2024 SABBATH THOUGHT ARTICLES

by

Steven Greene

Website: https://sabbathreflections.org

Email: sabbathreflections@gmail.com

CONTENTS

2024-01-06–Passover Sacrifice & Cleansing
2024-01-13–Giving & Receiving #1
2024-01-20–Giving & Receiving #2
2024-01-27–Giving & Receiving #3
2024-02-03–Giving & Receiving #4
2024-02-10–Giving & Receiving #5
2024-02-17–Desiring Gifts
2024-02-24–Righteousness, Love, & Faith
2024-03-02–God Love For You
2024-03-09–Grace, Not Anger
2024-03-16–Do I Need to Forgive Myself?
2024-03-23–How Many Will Die?
2024-03-30–Remember the Exodus
2024-04-06–Sacrifice for Sin
2024-04-13–Come Out My People
2024-04-20–Passover Thoughts
2024-04-22–Meaning of Leaven
2024-04-27–Feast of Unleavened Bread
2024-05-04–Why I Keep the Calculated Hebrew Calendar
2024-05-11–The Assumption That Destroyed the USA
2024-05-18–Believe the Gospel
2024-05-25–Is God Real?
2024-06-01–Commission of Light
2024-06-08–The Forty & Ten Days of Pentecost
2024-06-15 - Pentecost Liberty & Retirement
2024-06-22 - The Woman Who Banned God
2024-06-29 - Preaching the Gospel
2024-07-06 - Righteousness, Faith, Law, & Grace
2024-07-13 - Hold Fast
2024-07-20 - The Thief in the Night
2024-07-27 - Faith & Healing
2024-08-03 - Anger, Wrath, Malice, Blasphemy, Filthy Language, & Lying
2024-08-10 - How to Prepare for the End Times
2024-08-17 - Authority
2024-08-24 - Days of Rejoicing
2024-08-31 - Does God Appoint Rulers
2024-09-07 - Afflictions of Offenses
2024-09-14 - Victory Through Prayer
2024-09-21 - Of Such Is the Kingdom
2024-09-28 - Purpose of the Day of the LORD
2024-10-05 - What Will Remain When What You Know Vanishes
2024-10-12 - Cry Out to God
2024-11-02 - Who Will Be Elected
2024-11-16 - Anointings
2024-11-23 - Deception
2024-11-30 - Bless the LORD
2024-12-07 - The Enemy of Agape Love
2024-12-14 - Humility & Meekness
2024-12-21 - Fellowship
2024-12-28 - Faith & Doubt

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-01-06—PASSOVER SACRIFICE & CLEANSING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Being clean before God is extremely important. The ancient Israelites were required to perform rituals to cleanse the tabernacle and temple as well as the altar and furniture; the priests and Levites[1]; land that was polluted by blood (murder)[2]; anyone who touched a dead person, animal, or 'creeping thing'[3]; soldiers after battle[4]; bodily discharges[5]; etc. God even required them to eat only certain clean animals[6]. Those who came before Him had to be clean in every respect.

But it went beyond the physical. In addition to the rituals, God also expected the ancient Israelites to cleanse their minds and hearts. He told them to "**distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean**," (Lev. 10:10). Being clean meant KNOWING what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean. To do that requires examining one's inner thoughts of the mind and heart.

Being clean is especially important when keeping the Passover memorial sacrifice and it requires everyone to be exceptionally clean, which is a theme continued in the meaning behind the Days of Unleavened Bread that follow. But spiritual cleanliness is rarely emphasized when it comes to the Passover even though a primary purpose of the blood shed by Jesus Christ was CLEANSING:

> EPHESIANS 5:25-27 … Christ also loved the [ekklesia = called out ones] and gave Himself for her, 26 that **He might sanctify and cleanse her** with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious [ekklesia], not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but **that she should be holy and without blemish**.

So, what does it mean to be clean?

> 1 JOHN 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light as He *[God the Father]* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just **to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

Cleanliness is synonymous with righteousness and sinlessness. But how can anyone be without sin? Verse 8 said that a person who thinks they are without sin is deceived (it is a sin of pride if nothing else). Without a doubt, it is not possible to be without sin in this life so only God can establish someone as clean:

[1] Num. 8:5-22.
[2] Num. 35:33; Ezek. 39:11-16.
[3] Lev. 11:24-34.
[4] Num. 31:19.
[5] Lev. 15.
[6] Lev. 11:1-23.

ROMANS 4:6-8 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man **to whom God imputes righteousness** apart from works: 7 "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And **whose sins are covered**; 8 Blessed *is the* man **to whom the LORD shall not impute sin**."

