate in graduate school. As we were delving through the works of Plato, he would write "agree or disagree" in the margins of his text—a very shallow way of reading. The law of criticism's being is "the idea of a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."

When we approach a subject with self-reflexiveness or dis-interestedness, we thoughtfully and deliberately monitor our thinking, mulling it over, and again mulling it over, taking a second and third thought. We suspend our emotional reaction and look at it in a calm, cool, scientifically detached manner. In this way, we can read meticulously read the works of Karl Marx without becoming a Communist, or the works of Adolf Hitler

without becoming a Nazi, or the Koran without becoming a Moslem. Recently I purchased the entire works of Martin Luther on CD Rom. To my knowledge, I have not become a Lutheran though I have developed a keen appreciation of Martin Luther's translating skills and his contribution to Linguistics and particularly to the establishment of the standard Modern High German language.

In Helmut Richter's "A Short History of the German Language," Martin Luther's translation of the Bible was credited as establishing a common dialect Hoch Deutsch—or the language spoken in the mountains of Thuringia, the common language for all of Germany. With Luther's religious polemics we may have some quarrels, but his contributions to Linguistics have earned him our respect and gratitude

The English poet William Wordsworth insisted that even though emotion may have inspired a poetic work, it takes calm, detached tranquility in order to create a poem, an article, a novel, or a sermon or sermonette. *Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."*

We could say that even though creativity begins as a somewhat chaotic popcorn process in the right brain, it must be brought under control by cool Berean analysis and synthesis in the analytical left brain. Creating any work takes both the operations of the right creative sphere and the left critical sphere. The late General Semanticist Stuart Mayper, one of my previous mentors, referred to this process as thinking creatively.

When my cerebral cortex is under a storm front, when inspiration is really popping, I find that I cannot organize my way out of a paper bag. When we are flooded with emotion, it is impossible to process any new ideas. For example, when John Ritenbaugh introduced his new interpretation or understanding of born again or born from above back in May 31, 2009, I must say that initially I was not on board. Several individuals left our fellowship because it seemed to contradict some major doctrines we had previously learned under Mr. Armstrong's tutelage.

That initial message on May 31, 2009 metaphorically blew out a whole panel of circuits, shutting down the thinking process—especially when coupled with Brother Clyde Finklea's sermonette on what he referred to as the good leaven on the same program.

Once again, I had to borrow a life-saving technique from Herman Hoeh—that is to create a back burner to ponder those things that did not add up at the present time. Several weeks later, when the emotional embers had cooled, Julie and I employed the self-reflexive Berean approach of going over every scripture and every point-

counterpoint argument.

One thing I learned many years ago was not to get up-ended over a metaphor or analogy, biblical or otherwise—whether we are talking about begetting, impregnation with the Holy Spirit, the birth process, or wind rushing around that we cannot see.

In my textbook, *Images of Order*, I defined the metaphor as a comparison in which the properties, characteristics, and structure of something we can see are projected upon something we cannot see. When David says, “God, you are my Rock”—he does not refer to God’s hard-headedness in not answering our prayers, but the perceived permanence and durability of the rock. But the metaphor, analogy, parable, figure of speech, or any other symbol for that matter, is not the reality.

As Count Alfred Korzybski, the father of General Semantics, has warned: the map is not the territory, the map cannot say all there is about the territory, and furthermore maps can distort our perception of the territory. I soon realized that one of the things I was most ticked-off about this understanding was not to be able to use the hatpin test on my Baptist neighbor down the street. As I personally compared the Scriptures with the prior set of proof texts, in my estimation, John’s analysis stood the test of cold reason.

There are many instances in the Scriptures in which individuals needed time to ponder, reflect, or turn over things in their mind before they could embrace them. For example,

Genesis 37:9-11 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me." He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What do you consider the significance of the dream you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" His brothers became jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. His brothers became jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Jacob metaphorically put it on the back burner, letting it simmer and percolate. He did not initially like the idea, but he was not going to take a chance on perhaps rejecting a revelation from God.

