

## Why Does God Keep Secrets?

**Reflective Thinking/God's Teaching Techniques**

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For those who like to title sermonettes and sermons, I would like to call this one, "Why Does God Keep Secrets?" And for some specific descriptors and identifiers to index this, we will call it "General Revelation" or "Special Revelation" or as I e-mailed to Diane, the second part of this title is "God's Pedagogical Techniques." When you hear *pedagogical*, it is a synonym for teaching learning techniques.

In Proverbs 25:2 we read the enigmatic passage, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter." Countless individuals throughout history have expressed frustration and bewilderment at this proclivity on the part of our Creator to conceal things or to keep secrets.

When Job was trying to make sense of his devastating trial, he lamented, "And these things You have hidden in Your heart; I know that this was with You" (Job 10:13), and, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!" (Job 23:3)

Most people at one time or another have identified with the ceramic clay in Isaiah 45:9 and Romans 9:20, who asks, "What are You making?" and, "Why have You made me like this?" Does God have a pragmatic reason for keeping mankind seemingly perpetually in the dark, ignorant of His intentions?

What I hope to do this morning before this message concludes is to demonstrate that God Almighty, by not revealing everything immediately and directly, has been employing state-of-the-art pedagogical (or teaching) techniques, inductive inquiry, and explorative methods, which have taken the educational community and the teaching profession thousands of years to discover.

After God Almighty calls individuals out of this world's society to become members of His holy Family, He puts them through an intense rigorous program of study—lasting an entire lifetime—including the traditional straight deductive lecture which we read about in Romans 10:17 and a preponderance of life experiences to apply His principles and to grow in character. Our forbears in the wilderness learned the importance of the Sabbath inductively and deductively—inductively as God systematically regulated the manna supply in Exodus the 16th chapter.

We might draw an analogy from our academic institutions that when we teach a class like chemistry, biology, or physics, we often insist on one lecture period and two or more labs or practicums. Our Sabbath services and Bible studies we could consider the deductive lecture on foundational principles while the other six days of the week we could consider the lab or practicum on overcoming and character building. As Herbert Armstrong repeatedly said, "God cannot build character by fiat and He can't overcome your human nature for you." No preacher or teacher can ever hope to lecture it into a student.

Scripture reveals that certain things God has kept back from His creation, purposing instead to reveal those things incrementally and conditionally to His obedient chosen offspring.

**Deuteronomy 29:29** The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

We learn from Daniel that "there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets" (Daniel 2:28) and that He reveals deep and secret things to those who have understanding (Daniel 2:21-22).

Actually theologians have perpetually talked about a general or public revelation which anyone with eyes and a brain could figure out for himself. Zophar, one of Job's counselors, alludes to this empirical revelation. I am going to use the old King James version because it is a little bit more emphatic. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" And then secondly, "Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7)

The American pamphleteer and propagandist, Thomas Paine, wrote a book entitled *The Age of Reason* in which for his thesis he attempted to answer Zophar's double-pronged question. To the first part he answered unequivocally in the affirmative, citing the order and the design of the cosmos. Thomas Paine, a practicing Deist, points to Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" as affirmation of a general or a public revelation. Every man, woman, or child who draws breath is privy to this general revelation of the Almighty.

Here is another scripture which more definitively substantiates the idea of a public or general revelation.

**Romans 1:20** For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Even with such an overwhelming testimony, some hapless fools, having immersed themselves in evil behavior, have deluded themselves into rejecting this general revelation, refusing to see God. We read that in Psalm 14:1.

**Romans 1:21** because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Thomas Paine responded to Zophar's second question, "Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" with a resounding "No." To a large extent Paine is right on target. The carnal mind, because of its propensity to sin and lawlessness, is enmity against God (Romans 8:7) and will never become privy to His intentions (unless, of course, God changes that).

Knowledge of God's intents and purposes (His secrets) has always been conditional—unequivocally linked to submission and obedience to His holy law. God Almighty promises to those that He has scattered for disobedience,

**Deuteronomy 4:29-30** But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice.

I would say that this scripture applies many times more to the scattered church—the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)—than it did to our forbears on Sinai.

Consequently, the answer to Zophar's second question, "Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" has strings attached. We may see God's intent and purpose for our lives more clearly if:

(1) we yield to His will, and if, (2) we actively and tirelessly seek for Him as we would for buried precious minerals.