Volumes could be written on the subject of being clean before God. But one cleansing ceremony was particularly significant: the cleansing of lepers. In the days of Jesus' ministry, lepers were often encountered. Healing lepers was even *proof* that Jesus was the Christ[7]. It was also part of the commission to the disciples:

MATTHEW 10:8 "**Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers** …

Notice the distinction between HEALING the sick and CLEANSING the lepers. The Greek for 'healing' is *therapeuo*, which is the origin of *therapeutic* meaning the treatment and healing of disease. On the other hand, 'cleansing' is from the Greek *katharizo* from which *cathartic* is derived. That means to cleanse by purging. When it came to lepers, lepers are CLEANSED rather than healed. Even more interesting is that the Bible never requires a sick person to be cleansed—only lepers. To that end, there was a whole ceremony for cleansing a leper:

LEVITICUS 14:2-7 "This shall be **the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing**: He shall be brought to the priest. 3 "And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine *him;* and indeed, *if* the leprosy is healed in the leper, 4 "then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed **two living *and* clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop**. 5 "And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 "As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird *that was* killed over the running water. 7 "And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

Subsequent verses list the additional requirements for trespass (guilt), sin, burnt, and grain offerings so the entire ceremony itself is quite involved. However, the cleansing ceremony has important connections with the Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The components pertaining to cleansing are: 1) a bird that was killed, 2) a bird that was sprinkled with blood and released alive, 3) cedar wood, 4) scarlet material, 5) running water, and 6) an earthen vessel. Most important, these are exactly mirrored in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In the following, the leper cleansing ceremony is highlighted gray and the sacrifice of Jesus is yellow.

1) FIRST BIRD

Leper cleansing ceremony → First bird was killed:

LEVITICUS 14:5 "… command that **one of the birds be killed** in an earthen vessel over running water.

Sacrifice of Jesus → Jesus was killed:

MATTHEW 27:22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" *They* all said to him, "**Let Him be crucified!**"

LUKE 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out *[on the cross]* with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, **He breathed His last**."

[7] Luke 7:22.

2) SECOND BIRD

Leper cleansing ceremony → Second bird was dipped in the blood of the first bird and released alive:

LEVITICUS 14:6-7 "As for the **living bird**, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and **dip** them and the living bird **in the blood of the bird *that was* killed** over the running water. 7 "And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and **shall let the living bird loose** in the open field.

Sacrifice of Jesus → A prisoner was released from a death sentence. All repentant sinners are covered in the blood of Jesus:

MATTHEW 27:16, 21, 26 And at that time they had **a notorious prisoner called Barabbas**. … 21 The governor answered and said to them, "**Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!**" … 26 Then **he released Barabbas** to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.

1 PETER 1:2 *[The]* elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and **sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ**: …

3) CEDAR WOOD

Leper cleansing ceremony → Cedar wood was dipped in the blood of the first bird:

LEVITICUS 14:6 "As for the living bird, he shall take it, the **cedar wood** and the scarlet and the hyssop, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird *that was* killed** over the running water.

Sacrifice of Jesus →: Jesus died on a wooden cross possibly made of cedar upon which He shed His blood:

1 PETER 2:24 who Himself *[Jesus]* bore our sins in **His own body on the tree** …

a) *NOTE: Cedar trees grow 130 feet and live for 2,000 years. They are valued for their beauty, fragrance, and durability. Cedar trees were also in the garden in Eden (Ezek. 31:8).*

4) SCARLET MATERIAL

Leper cleansing ceremony → Scarlet material was dipped in the blood of the first bird:

LEVITICUS 14:6 "As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the **scarlet** and the hyssop, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird *that was* killed** over the running water.

Sacrifice of Jesus → The soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus while He was bleeding after the scourging:

JOHN 19:1-2 So then Pilate took Jesus and **scourged *Him***. 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they **put on Him a [scarlet] robe**.

5) HYSSOP

Leper cleansing ceremony → Hyssop was dipped in the blood of the first bird:

LEVITICUS 14:6 "As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the **hyssop**, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird *that was* killed** over the running water.

Sacrifice of Jesus → Hyssop soaked in sour wine (representing blood) was offered to Jesus:

JOHN 19:29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they **filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth**.

6) BLOOD & WATER

Leper cleansing ceremony → The first bird was killed and its blood drained over running water:

LEVITICUS 14:5 "… **one of the birds be killed** in an earthen vessel **over running water**.

Sacrifice of Jesus → Blood and water came out of Jesus when He was pierced:

JOHN 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His *[Jesus']* side with a spear, and immediately **blood and water came out**.

7) EARTHEN VESSEL

Leper cleansing ceremony → The first bird was killed IN an earthen vessel:

LEVITICUS 14:5 "… **one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel** over running water.

Sacrifice of Jesus → Jesus was IN an earthly body when He was killed:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:47 The first **man was of the earth**, earthy; the second Man is the Master from heaven.

JOHN 1:14 And **the Word became flesh** and dwelt among us …

By the blood of Jesus Christ we are CLEANSED, whereby God imputes His righteousness to us. Though we should be striving to be clean each and every day, the Passover is a time to be clean above all others.

EZRA 6:19-20 And the sons of the exile performed the **Passover** on the fourteenth *day* of the first new *moon*, 20 for **the priests and the Levites had cleansed themselves – all of them were clean**. And they slew the Passover for all the sons of the exile, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-01-13—GIVING & RECEIVING #1

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Tithing is known by anyone who has even a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible. It funded the Levites and priests who were responsible for the tabernacle and temples, performing the sacrifices (both personal and national), and for teaching the Law of God. There are many scriptures in the OT that explain tithing; however, when it comes to the NT, tithing is almost without mention. The first is in Matthew[1]:

> MATTHEW 23:23 "Woe to you, **scribes and Pharisees**, hypocrites! For **you pay tithe** of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, **without leaving the others undone**.