When Mary’s fiancé Joseph learned of Mary’s pregnancy, his nervous system was undoubtedly jolted, but he self-reflexively pondered over a solution.

Matthew 1:19-20 And her [promised] husband Joseph, being a just {and} upright man and not willing to expose her publicly {and} to shame {and} disgrace her, decided to repudiate {and} dismiss (divorce) her quietly {and} secretly. But as he was thinking this over [percolating, pondering, giving it a second, third, or fourth thought] , behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary [as] your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of (from, out of) the Holy Spirit.

When we lose our Berean self-reflexiveness (thinking about our thinking) we tend to lose our teachability and we lose our pliability. Perhaps the most important aspect of self-reflexiveness is our willingness to be shaped and molded by Almighty God, and not become stiff-necked as our forebears did in the wilderness.

Hebrews 3:7-12 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED ME BY TESTING ME, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. THEREFORE I BECAME ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" Take care, brethren, that there not exist in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

On May 26th of this year, Bill Onisick gave a sermonette titled "Using Gray Matter to Solve Gray Matters," acknowledging that when we are newly called babes in Christ, we naturally prefer simple black and white choices, but as we mature, we are required and mandated by Almighty God to make decisions in gray matters, far more numerous than the simple black and white decisions we had to make when we were first called.

For example, it is easy to understand that we should keep the weekly and the annual Sabbaths holy. But how to keep the Sabbath holy is up to our own discretion and we will have to experiment—possibly making mistakes and false steps in the process. It is by God's design that we use these numerous, gray, uncharted areas to build spiritual maturity by applying the principles in God's Word, using common sense and emergent God-given discernment prompted by God's Holy Spirit.

Spiritual maturity develops within us only if we have regularly and faithfully exercised discernment concerning these multiple gray areas using the God ordained human reason which I am sorry to say that some evangelical fundamentalists have denigrated.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to serve as teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk has not familiarized himself to the word of righteousness, for he resembles an infant. But solid food we reserve for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

In this same vein, my friend Dave Havir has often cautioned “Preach the rule, but be ready to counsel the exception.” Back in the fall of 1966, as a group of us were returning back to Minnesota from the Feast in Big Sandy, Texas, we were following a semi-truck in Northern Iowa just a little outside of Mason City. Suddenly, one of the truck tires burst into flames. I said to the driver, “Don’t you think we should stop to help that guy?” He replied, “No, we better not. The Sabbath is approaching.” I said, “Okay.” At that time, I did not have the savvy or the spiritual maturity to comprehend, let alone to remind the driver, what our Elder Brother counseled in Matthew 23:23, that love and mercy trump the more mundane aspects of the law.

Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Turn over to another familiar scripture reinforcing the same principle.

I Corinthians 13:11-12 When I lived as a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have become fully known.

I am going to re-read verse 12 in the Amplified Bible for better clarity and insight:

I Corinthians 13:12 For now we are looking in a mirror that gives only a dim {blurred} reflection [of reality as in a riddle or enigma], but then [when perfection comes] we shall see in reality {and} face to face! Now I know in part (imperfectly), but then I shall know {and} understand fully {and} clearly, even in the same manner as I have been fully {and} clearly known {and} understood [by God].

Even with best light possible, while we are still in the flesh, we will see only imperfectly and crudely—through a glass darkly.

I Corinthians 13:13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these consists of love.

As the sheep-wars continue to rage among the splinter groups of the greater church of God, I reflect on a statement my dear friend and mentor Bob Hoops used to say back in 1976, “We undoubtedly will have more to account to God Almighty for the shabby treatment we’ve given to other people than our keeping Pentecost on the wrong day.”

Following the Berean Model, we should make it a daily practice to self-reflexively meditate each day on our progress. We need to develop the habit of meditating instead of counting sheep or fretting about the frustrating events of the day.