Axiomatically, God will only reveal Himself (making His purposes and intentions known) to people who yield themselves to Him and to His holy law and actively and aggressively seek Him. Paul, addressing the philosophers of Athens, suggested that finding God requires some expended effort and energy.

**Acts 17:26-27** And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

God Almighty has placed a high priority on the "seeking out" and the "exploring" aspect of our character-building. Even with the help of God's Holy Spirit, God requires that we engage in an explorative searching investigative manner. Consider:

**I Corinthians 2:10** But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

We remember also that the receipt of this power to search and investigate also comes with strings attached. As the apostle Peter suggested, the Holy Spirit is "given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Even after God draws an individual into His Family (John 6:44), He does not instantaneously put all the pieces together. Herbert Armstrong often referred to the Bible as a coded book or a jigsaw puzzle, with God Almighty revealing the schematic diagram incrementally through His Holy Spirit. The main guiding interpreting principle in the greater church of God has always been that the Bible interprets the Bible, but the clues are not all found in one place. As one begins the process of putting the pieces together, he encounters the principle introduced in Isaiah 28:10, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little."

Without the connecting links supplied by God's Holy Spirit, the disjointed segments remain disjointed and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. It looks like pure foolishness to those who are not imbued with God's Holy Spirit. This is same coded feature our future Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, incorporated into the parables. When the disciples asked Him the reason He used coded figures of speech, He told them.

**Matthew 13:11** Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Jesus gave the crowds a crystal clear figure of speech, but he withheld both the referent (that is what the figure stood for) and the grounds of comparison, sharing it instead with His disciples in private (Matthew 13:11-13), referring to a scripture in Isaiah 6:9 for His not sharing the connection with the uninitiated. And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'"

As a coded book, the Bible demands readers to look for parallels, recurring patterns, and symbol clusters. To use a musical analogy, it would be helpful to be familiar with the various inversions of a chord in both block and arpeggio forms.

A principle pertaining to discovering biblical knowledge appears repeatedly throughout the Proverbs. Regarding godly wisdom, Solomon suggests:

**Proverbs 2:4-5** If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

We are also assured in Proverbs 2:7 that God Almighty stores up sound wisdom for the *crafty and cunning*? No—for the upright. Wisdom personified in Proverbs 8 suggests that those who diligently search for wisdom will find it. One former administrator of Ambassador College, Roderick Meredith, and his brother-in-law Raymond McNair, used to refer to the institution as a gold mine, but added with caution that gold or silver ore does not lie neatly above the ground, but has to be sought for amidst waste tailings and slag.

Whether we apply the principle to mining procedures or pedagogy (teaching principles), what we acquire too easily, we will not esteem very highly. In my experience with educational institutions over the last forty years, the lessons I have learned from glib instructors equipped with the latest technological bells and whistles seem to stick to the memory like Teflon (it does not stick). On the other hand, some of the one-on-one independent study courses in which I had to metaphorically dig out each chunk, each piece, each nugget of ore, chunk by chunk, have remained a permanent part of my learning repertoire.

In 1910 American educator-philosopher John Dewey (I deplore the man's politics and his philosophy, but he has written some gems as far as pedagogical techniques) wrote a book titled, *How We Think*, based upon empirical findings that grew out of the laboratory school that Dewey founded at the University of Chicago. Some far-reaching pedagogical techniques had their origin in this little volume—especially his procedures to foster what he called *reflective thinking*. In Dewey's estimation, thinking could be defined

as the "intentional effort to detect specific *connections* between our *actions* and their *consequences*." [emphasis ours] Dewey insists that by uncovering the detailed connections between our activities and their consequences, we learn to think *reflectively*. As Mr. Armstrong said, "Every effect has a cause."

Dewey suggests that to promote mature reflective thinking, a state of perplexity or a "forked-road" situation offering ambiguous alternatives must be placed in the learner's way. As long as no obstructions or forked roads are placed in the path, mature reflective problem solving skills will never be needed, but when we have an obstruction or obstacle demanding a choice or a decision, the learner is thrown into an intense need to resolve a painful ambiguity or dilemma. The resultant process of problem solving we could refer to as *reflective thinking*.