What may have escaped notice is that scribes and Pharisees were not necessarily Levites or priests. The premier example is Paul, who was a Pharisee but he was not a priest because he was of the tribe of Benjamin[2], not Levi. So, the scribes and Pharisees were paying tithe of what they grew, which was required of all farmers as acknowledged by Jesus. In one of His parables, Jesus mentioned another Pharisee who tithed:

> LUKE 18:10-12 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "**The Pharisee** stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men–extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; **I give tithes** of all that I possess.'

The last mention is in Paul's discussion about the Levities and priests receiving tithes for their temple work:

> HEBREWS 7:4-10 Now consider how great this man *was,* to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a **tenth of the spoils**. 5 And indeed those who are of the **sons of Levi**, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment **to receive tithes** from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. 8 Here mortal men **receive tithes**, but there he *receives them,* of whom it is witnessed that he lives. 9 Even **Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak**, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Paul is declaring the preeminence of Melchizedek who was greater than Abraham (whom the Jews revered) because He received a tenth of his spoils of war. Beyond these scriptures, the NT makes no mention of tithing. What it does describe is something SEPARATE FROM TITHING that is foundational to the spiritual fulfillment of the Law as well as salvation—giving and receiving. Jesus hinted at this when He said:

> MATTHEW 5:40-42 "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, **let him have *your* cloak** also. 41 "And whoever compels you to go one mile, **go with him two**. 42 "**Give to him** who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you **do not turn away**.

[1] Also Luke 11:42.
[2] Phil. 3:5.

Giving and receiving in the OT was, in fact, a statute but it was not motivated by compassion as much as it was a matter of doing in accordance with the Law:

> EZEKIEL 18:5, 7, 16 But if **a man is just And does what is lawful and right**; … 7 If he has not oppressed anyone, *But* has restored to the debtor his pledge; Has robbed no one by violence, *But* has **given his bread to the hungry And covered the naked with clothing**; … 16 Has not oppressed anyone, Nor withheld a pledge, Nor robbed by violence, *But* has **given his bread to the hungry And covered the naked with clothing**;

While the principle of giving and receiving was well established in the OT, it was discussed in a very different manner. Notice:

> DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11 "If there is among you **a poor man** of your brethren, **within any of the gates *[i.e., a neighbor]*** in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, 8 "but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs**. 9 "Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and **your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing**, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. 10 "**You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him**, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11 "**For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'**

The verbiage of the OT was in the form of a stick rather than a carrot. God warned that "you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand," do not let "your eye be evil against your poor brother," and "your heart should not be grieved when you give." But this changed in the NT. Notice this interesting account of John the Baptist:

> LUKE 3:3, 10-11 And he *[John the Baptist]* went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of **repentance for the remission of sins**, … 10 So **the people asked him**, saying, "**What shall we do then?**" 11 He answered and said to them, "**He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.**"

After hearing John preach of repentance for the remission from sins (a full pardon or release), the people asked him what they must do. When he said give to those in need they must have been surprised or baffled. They knew all too well that only God could forgive sins[3], but what does forgiveness of sin have to do with giving to the needy? John's answer actually revealed there was a problem with the heart of the people:

> MATTHEW 12:9-10; MARK 3:5; MATTHEW 12:14 Now when He *[Jesus]* had departed from there, He went into their *[the Pharisees']* synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him. … MARK 3:5 And when He had looked around at them *[the Pharisees]* with anger, being **grieved by the hardness of their hearts**, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole

[3] Luke 5:20-21.

as the other. … MATTHEW 12:14 Then **the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him**.

In most regards, the 'religion' of the Jews replaced the Law of God that ensured equity and peace with their own rigorous rules and regulations. Their hearts and minds were so corrupted that they were ANGRY when God, in the form of a man, healed someone on the Sabbath because it violated THEIR laws. Adherence to their ways was much more important than easing the suffering of people. The nation of that time (and today as well) was incapable of understanding God's intent that giving and receiving was a matter of heartfelt compassion. This reveals why so many stories in the gospels had the lesson on caring for the needs of others—the people had to be taught mercy. Notice when Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the Kingdom. The first time was just the twelve disciples who would later become apostles[4]:

MATTHEW 10:6-10 "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give.** 9 "**Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, 10 "nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs;** for a worker is worthy of his food.

Jesus told the disciples to not take anything extra with them: no food, money, clothes or sandals, etc. While these may seem unimportant today with everything readily available wherever we go, a broken sandal would mean walking barefoot. Even on 'roads', there were rocks, scorpions, and briars. An extra cloak could be a lifesaver on cold nights. Not taking the bare necessities would be like having a car with flat tire in the middle of a blistering desert with no spare, no water or food, no one to help, and where the nearest town is miles away. It meant that they had to rely upon God and the generosity of people to give them what they needed.