Psalms 63:6-8 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, For I regard you as my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.

Many of you recall that in one of Jack Bulharowski’s sermons he talked about preparing a flight log of his previous air flight, in which he would rehearse the problems that had occurred and what he had done to fix them to prevent a future recurrence.

Motivational expert Paul Meyer of Waco, Texas encourages people to keep a daily journal, highlighting the significant events of the day—especially the glitches and problems, what caused them, and what we could do to prevent a repeat occurrence. Since the fall of 1971, I have tried to follow Paul Meyer’s advice, and have profited from his counsel, making entries before falling asleep and immediately upon getting up in the morning. (I might mention that every sermon, Bible study, article, book, and lecture that I have given has started in the pages of my journal.) A reinforcement of this principle is

found in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:147-148 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Your words. My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.

We can see that our reflections over the day's activities should be compared with the principles found in God's Word and, moreover, His Holy Law. If we have had some clashes with our supervisors or with our clients, have we been oblivious to some precept in God's Law which could have averted it?

A practicing Berean will learn to accept correction, even from people whom we do not want to hear correction.

II Samuel 16:5-7 When King David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose had the name of Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men stood at his right hand and at his left. Thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow!

Please scroll down to verse 9 to see David's response:

II Corinthians 16:9-12 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head." But the king said, "What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the LORD has told him, 'Curse David,' then who shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him. Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day."

Can we develop the Berean self-reflexiveness to realize when correction—even when it comes from a despised enemy—may actually be a course correction directly from Almighty God?

It amazes me that within the last six years, I have finally implemented some of the blunt, corrective criticism I received from my Ambassador students back in 1974, but was too full of pride to do anything about it then. Last week, one of my students said, "Dr. Maas, I don't mean to speak out of turn, but I think you made a mistake on this test." I replied to her, "You are absolutely right and I will fix it." She dropped her jaw and said that she had never heard any teacher do that before.

When I made the statement to my supervisor Dr. Torrance, "These students are going to learn that they cannot pull anything over me," he chuckled and replied, "Someday you will see it is wiser to let them think they have pulled something over you." It took me years to see the wisdom of his counsel.

Back in the spring of 2006, when excessive stress put some intense demands on my nervous system causing a metaphorical shutdown of the machinery, my supervisor Sally Malone Hawkins said to me, "I do not know why you are going through this, but I am sure God is allowing it, and allowing it for a reason." This horrible episode provided the inspiration for the November-December 2008 Forerunner article "From Sheriff to Shepherd to Shepherd: Are we willing to be defrauded?" in which the contrast between the easy-going type B personality Sheriff Andy Taylor is contrasted with the high-strung type A personality Barney Fife demonstrates the contrast between the servant leadership mandated by Jesus Christ and the tyrannical gentile leadership practiced by too many dictators around the world, especially in the Muslim world.

It takes a large measure of Berean self-reflexiveness to admit our errors. It takes much more to ask God to see our secret sins, but we have an obligation to do that as well.

Psalms 19:12-13 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I will remain blameless, and I shall receive acquittal of great transgression.

Sins that we have hidden or concealed from ourselves are never concealed from Almighty God, as we learn in Psalm 90.

Psalms 90:8 You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

All of us are plagued with spiritual blind spots. Dave Maas does not know where his

blind spots are, but other people, and some of my students, seem to have no difficulty pointing those out to me.

As a group (or as one of the splinter groups of the Greater Church of God), we have spiritual blind spots too. We may not know what they are, but there are plenty of blogs dedicated to removing the specks or splinters out of our eyes to get us back on the right track. One of them is the COG Ritter-or perhaps the COG Writer—composed by a man whose initials are BT and his last name rhymes with Eel. BT writes:

Church of the Great God (CGG) is *ran* by John Ritenbaugh. Sadly, like many groups, he does not place his group's top priority on proclaiming the Gospel. Unlike some of the other groups, he originally seemed to consider that to be one of the best things about his group. This article includes quotes from CGG as well as comments which show that CGG has departed from 'the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3). It should be pointed out that CGG changed a little, so some of the quotes here seem outdated as CGG has decided to place a bit more emphasis on gospel proclamation now than it did its first decade or so of existence.