God Almighty had to lead through many forked roads our forefather Abraham, in many of which he took the wrong fork. In Genesis 12:11-20 (before the Pharaoh in Egypt) and also in Genesis 20:1-2 (before King Abimelech), events in Abraham's formative years (lessons placed there for our contemplation and admonition), Abraham compromised with God's law—at least that part dealing with bearing false witness. God Almighty allowed Abraham to take the wrong fork in both situations, and then in His mercy bailed him out of a bad situation, but not before Abram stewed in his predicament for awhile, learning some hard lessons about taking the expedient, faithless way out.

God again allowed Abram to take the wrong fork of expediency and faithlessness when he allowed Sarai to talk him into cohabiting with Hagar. In Genesis 16:9-12 we learn that God eventually patched up the botched mess that Abram got himself into, but not until Abram realized the unfortunate consequences of his rash, expedient, but faithless act. Abraham did not earn the titles 'father of the faithful' and 'friend of God' until he systematically reflected on the consequences of taking the wrong fork. Over an entire lifetime, reflecting on consequences of good and bad choices, Abraham finally calculated that the way to the real desire of his heart was to submit to God's law.

Back in 1987, John Ritenbaugh used a metaphor concerning Abraham which has lodged in my memory. He suggested that God metaphorically dropped Abraham like a rubber ball from increasingly higher and higher levels until Abraham was ready for the ultimate dilemma of his being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac.

In the Jewish Publication Society of America's *The Torah, The Five Books of Moses, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text*, I found a very interesting pattern which served as a metaphor of Abraham's and our own lives. In Genesis 12:9, the text in the JPS reads, "Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negev." And in Genesis 13:3 the text reads, "And he proceeded by stages from the Negev as far as Bethel." Over his entire lifetime, Abraham's spiritual development from little faith to much faith, and eventually the friend of God, proceeded in stages.

I like to picture the system of locks up and down the Mississippi River, or perhaps along the St. Lawrence Seaway at Sault Ste. Marie, in which a large vessel can systematically climb a watery stairway by floating the vessel into a holding tank and then pumping water into this tank until the vessel is elevated to the next level of watery expanse. Now the Army Corp of Engineers installed these locks to make inland large tonnage navigation possible.

Aaron Copland in his book, *What to Listen for in Music*, described three distinct stages in musical appreciation. The first, a purely *sensuous level*, corresponds to Romans 10:17, faith comes from hearing level. The second level, Copland referred to as the *performance level*, corresponding to the doing level discussed in James 2:24. The third level, the *purely musical* corresponds to the intimate secret level described by Psalm 25:14, "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." This is the level in music appreciation in which the musician actually becomes desirous of understanding the musical structure, laws, or schematic blueprints.

When I was a teenager, I used to think my dad was an old fuddy-duddy when he would take a miniature musical score with him when our family would



attend symphony concerts. Not until I was well into my forties and fifties did I learn to appreciate string quartets, chamber music, or pipe organ music, or sitting at concerts or in front of my CD player with a miniature orchestra score, which I do now. This level of appreciation comes only with a mature appreciation for pure musical law and form.

Whether we use the image of Abram traveling by stages through the Negev, or being dropped like a rubber ball from higher and higher altitudes, or being elevated by a system of locks, or progressing through a series of stages of musical appreciation (Now this metaphor piling technique I learned from my mentor, Jesus Christ: "The kingdom of God is like . . . , The kingdom of God is like . . . , The kingdom of God is like . . . ). In these metaphors, God uses a series of dilemmas or forked-road situations to gently pressure an individual to relinquish self-will and submit to God's will. God begins to incrementally reveal His secrets to those who yield to His will (faith comes from hearing). These insights are strengthened by doing and have matured by absorbing His laws and statutes deep into our bones.

God Almighty leads us down similar forked-road situations as our forefather Abraham encountered. Sometimes we may ask, "Why is God giving me this trial again? Haven't I passed it before?" Since 1974 when I started working for Ambassador College, I lived in somewhat of a protective cocoon when it came to certain kinds of trials—such as having to ask off for the Sabbath and the annual holy days. I do not ever remember receiving a jury summons for more than 28 years.