This idea of giving and receiving is so central, that Jesus later sent 70 other disciples out to learn the same lesson (Luke 10:1-12). When they returned, they rejoiced because they found they could heal and had power over demons. But that was not the lesson they were to learn. Jesus admonished them to rejoice instead that their names were written in heaven. They had received something they did not even know they had. Jesus then thanked God the Father in this manner:

LUKE 10:21-23 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "**I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.** Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. 22 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, **and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.**" 23 Then He turned to *His* disciples and said privately, "**Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see**;

Before they were sent out, Jesus COMMANDED them saying, "**Freely you have received, freely give.**" (Matt. 10:8). Interestingly, Jesus reminded them that they had FIRST RECEIVED so they were obligated to GIVE. What was it they received? Jesus REVEALED God the Father to them! He GAVE to them a message of God the Father and His Son. As a

[4] Also Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6;

result of RECEIVING that special gift, Jesus said they were obligated to likewise GIVE unto others.

Being Jews, the disciples certainly knew the OT statutes that required taking care of the poor. However, they had to learn that giving is much more than being blessed with the physical abundance to help others. They were beginning to understand that ALL who would follow Christ have RECEIVED something that was given by God, a very humbling prospect since none are deserving of it.

It cannot be a coincidence that the very next parable was also about giving and receiving. A lawyer asked Jesus, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" After the man claimed that he kept all of the commandments, Jesus related the parable of the good Samaritan, who took it upon himself to care for a wounded man (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus concluded by asking:

> LUKE 10:36-37 "So which of these three do you think was **neighbor** to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he *[the lawyer]* said, "**He who showed mercy on him.**" Then Jesus said to him, "**Go and do likewise.**"

Since it was REQUIRED in the OT to give to the needy, there was certainly a reluctance to AVOID contact with those who were lacking. The priests and Levites who refused to help the Samaritan were notable examples mentioned in the parable. But doing good to others in strict adherence to the Law is not what God ever desired. To emphasize it, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 a couple of times ("I desire mercy and not sacrifice"). In another seemingly separate example, a man asked how to be perfect:

> MATTHEW 19:16, 20-21 Now behold, one came and said to Him *[Jesus]*, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" … 20 The young man said to Him, "All these things *[the Commandments]* I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" 21 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."

The answer to being perfect was to sell everything and give to the poor. Note that this was specific to this particular man, just as in the case of the lawyer (Luke 10:25-37). They both needed to learn the lesson that giving and receiving is an act of mercy and wealth is not a measure of it. Furthermore, neither Jesus nor the apostles ever commanded God's people to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. That would not even make sense—the result is either everyone would become poor and needy or everyone would have abundance and be in the position of having to sell everything *again*. God does not want everyone to be poor—who would then *provide* for the poor? However, poverty is one way to learn humility and mercy.

Much of the NT is a lesson of giving and receiving, which is separate from tithes. Caring for the needs of others reflects the love in a person. Above all, the principle of giving and receiving is something that begins with us FIRST receiving from God.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-01-20—GIVING & RECEIVING #2

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The previous Sabbath Thought discussed the origins of Giving & Receiving in the OT and showed that it is distinct from tithing. It also illustrated that, as a matter of human behavior, people of the Old Covenant were incapable of Giving & Receiving according to God's intents and purposes because their hearts were hardened and without compassion. That all changed in the NT where tithing is briefly mentioned as a basic statute that provided for the Levites and priests. Instead, there is a great emphasis on mercy and providing for the needs of others in the NT stories and parables. This is the result of the change in the New Covenant to a spiritual relationship with God in which the hearts of the people become vessels of His agape love instead of selfishness.

Unlike *tithe*, there is no simple or 'official' name for desires borne out of love and mercy to serve others. Instead, several NT scriptures emphasize the actions of "Giving & Receiving" and, hence, that is the name I have chosen to describe the way of life that was always intended by God:

> MATTHEW 10:8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give.**
>
> PHILIPPIANS 4:15 … no church shared with me **concerning giving and receiving** but you only.
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 4:3-4 … *[that which]* God created to be **received** with thanks**giving** by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is **received** with thanks**giving**;

What is unique about Giving & Receiving is that it is, as described in Ezekiel 18:5, 7, 16, only FROM by God. It is, in fact, the result of agape love, which is not natural to the human heart and, therefore, is something that must be GIVEN by God:

> 1 JOHN 4:16-17, 19 And we have known and believed **the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him**. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because **as He is, so are we *[to become]* in this world**. … 19 **We love Him because He first loved us.**

Agape love originates from God. He IS agape love and is PERFECTING it in us. Giving & Receiving is an outreach of agape love, which is first GIVEN by God, RECEIVED by us, and then GIVEN to Him again. Agape love is, truly, the only thing that we uniquely can offer to Him that He does not have. Agape love is then the motive for all that follows in a relationship that spans eternity:

> JOHN 3:16 "For **God so loved** the world **that He gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but **have everlasting life**.