That is very charitable of him to acknowledge that we have inched a little closer to the faith once delivered. Brother Bob, I would like to take a little splinter out of your eye—if you do not mind.

You used the wrong form of the verb in your first sentence. It is not the church is “ran” by John Ritenbaugh, but it should read is “run” by John Ritenbaugh. I do not want you to sound illiterate as you continue to remove the many splinters from our blind eyes. To be fair to BT, he does not have a backup editor like I have in Charles Whitaker.

In my humble opinion, some members of the group which BT affiliate himself have shown a high degree of intolerance and judgmentalism for those who do not fit in their mold. For example, when I attended the funeral of Dr. Lynn Torrance, one of the members of that group and I were passing the grave of Garner Ted Armstrong, and this member raised his voice loudly and exclaimed, “I hope for his sake that he was never converted.” My jaw dropped as I tried to process this bit of arrogant pomposity. I have drawn the same protective red line around GTA as I have for Herman Hoeh.

Several years later, when I recounted this episode to another member of that fellowship, she said “I do not see what is wrong in what he said.” I consider this group in which they are affiliated to be loyal members of God’s church, and their pastor a faithful servant of

Jesus Christ, but I do not think this and several other groups of similar mindsets realize that the thing that rankled our Elder Brother Jesus Christ most was blatant self-righteous, which stinks like filthy rags. To quote Roderick Meredith, "That's damnable, brethren!"

In contrast, several years earlier, I had attended the funeral of Garner Ted Armstrong. Ron Dart said a little more charitably, "Ted undoubtedly grieved God's Holy Spirit frequently, but the evidence is that he did his best to serve Almighty God before his death." Having heard ministers in the Church of God, International, I also consider them faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Yes, they like every other splinter group in the Greater Church of God have spiritual blind spots just as the Church of the Great God and the group with which the Cog Ritter BT affiliated also have significant spiritual blind spots.

Brother Bob (and I consider you a brother though I am not sure you consider me a brother, but just another heretic who has wandered from the faith once delivered), I am challenging you to point out any spiritual blind spots that I or my fellowship have. My e-mail is davidfmaas@yahoo.com, and I promise I will prayerfully go over every comment you make.

But I humbly ask you, Brother Bob, with all the malicious finger-pointing you are doing in your blog, do you think you might be missing the mark on the apostle Paul's admonition in II Corinthians 10?

II Corinthians 10:12 For we do not have the boldness to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they have no understanding.

II Corinthians 10:12 Not that we [have the audacity to] venture to class or [even to] compare ourselves with some who exalt {and} furnish testimonials for themselves! However, when they measure themselves with themselves and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding {and} behave unwisely.

It is presumptuous of anyone to determine who is orthodox and who has swerved into heresy. It is presumptuous for any one of us, regardless of the group in which we are affiliated, to pontifically declare who is converted and who is not, who will be in the first resurrection and who will be in the second resurrection, and who is doing the work and

who is not.

God alone makes that determination—we do not—or if we do, we should not. Furthermore, everyone in this room and everyone within the sound of my voice in every splinter group of the Greater Church of God is a heretic. In the past, you have heard me refer to Big Sandy as Heresy Junction because every splinter group in the Greater Church of God, including ours, has a presence. Though most of the groups share more things alike than we disagree upon, it does not prevent individuals to get out their litmus test or list of doctrinal purity:

Do we have the name of God?

Do we keep the Sabbath?

Do we keep the Holy Days?

Do we reject the trinity?

Etc.