Two years ago, and two weeks before we would leave for Jefferson City for the Feast, I received a jury summons. Memories loomed in my mind of my terrifying experience in front of the LeSueur County Draft Board court 30 years earlier when I was intensely ridiculed for being a conscientious objector for religious reasons at the height of the Vietnam war. I remember I was sitting with my Bible open in front of the Draft Board explaining the scriptural reasons for not fighting. Clouds of cigar smoke started to come on both sides. I turned around and saw my old boss who was a member of the Board. I did not realize that, and I had heard him say many times, "I'd like to take every black, every Jew, every queer, every conscientious objector and line them up against the wall and BLAM. So, like father Abraham in his formative years, I took the most expedient way out, stating that I would be

participating in a religious convocation in Jefferson City and would not be able to serve. Well, the court clerk simply issued me a deferment and three months later I received another summons.

I reasoned with myself, the odds of not being picked should be pretty much in my favor, so instead of risking a hassle over religious reasons, I just decided to show up at the courthouse. Because over 200 people were called for this pool of jurors, I thought I could possibly escape detection. Many prospective jurors tried to get themselves excused, only to find the judge ridiculing them publicly for their futile attempts.

My ruminations started to go back to the experience of my old friend, the late Mrs. Bud Jenison, who had been thrown in the Renville County Jail over 30 years ago for refusing jury duty on religious grounds. To my dismay, I was the very first one chosen for jury duty. I uttered up a quick silent prayer, "God of Abraham, please get me out of this predicament."

This particular case presented an issue for which I had extremely strong feelings. When the defense and prosecuting attorneys questioned me in what the court termed *voir dire* (or cross examination of the prospective jurors), I said enough things to convince the judge, and particularly the prosecuting attorney, that my strongly held opinions would be a threat to the case. When the judge promptly kicked me off the jury, I silently thanked God for giving me some of father Jacob's conniving genes. I thought this was the end of my jury hassles.

But I was wrong. Six months later I received another jury summons. This time I checked off the excuse of child care because Julie had taken a temporary job in the summer and I had early morning classes and I could watch Aaron for the rest of the day. I thought that this expedient excuse would take care of the hassles.

When my mother-in-law Barbara Keegan received a notice before the Feast last year, I silently thanked God that I did not have to go through that hassle at this time (though terribly sorry she had to). But when I returned from Jefferson City last year, I found a jury summons in the mailbox. When I grumbled and seethed, "Why does this happen to me?", Julie said, "Why don't you try the truth this time?" I replied, "No I can't do that. I saw a judge

publicly ridiculing people's requests for being excused." I dreaded the thought of being labeled some kind of a religious kook in front of all those people. I did finally yield to Julie's suggestion, using the written excuse my mother-in-law had used in her predicament. After two long weeks, with no call from the court, no bailiff at my door, no city marshall at my door, I thought I had overcome this fourth round.

Three months later, I received another jury summons. I know we have a lot of crime in Smith County, but I never heard of anyone receiving so many summons in such a short time. My insides started to churn again, rehearsing in my mind all the ridicule and hassle I would probably go through. After praying fervently about the situation and reading and re-reading an article about jury duty, I finally gave up metaphorically, bracing myself for any verbal ridicule. (One of my former students who is still in Worldwide is a judge down there and I was fearful that I would go before him and wind up with a jail sentence.) When I finally gave up trying to find an expedient solution, turning in my biblically based response to the summons, I put the whole thing into God's capable hands.

The crisis passed and I received no further summons to appear. Thank God, I think I finally got the point that, as father Abraham had already discovered, God might allow us to temporarily take the expedient way, but sticky unpleasant consequences will follow. In the words of the Yiddish proverb, "With lies (or let us say half truths) one can go a long way, but not back again."

Another forked road situation occurred just a few short weeks before these fall holy days. My old friend David Bourland informed me that he had put my name in nomination for the Vice President for Education for the International Society for General Semantics. This was a post I really desired, but realized I would have to turn down because the obligatory executive meetings had been held on Saturday since S. I. Hayakawa founded the organization in 1943. When he offered me free transportation to Oakland on October 2 for the annual executive meeting, I stammered that I had previous commitments. He asked, "May I ask you what these commitments are?" I replied hesitantly, "I'm attending a church convention in Jefferson City." He said, "I detected a hesitation in your voice. Is there any reason you felt you couldn't tell me?"

I had always used expedient excuses in dealing with the Sabbath issue in the past, purposely scheduling our Ambassador College invitational conferences away from the Sabbath. But now, I realized the jig was up, and I prepared myself to withdraw my name from nomination.