It is God's love for mankind that is behind His desire to GIVE us eternal life. It is agape love for God that causes us to want to RECEIVE eternal life. So, God GAVE to us first because He LOVED us:

> JOHN 17:8 "For **I *[Jesus]* have given to them the words which You *[God the Father]* have given Me; and they have received *them***, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 2:12 Now **we have received**, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been **freely given to us by God**.
>
> ACTS 10:43 "To Him *[Jesus Christ]* **all the prophets witness** that, through His name, **whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins**."
>
> ACTS 26:18 *[Jesus sent Paul to the Gentiles,]* 'to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that **they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance** among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Those under the Old Covenant were incapable of fulfilling Giving & Receiving even though it was a clear statute (Deu. 15:7-11) and, yet, it is an expectation in the NT. What makes it possible for those in the New Covenant? The obvious answer is the Holy Spirit:

> JOHN 7:39 But this He *[Jesus]* spoke concerning **the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given [by God the Father]***, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
>
> ACTS 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**.

But notice this is the GIFT of God[1]. He expects His people to fulfill Giving & Receiving because, 1) He GAVE us the Holy Spirit so we could have His agape love working in us and, 2) He GAVE to us FIRST; therefore, we have an obligation and, hopefully, desire to give to others. All of this, of course, was made possible by God when the Father "**gave** His only begotten Son" for our sins. Such an act is only a glimpse of the immeasurable depth of His agape love. No one can, as is the common expression, out-GIVE God.

God the Father gave us everything through His Son so that His people can become agape love and continue the only way of true ETERNAL life—Giving & Receiving! This is absolutely a matter of salvation. Notice perhaps the most important testimony to this:

> MATTHEW 25:31-46 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. 33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, '**Come, you *[sheep]* blessed of My**

[1] Also Acts 10:45; 11:17; Rom. 5:15-19; 2 Cor. 9:15; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6 et al.

> **Father, inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and **you gave Me** food; I was thirsty and you **gave Me drink**; I was a stranger and **you took Me** in; 36 'I *was* naked and **you clothed Me**; I was sick and **you visited Me**; I was in prison and **you came to Me**.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You,* or thirsty and give *You* drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You?* 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me**.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, '**Depart from Me, you *[goats]* cursed, into the everlasting fire** prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 'for I was hungry and **you gave Me no** food; I was thirsty and **you gave Me no** drink; 43 'I was a stranger and **you did not take Me in**, naked and **you did not clothe Me**, sick and in prison and **you did not visit Me**.' 44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and **did not minister** to You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me**.' 46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Those beloved of God the Father and Jesus Christ and who are GIVEN salvation also GIVE to others. Those cursed of God the Father and Jesus Christ are denied salvation because they did NOT GIVE.

Giving & Receiving, in all respects, is a measure of God's agape love in a person.

The parable of the Sheep and Goats is reflected throughout the NT. While a reader will not always find scriptures under the heading of Giving & Receiving, it is there nonetheless. Notice one example:

> GALATIANS 6:2-5 **Bear one another's burdens *[take it upon oneself to GIVE aid]***, and so **fulfill the law of Christ**. 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine **his own work**, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load.

What is the Law of Christ that is FULFILLED? The two Great Commandments: Love God and Love Our Neighbor[2]. These have been mentioned in more scriptures than can be listed (a sampling of them is in the footnote). The Law of God from the days of old is not just to teach *concepts* but it is a MEANS to BECOMING agape love:

> 1 TIMOTHY 1:5 Now **the purpose of the commandment *[God's Law]* is love from a pure heart**, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith,

So, HOW is the Law fulfilled? Through good works (Gal. 6:4) of Giving & Receiving! This is the core of salvation. Here are warnings to those who exhibit 'goat' behavior:

[2] Matt. 7:7, 12; 22:36-40; 19:19; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14; Eph. 5:2; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 Tim. 1:5; Jas 2:8 et al.

GALATIANS 6:7-10 **Do not be deceived, God is not mocked**; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And **let us not grow weary while doing good**, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, **as we have opportunity, let us do good to all**, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

JAMES 2:14-18 What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? *[None!]* Can faith save him? *[No!]* 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," **but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit**? 17 Thus also faith by itself, **if it does not have works *[of Giving & Receiving],* is dead**. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

1 JOHN 3:17 **But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?**

… and here are a couple of 'sheep' examples:

1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-3 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing **your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

HEBREWS 6:10 For **God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love** which you have shown toward His name, *in that* **you have ministered to the saints, and do minister**.

Hopefully, this is much more than an intellectual review of basic Scripture because having faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins, becoming agape love, and doing good works through Giving & Receiving ARE the "simplicity in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). They are so easily corrupted by Satan through all manner of distractions but they are the fruit that must remain."[3] The gospel of Christ for salvation[4] is simply put:

For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son for the remission of sins of those who believe in Christ so they can become agape love and live a life of Giving & Receiving through good works now, and to RECEIVE everlasting life in the day of our visitation.[5]

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[3] John 15:16.
[4] Eph. 1:13.
[5] John 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5; Phil. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:12.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-01-27—GIVING & RECEIVING #3

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The previous Sabbath Thought discussed Giving & Receiving as a statue in the OT but the people were too hardhearted to carry it out as God intended. In the New Covenant, God gives His people the Holy Spirit so they can become agape love and have a heart for Giving & Receiving. Above all, the NT emphasizes that God GAVE to us FIRST—His agape love and sacrifice unto salvation. No one of the flesh is worthy of it nor can it ever be repaid. That gift is meant for us to become as He is in agape love, mercy, and compassion and these things ought to provoke us unto Giving & Receiving.