But we may find on someone's litmus test something to which our particular group does not adhere to—then we become the heretic. I used to employ a similar list myself until I heard an individual in Big Sandy recite all the above things—but then he added:

Do we believe that being born again happens only after death when we are spirit beings and can swoosh around as the wind. (This same individual finds us heretical for not marching in lockstep on counting Pentecost.)

Last month, a member of the Hebrew roots movement in Big Sandy (yet another branch of the Greater Church of God) implied that I was a heretic for uttering the name of Jesus, which she insisted was a corruption of the name Zeus. Another individual implied that I was a heretic for not observing new moons.

The label heretic does not bother me as much as it did one time, because a heresy, when examined properly, is a course correction which has been carried too far. For example, when Martin Luther perceived that the church in which he was a member focused excessively on works, he pushed the emphasis to the opposite extreme of faith alone.

When Herbert W. Armstrong took issue with Protestant evangelicals for emphasizing

grace too much, he downplayed the role of grace, emphasizing the law. If the Protestants emphasize grace too much, well we will fix that by emphasizing law, law, and law. Likewise, when our fellowship (Greater Church of God) pointed out that the world's churches were observing Jesus Christ's birth and His resurrection on pagan holidays, there was a tendency to go to the opposite extreme of never mentioning those events at all.

When my friend Dave Havir decided to mention the birth of Christ during the fall holy days and the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a Bible Study following the Passover, he received several angry emails accusing him of heresy and departing from the faith once delivered. Any adjustment or course correction is risky if we take it too far, but not making the course correction is just as dangerous.

Ralph Waldo Emerson compared our life's journey—and by extension, our spiritual life's journey—to the voyage of a ship, necessitating many zigs and zags to stay on course. If we continue to zig when we should zag, we are employing a foolish consistency, which he described as the “hobgoblin of little minds.”

As Charles Whitaker pointed out in his sermon, we must be willing to zig when God zigs and zag when God zags. In a similar vein, John Ritenbaugh in his article, “The Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility: Part Eleven,” made the following observation:

Some people are especially endowed with a beautiful or handsome face and proportioned body, but what would become of that beautiful face or body if a part of it became disproportionately large? Suppose one eye became twice as large as the other, the nose occupied the whole of the face, or one arm became as long as a leg. There would be no beauty of face and form because beauty largely consists of everything being in proper proportion to the recognized ideal.

As a group, we have made many course corrections over the years. What we have staked our reputations and very lives as the truth has often turned out to be futile speculation.

Technically, we are not called to guard the truth. As the poet Milton said in his *Areopagitica*, “The truth does not need protection—it is our access to the truth that needs guarding.”

We should never dogmatically assume, as one evangelist in the Greater Church of God used to say, "We know, and we know that we know." In certain contexts, such as in Mike Ford's insightful sermon on the outliers, certain skills may be honed until they are habitual, but the context of the "know and know that we know" proclamation is actually an aphorism of Confucius, reading, "To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge."

As the American humorist Will Rogers has stated (sometimes this aphorism has been erroneously attributed to Mark Twain), "It isn't what we know that gives us trouble; it's what we know that ain't so." And as I tell my students, when the preacher cusses and the English teacher uses bad grammar, the lesson is extremely important.

Many things that we glommed onto in the past as the absolute truth turned out to be mistakes and errors in judgment. As a pompous 21 year old, I desired to bring the truth of God to my father: "Dad, you mark my words, the Germans will be marching the streets of Minneapolis before 1975." (Perhaps the New Ulm High School Band did march in the Aquatennial Parade.) "Dad, God would never allow a holy day to occur on the venerable day of the sun." Crow does not have a very good flavor—and I regret it took nearly 25 years to repair the damage to the relationship between my father and me. Ironically, back in 1966, I used to envy the close father-son relationship shared by Garner Ted and his father.

The thing is, we can only go with the best light we have, and with that light we still see through a glass darkly. Remember, though prophecy may be true, our perception of it may be in total error. When Paul says in I Corinthians 13:8 that prophecy will fail, the fickleness of individual interpretation could be one aspect

Consider the huge list of things we have had to re-evaluate and re-evaluate over the years.