The scripture kept shouting at me, "The fear of man brings a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). Feeling ashamed at my earlier timidity, I called David again and said, "You may think your old pal a religious kook, but these scruples I have about the Saturday Sabbath go back over 35 years." After a long, pregnant pause, David replied, "Wouldn't you say your scruples go back more like 6,000 years?" He said, "Whatever gave you the idea that I wouldn't understand." To make a long story shorter, David refused to accept my withdrawal, and promised to change the date of the annual executive meeting from Saturday to a Sunday, breaking a 56 year precedent. Somehow all of those things took place and I was elected to the office.

From these previous experiences it has become clear that though God does not force us to take the right fork in the road, the wrong choices are also part of our learning repertoire. He always lets us draw clear lessons from the goofs, from the consequences of our actions so we are not inclined to continually repeat the same stupid mistake. John Ritenbaugh suggested in his sermon on *Make Sure of Your Focus*, "I am sure that God left the qualifications for a Philadelphian reasonably vague in order to provide a prod toward growth because if we had exact standards against which to measure ourselves, it would probably cause us more problems than it does leaving them vague." He added another insight in his September 20, 1999 Atonement sermon, "God is faithful to bring ourselves face to face with ourselves until we reach the heart of the matter"—that heart being, of course, our own deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9).

In our life's laboratory experiences, apart from the deductive generalization to experience messages we receive on the Sabbath, the vast majority of God's teaching techniques are inductive—that is starting with the experiences and working toward the generalization or consequences. Now inductive teaching is generally more time consuming. It is a lifetime we do this, but their results are certainly more permanent. They are etched into our minds forever. The admonitions learned by our forefathers on the Sinai

Peninsula (recorded for our admonition according to I Corinthians 10:11) are reinforced with our own lifelong catalog of experiences which God also gave to us to reflect, ponder, and learn from.

Jack Bulharowski once gave in a speech in the North Hollywood Graduate Club, that as a pilot, he keeps an ongoing log. After every flight, he notes in his logbook what went right and what went wrong, in order that in analogous experiences, he might be able to save his life. This accumulated log constitutes inductive experience. Our weekly Sabbath we should use to take stock, time to reflect back over the accumulated weekly experiences.

As a young graduate student, I complained to my linguistics professor that no one had assembled a systematic phonemic inventory comparing the sounds of English to other languages. Dr. Hackenburg challenged me, "Why don't you construct one yourself?" With this challenge twenty-two years ago, I assembled such a reference book over a period of two years and then shared the work with my linguistics students. Today, collectively, my students and I have compared and contrasted more than 56 languages.

When my students complain about the tedium of this work, I metaphorically compare it to the blueberry or blackberry picking, suggesting that it takes a long time to fill the pail and enjoy or sample the results, but the fruits we bear on this project may not be for us to eat. Every spring right before Passover, the Jewish community keeps a festival called Tu Bishvat, a time when trees are planted, not especially for the enjoyment of the planter, but for the sake of posterity. The blessings that we currently reap in this land spring from one man's faithful obedience—namely Abraham.

Last fall, our dean gave all the academic departments computers if we would attend a workshop in which we assembled our own computer. Although none of us have become computer gurus, we have become less intimidated and feel more in control of a part of our life which formerly overwhelmed us.

Our father Abraham metaphorically started on a spiritual Heathkit, stepping out on faith, having no idea where the schematic diagram would lead him. Hebrews 11:9 suggests that Abraham by faith sojourned into the land of promise, having no clue where God was taking him, and dying, as we learn, without fully receiving the promises (Hebrews 11:13). The approbations,

father of the faithful and friend of God, did not accrue all at once, but came about as a result of a lifetime of learning experiences in which he diligently searched for God's purpose for him. Apparently Abraham died before he could finish the kit, but he at least had been privy to the structural foundation (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham learned through raw experience that "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

By demanding exploratory behavior, God Almighty has modeled the most effective pedagogical techniques known to education, the emphasis on inductive or inquiry approaches to learning. It takes longer than traditional straight lecture deductive methods. God deliberately withholds many of the answers He could have given all at once. Herbert Armstrong related many times how he and Loma had kept the Feast of Tabernacles several years at Siegler Springs without having a clue as to what they meant. Today as a result of his persistence at seeking God's intent, the greater church of God has a better picture of how the pieces fit together (though some of them are still missing).