So, what exactly IS Giving & Receiving? Is it something of the heart that bonds us together in our strivings for the eternal Kingdom? Is it praying for one another, visiting the lonely and the prisoners, caring for the afflicted and sick, tending to widows and orphans, or counseling with godly wisdom? Is it reconciling offenses or resisting being offended? Is it reaching out to someone who wandered from their calling or helping someone when they sin? Or is it the more practical aspects of giving money, physical items and clothing, food and drink, shelter to the homeless, or provisions needed in weather-related disasters? The answer is 'yes' to all of these. A number of them are mentioned in the parables of the Good Samaritan and Sheep & Goats but the NT abounds with examples of Giving & Receiving:

> JAMES 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to **visit orphans and widows in their trouble**, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
>
> MATTHEW 5:7, 9 **Blessed *are* the merciful *[to others]***, For they shall obtain mercy. … 9 **Blessed *are* the peacemakers**, For they shall be called sons of God.
>
> ACTS 6:2-3 Then the twelve *[apostles]* summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and **serve tables *[this still needs to be done]***. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may **appoint over this business**;
>
> GALATIANS 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**.
>
> ROMANS 12:16 *Be* of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high ambitions; rather, be **accommodating with those of low estate *[the poor and afflicted]***. Do not be wise in your own eyes.
>
> JAMES 5:16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and **pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
>
> 1 TIM 5:5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and **continues in supplications and prayers night and day**.

HEBREWS 6:10 For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have **ministered to the saints**, and do minister.

Matthew 18, generally thought of as the chapter on reconciling offenses, actually has many principles of Giving & Receiving:

MATTHEW 18:5 "Whoever **receives one little child *[help, teach, guide, encourage* "babes in Christ"*]*** like this in My name receives Me.

MATTHEW 18:12-14 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains **to seek the one that is straying *[from salvation]***? 13 "And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 "Even so it is **not the will of your Father** who is in heaven **that one of these little ones should perish**.

MATTHEW 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault between you and him alone *[and reconcile the offense]***. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

MATTHEW 18:27 "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and **forgave him the debt *[offense]***.

Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law[1] by revealing it has a greater spiritual meaning. That realization establishes Giving & Receiving as a WAY OF LIFE. Listing the NT scriptures that describe acts of Giving & Receiving is not practical—there are just too many. But reading the Bible from that perspective will shine a whole new light on Scripture by revealing what Jesus meant when He said, "I am **the way**, the truth, and **the life**"[2] because His way and the life IS Giving & Receiving. To understand how it works, examine the way of giving:

ACTS 20:35 "… And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' "

Being blessed to give is always preferable to receiving because no one wants to have needs and rely upon others. But what is God's perspective? To be "more blessed" sounds as if the giver has more favor with God. Jesus said it is "**more blessed**" to give than receive; however, He does not say the one who gives is more *righteous*. Notice what God *expects* of the giver who is "more blessed:"

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19 **Command those who are rich** in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but *trust* in the living **God, who gives us richly** all things to enjoy. 18 ***Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share**, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on **eternal life**.

[1] Matt. 5:17-18.
[2] John 14:6.

Those who are blessed are COMMANDED by God to be "ready and willing" to share with others. This is conditional for eternal life! Moreover, God requires those who are blessed to give with gladness of heart:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7 *So* ***let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for **God loves a cheerful *[full of gladness]* giver**.

Giving must not be with reluctance or resentment. Nor, as with the Pharisees, done out of necessity. Helping someone must be done joyfully because being "more blessed" by God comes with conditions. Paul continues:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:8 And **God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you *[the rich]*, that you**, always having all sufficiency in all *things,* **may have an abundance for every good work**.

God says that HE *provides* the means to give so the abundance may not be taken away if someone is NOT a cheerful giver and seeks opportunities to do "good works" to those in need. This is similar to the warning to Esther:

> ESTHER 4:13-14 And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: "**Do not think in your heart that you will escape** in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 "For **if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place**, but you and your father's house will perish. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?**"

If Queen Esther refused to speak to King Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews, then God would destroy her and find another to deliver them. A giver who has been blessed with abundance to help others has the same warning. "God is able to make **all grace abound** toward" the giver, but He can just as easily to take it away. Being "more blessed" comes with a greater condemnation to those who refuse to "give as he is able"[3] or they do it "grudgingly or of necessity."[4]

God is constantly testing the hearts of His people. Giving should be a joy—not so that someone can be "more blessed," but because the giver is an instrument of God to help the poor and afflicted. Jesus said, "**you have the poor with you always,**"[5] but notice the rest of what He said:

> MARK 14:7 For you have the poor with you always, and **you are able to do good for them whenever you desire**; …

There it is. There will ALWAYS be those who are needy and God provides for them through the giving works of others. Could it be *that* is the REASON there will always be poor people among us? God provides the MEANS to give but the test is whether the giver will do so out of a DESIRE of the heart! Paul says it this way:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:9-13 As it is written: "**He *[God]* has dispersed *[abundance]* abroad *[to some so that]*, He has given to the poor**; His righteousness endures

[3] Deut. 16:17.
[4] 2 Cor. 9:7.
[5] Also Matt. 26:11.

forever."[6] 10 Now **<u>may He who supplies</u>** seed to the sower *[the giver]*, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have *sown* and **<u>increase the fruits of your *[the givers']* righteousness</u>**, 11 while ***<u>you [the givers] are</u>* <u>enriched in everything for all liberality *[to give to the poor]*</u>**, which causes thanksgiving through us to God *[both the givers and the poor]*. 12 For **<u>the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints</u>**, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, **<u>they *[the poor]* glorify God</u>** for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for ***<u>your</u>* <u>liberal sharing with them *[as givers]*</u>** and all *men*,

God "multiplies" what He gives to some for the very PURPOSE that they can provide for the poor and needy, not to enrich a few. It is GOD who does this so that the "**<u>fruits</u>** of righteousness" may be increased in the GIVER. The reason God enriches some is so that they can GIVE LIBERALLY and "**<u>supply the needs of the saints.</u>**"

What are the riches that God supplies? Could they be physical things (shelter, clothes, food, etc.) as well as money? Could they be riches of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles,[7] a heart of encouragement and caring, or an ability to mediate offenses? God blesses a giver with those things necessary "for the **<u>equipping</u>** of the saints…, for the edifying of the body of Christ *[in agape love]*,"[8] to ensure that:

PHILEMON 1:7 For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because **<u>the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you</u>**, brother.

Yes, a giver is "more blessed" than the poor. But it is NOT because the giver is more righteous than the receiver. In truth, a greater responsibility is put upon the giver. The way of Giving & Receiving provides for ALL saints. At the same time it tests the hearts of those who will attain salvation. Take note:

ROMANS 15:1 Now **<u>we who *are* ~~strong~~ *[Gk. dunatos* = capable*]* are obligated to support the ones who are weak, and not to please ourselves</u>**.

Being "more blessed" to give is NOT to please oneself! GOD provides for the poor by multiplying "riches" of some to care for the needs of others. God gives to us FIRST so it is the result of agape love. Giving is always "**<u>as *[the giver]* purposes in his heart</u>**"[9] so that God's grace and abundance might be upon ALL the saints! Giving & Receiving is cornerstone of GIVING thanks to God! It is THE Way and THE Life!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[6] Quoted from Ps. 112:9, which shows Giving & Receiving was a part of the OT as well.
[7] 1 Cor. 12:7-11.
[8] Eph. 4:12-16.
[9] 2 Cor. 9:7.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-02-03—GIVING & RECEIVING #4

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The previous Sabbath Thought discussed Giving & Receiving from the perspective of *givers*. As Paul said:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-11 But this *I say:* He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 *So* ***let*** **each one *give* as he purposes in his heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 **And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency *[the minimum required]* in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work *[not for themselves].*** 9 As it is written: "**He has dispersed *[abundance]* abroad, He has given to the poor *[by supplying abundance to others]***; His righteousness endures forever." 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have *sown* and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while ***you are* enriched in everything for all liberality *[so you can give to the needy]***, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

While it is "more blessed to give than to receive"[1], the blessings are in the form of abundance so it can be given to the needy. It is vital to note that verses 8-9 say that an ABUNDANCE IS FOR THE POOR OR NEEDY, not the person receiving it. It does NOT imply givers are more *righteous*. In truth, blessings upon the poor or needy are greater—much greater:

> LUKE 6:20-21 Then He *[Jesus]* lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "**Blessed *are you* poor**, For yours is the kingdom of God. 21 **Blessed *are you* who hunger now**, For you shall be filled. **Blessed *are you* who weep now**, For you shall laugh.

Jesus said that those who are poor, who lack food, and who are grieved are BLESSED. While it refers to both a spiritual and physical lack, these blessings are so much greater than physical abundance because they are the blessings of eternal life, of being richly satisfied, and joy and peace fulfilled. Those who receive, especially from God, have the greater blessings whether they are physical or spiritual.

So, why do the poor or needy exist? Some might think God not pleased with them. But is that true? Are they being punished? Do they lack faith or love? How should the poor or needy view themselves before God? And why do many have a reluctance to receive help from others? To begin answering these questions, first of all note what Jesus Christ said about BOTH givers and receivers:

> MATTHEW 10:7-8 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give.**

Jesus commanded the disciples to FREELY give AND receive. The Greek word *freely* means undeservedly. Givers are not *deserving* of the abundance that they are to use to provide for the needs of others. Neither are the poor or needy *deserving* of those things they

[1] Acts 20:35.

receive because everything is from God, who provides the necessities of life for both the evil and the good[2]. He also makes this promise to both:

> MATTHEW 6:25, 33 "Therefore I say to you, **do not worry about your life**, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? … 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and **all these things shall be added to you**.