The Place of Safety, which we extrapolated from an obscure verse in Isaiah 16 and 33, we were lead-pipe sure was Petra.

Isaiah 33:15-16 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure."

George Crow recently reported that approximately 200,000 individuals had made reservations for this top-secret hideaway. In the same message, he reported that the Israeli government has registered over 200 pairs of two witnesses. Every speculation we make should be in the subjunctive mood rather than the indicative or the imperative mood giving us latitude to back up when we are wrong.

More recently, I have come to the conclusion that the Place of Safety is more probably Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle. (Smile) If you have ever seen the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, you will remember that the escape from Petra scenes were filmed in Palo Duro Canyon.

Back in psychology class, I learned that neurotics build air castles, psychotics move into them, and the psychiatrist picks up the rent.

Our many speculations about the identity of the Beast have been legion. Frank Nelte, in a recent article, said: It was on that doomed-to-failure foundation that all our speculations were built. And so a steady stream of “Beast candidates” was put forward by certain people. Going back to the 1940's this was the sequence:

- 1) First Adolf Hitler was supposedly “the Beast.”
- 2) Next Marshall Tito of then Yugoslavia was supposedly “the Beast.”
- 3) Next Adolf Hitler was supposedly still alive and hiding in South America, just waiting to emerge from hiding to consolidate a United Europe under his leadership.
- 4) Next Franz Joseph Strauss from Bavaria, Germany, was supposedly “the Beast.” Julie and I were in Bavaria for the Feast of Tabernacles when the Beast died. Brother Ted had to cancel his interview with him later that fall.
- 5) When Strauss died, then Otto von Habsburg was supposedly “the Beast.” And then Otto finally died in July last year at age 98 years.

There has been much speculation that the ten nation configuration will constitute the Beast and will be ridden by a whore, which some have almost staked their salvation was the Catholic Church. Some may even think that Herbert W. Armstrong came up with the prophetic insight that the Catholic Church was the whore of Babylon. He did not—Martin Luther, Andreas Karlstadt, and John Huss came up with that brainchild. I do not think Luther would have been too happy to be called the daughters of the whore, which some of our ministers used to faithfully teach.

The speculation that Herbert W. Armstrong was the Elijah was another troublesome supposition. One time in a phone conversation with Raymond McNair, he tried to pin me down asking, “

Do you believe Herbert W. Armstrong was the Elijah?”, to which I replied that the Bible teaches that patterns repeat themselves and that there may be many, many, many types, but it would be a mistake to assume that we must force more significance into Mr. Armstrong's role than that.

We may have been in error about the identity of Gog and Magog. What about Germany heading up a powerful ten nation revival of the Roman Empire? This summer, as my seven cousins from Minnesota, North Dakota, and California were conducting family tree research in Germany, my cousin from Berlin warned me in an email not to even joke about Germany's expansionist aspirations. It is a prisonable offense.

If we were such prophecy whizzes, then why was it that Herbert W. Armstrong, Herman Hoeh, Roderick Meredith, and David Hulme were all simultaneously blindsided by Islam terrorists and 9-11? No one saw those threats coming. I do not criticize them because I know that they were going by the best light they had, but with the best light they had they were seeing through a glass darkly.

In the past, we have gone to extremes about divorce and remarriage. I had a student from Minnesota who came tearfully to me, describing how the minister had made his Mom and Dad live like brother and sister in separate rooms for over ten years to determine whether their marriage was approved by God. Also, we were warned by a well-meaning minister not to go to doctors for any reason because it showed a lack of faith. I have this man's Master's thesis from Ambassador College condemning doctors as going to Egypt. I do not condemn this man, because I believe he was going with the best light he had—but even with the best light he had he was looking through a glass darkly.