Over the past sixty-six years, God Almighty has annually rehearsed with us the incremental pieces of the divine master plan. Some of the misguided members of our previous fellowship have scorned the practice of removing leaven from our homes in the spring and living in temporary dwellings in the fall, relegating it to foolish childish ritual. Evidently they found putting up Christmas trees and hunting for Easter eggs as more adult behavior.

Each time we rehearse these annual learning activities, we should get a clearer picture of the ultimate purpose and intent of our Creator and our future Bridegroom. A recurring theme during this Feast has been the urgency of getting the Bride ready for her future husband. Indeed the very motto of the Church of the Great God appearing on every *Forerunner* magazine is "Preparing the Bride of Christ." Our fiancée, Jesus Christ, wants to have an intimate relationship with us.

Our Fiancée, Jesus Christ, wants to share His innermost thoughts with us as the future bride of Christ. He certainly does not want to keep secrets from us once we are His bride. But what about us, brethren? Are we keeping secrets

back from our prospective Bridegroom? Are we holding back part of ourselves, figuratively committing adultery or fornication by our syncretism with the world's religious or philosophical systems? Our Fiancée, who is protectively jealous for us (Exodus 20:5), wants us to once and for all sever and renounce all of our ties to our previous lovers and get rid of the old keepsakes, the old love letters in the strongbox, the jewelry, the locks of hair, the photographs, and more importantly the contents of the heart. Jesus Christ does not want to share us with the memory of any former lovers.

I remember one time when Julie and I were dating, we had attended an event at Ambassador Auditorium when something caught my attention at the other side of the Auditorium. Julie looked into my eyes and then followed the tractor beam of my gaze diagonally across the Auditorium to its terminus, which was a woman I had previously dated and had at one time contemplated marriage. Well this relatively brief glance brought about a terrifying 24 hour period of communication black-out and I thought I had blown it. Jesus Christ feels the same way about us when we look back with what appears to be longing eyes to a past flame or heartthrob.

A colleague at Ambassador, after his spouse died, had his and her wedding rings melted together with both of their initials engraved into the new ring, (as big as a brass knuckle actually). While he was working through his grief, he ritualistically told and retold the story about the significance of the ring. Several years later when he remarried, he transferred that ring to the fourth finger of his right hand, but continuing to tell the ritualistic story about the significance of that ring, much to the chagrin and discomfort of his new bride. On one occasion I could not help noticing the pain and hurt expression in the eyes of his spouse. I didn't have the guts to tell him at the time that I felt that he should have demonstrated a little bit more sensitivity to his new bride.

My dad is an 81 year old newlywed. Both he and my stepmother, Olive have systematically and thoughtfully given all the keepsakes of their previous marriages to their offspring. My brothers and I have received all of mom's keepsakes such as the magnetic decal that went on the refrigerator proclaiming "Marie's Kitchen." My home is decorated with my mom's oil paintings. She was an artist in her own right. This Thanksgiving I will be picking up mom's easel and the last painting she worked on before her death.

Olive's son, Vernon, has received all of her husband's Flip's mementos including his Purple Heart, ceremonial sword, and a large flag that draped his coffin. Both Dad and Olive realize that the chapters in their past lives have been completed and that keepsakes from the past would jeopardize their current relationship.

Brethren, we need to make sure that after this Feast we go home and search our belongings for any keepsakes from our old spiritual lovers, scouring and cleansing our hearts from any past trace memories of these relationships. You cannot serve two masters and you cannot court two lovers. The culmination of all of our forked road learning experiences lead to yielding and final submission to our prospective Bridegroom. Then and only then will all the riddles and figures of speech and the esoteric prophecies of Scripture will be cleared up for us. Our Fiancée assures us,

**John 16:25** These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.

Well, before that happens, I would like to take a page from John Reid's marriage counseling manual and bind the prospective bride of Christ to a prenuptial and post-nuptial agreement, that is a before and after marriage agreement. If you will turn back to Deuteronomy 6:4, which our Fiancée proclaimed as the first and great commandment in Matthew 22:37, he states, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One!" When the bride of Christ and the Bridegroom marry, they will be one.

Now read along with me in unison. Reading aloud (recitation) is another effective pedagogical technique. In verse 5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." This, brethren, is the key which unlocks the innermost secrets of God.