One minister wrote his Master's thesis on the demonic origin of symphonic music. And, what about brown bread instead of white bread? Bob Hoops said one time he and Dody were visiting Herbert and Loma. Mr. Armstrong went out in the kitchen and after a while he started to cackle, while he brought in two loaves of white bread, to which Loma responded, “Herbert, Herbert!” Church government used to be called the watershed doctrine—making church government equivalent to God's government. Some of the other splinter groups still think it is.

Our fellowship then and now will continue to make blunders and mistakes. Herbert W.

Armstrong, Garner Ted Armstrong, Herman Hoeh, Roderick Meredith, Gerald Flurry, and Dave Pack are or were seriously flawed men. Charles Whitaker is a flawed man. Dave Maas is a seriously flawed man, but then so were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist seriously flawed men.

Do I fault them for their errors? No, because they were following the best light they had, but even with the best light, they were looking through a glass darkly. And, we are too. We are at this critical juncture navigating through thick, pea-soup fog, and visual cues will not help us. Back in 1951, two company airplane pilots for the Green Giant Company were returning to Le Sueur from a location in Wisconsin. Instrument navigation was not as sophisticated as it is now, so they thought they were ascending when they were descending, crashing their plane into a cornfield taking both their lives, leaving behind widows and children.

At this point, we must realize that the modern Berean is equipped with a kind of spiritual sonar or radar.

John 14:26 But the Comforter [*paraclytone*, Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, Standby], the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.

John 16:8 And when He comes, He will convict {and} convince the world {and} bring demonstration to it about sin and about righteousness (uprightness of heart and right standing with God) and about judgment:

We have been gifted with a spiritual navigation system, a GPS, a sonar, a radar, whatever metaphor we want to describe it, so that we can walk by faith and not by sight. In I Corinthians 2, the apostle Paul echoes or reinforces this theme:

I Corinthians 2:10-12 Yet to us God has unveiled {and} revealed them by {and} through His Spirit, for the [Holy] Spirit searches diligently, exploring {and} examining everything, even sounding the profound and bottomless things of God [the divine counsels and things hidden and beyond man's scrutiny]. For what person perceives (knows and understands) what passes through a man's thoughts except the man's own spirit within him? Just so no one discerns (comes to know and comprehend) the thoughts of God except

Re-Embracing the Berean Model by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit [that belongs to] the world, but the [Holy] Spirit Who is from God, [given to us] that we might realize {and} comprehend {and} appreciate the gifts [of divine favor and blessing so freely and lavishly] bestowed on us by God.

This constitutes the spiritual sonar, radar, or GPS which will help us to navigate the difficult times ahead.

To conclude, let us turn to my favorite verse in the entire Bible Hebrews 8:10.

Hebrews 8:10-11 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will imprint My laws upon their minds, even upon their innermost thoughts {and} understanding, and engrave them upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And it will nevermore be necessary for each one to teach his neighbor and his fellow citizen or each one his brother, saying, Know (perceive, have knowledge of, and get acquainted by experience with) the Lord, for all will know Me, from the smallest to the greatest of them.

This verse originally appeared in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and it is repeated in Hebrews 10:16.

Herbert W. Armstrong used to call the Holy Spirit God's law in action. In the future, it will be our entire composition as glorified spiritual beings.

Currently, we have an earnest or down payment (Ephesians 1:13-14)—just a little dab of spiritual protoplasm. But, the ultimate fulfillment of this process will culminate when we are completely composed of Spirit, and God's Law will be our first nature, not just second nature.

In the meantime, the lessons we learn during this Feast of Tabernacles and, indeed, through our lives will (to cite the old German philosopher Nietzsche and has become the lyrics of a current pop song), that which will not kill us will make us spiritually stronger.

For the rest of our spiritual journey, let us learn to cup water with our hands rather than carelessly putting our faces into the water, lapping it like a dog or a cat. Let us use this Feast of Tabernacles to recapture the Berean ideal.