First of all, understand that Giving & Receiving is NOT a spiritual distinction between those who have *physical* abundance and those who are lacking. Is everyone complete in fruits of agape love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control[3]? Do those given physical abundance never need comforting, mercy, or compassion? Are they somehow more perfect? No! ALL are poor or needy before God in some regard. The parable of the Talents[4] starts with GOD giving to the servants; therefore, *all* giving begins with Him. But what is our responsibility in all this? We must ASK!

> MATTHEW 7:7-8 "**Ask *[God]*, and it will be given to you**; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 "**For everyone who asks *[God]* receives**, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

When there is a lack or need—whether physical or spiritual—we are to pray in FAITH and ask God to provide. And Jesus gave us an unbreakable promise to do so:

> JOHN 14:13-14 "And **whatever you ask in My *[Jesus']* name, that I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 "**If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it.***

This promise is mentioned NINE times[5]. In spite of that, when our prayers go seemingly unfulfilled, I have heard some people say, "sometimes God's answer is 'no'." But is that true? Is that not a denial of Jesus' PROMISE? Certainly our prayers are not answered if we "ask amiss"[6] and there are situations that are "common to man"[7] or of "time and chance"[8]. These may seem to be a denial of prayers; however, some things are just a part of this physical life. The fact that all MUST die does not mean God says 'no' to healing. Instead, God must defer some answers to prayer for the resurrection. But a delayed answer does not mean God says 'no' to ANY prayer. Did Paul believe that God would NEVER remove his "thorn in the flesh?"[9] No! God *gave* to Paul that which he needed to be perfected so He COULD answer that prayer by raising him to eternal life. Will his 'thorn' continue in the Kingdom? Absolutely not! God cannot lie so Jesus *will* fulfill His PROMISE to Paul and everyone else. NO ONE—not one single person—will enter into the Kingdom without God fulfilling His promise to answer every righteous prayer from His people. So, God's answer is NEVER 'no', it is ALWAYS 'yes' because He loves us. But waiting on God is why longsuffering[10] is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit we are to have. This allows God to fulfill His work of perfecting us:

---

[2] Matt. 5:45.
[3] Fruits of the Holy Spirit—Gal. 5:22.
[4] Matt. 25:16-30.
[5] Also Matt. 7:8; 21:22; Luke 11:10; John 15:16, 23, 24, 26.
[6] Jas. 4:3.
[7] 1 Cor. 10:13.
[8] Eccl. 9:11.
[9] 2 Cor. 12:7.
[10] Also Rom. 8:28.

PHIL 2:13 for **it is God who works *[works take time]* in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure *[or PURPOSE]***.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into **the patient waiting for Christ**.

All must patiently wait upon God[11] because His work in us requires time and, sometimes, suffering. But God answers righteous prayer—ALWAYS. Sometimes it takes time. They can be a direct miracle or, many times, come through brethren or strangers!

However, it seems many find it hard to receive answers to prayers if they are not directly from God. When they come though other people, there is a reluctance to receive it. No one denies God's direct intervention. But if we pray for help in times of grief or sorrow, do we reject the comfort of a brother or sister? Hopefully not. Many times there is reluctance to receive help from people who are often the instruments of God for answering a prayer. The preference is for God to directly intervene. Why is that? If there is no money to pay a bill, why is there a reluctance to receive it from a brother or sister? Are we expecting God to pull out His wallet? We call it a miracle when someone gets a raise or better paying job but it is also a miracle if extra money comes from a brother or sister. No one has ever received an envelope stuffed with cash having a return address of Mt. Zion in the Third Heaven. Still, it is harder to accept help when it comes through a brother or sister. Why? Because pride wants us to believe we become indebted to that person. But is not *everyone* indebted to God? Even those who have received an abundance *for* the poor?

God determined that the poor will be with us *always*; therefore, He also gives some an abundance (2 Cor. 9:8-9—FOR the poor, not themselves) for the very purpose of providing for them: "For **the poor shall never cease** out of the land: therefore **I *[God]* command thee**, saying, **Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy**, in thy land." (Deut. 15:11)[12]. This was recorded in the OT, so it is a statute from the *beginning*. God provides some with an abundance to supply the poor or needy. Why, then, is it so hard to accept that God answers their prayer through others instead of directly from Him? Is not every answered prayer a miracle regardless of who was involved? Everyone is expected to do what they can to provide for themselves but sometimes it just is not enough. So, if we ask God for help, why is it reluctantly received when He works through others to answer it?

Sometimes healings fall into the principle of Giving & Receiving. There are many differing views regarding physicians but nowhere in the Bible are they condemned. There are about a dozen cases of medical treatment in the Bible[13]. While physicians could not heal Asa's foot disease[14] or the woman with an issue of blood[15], Jesus acknowledged the healing abilities of physicians[16]. Can physicians heal everything? No, they still cannot heal a common viral cold. Is there a lack of faith if a physician is involved? Again, no. In fact, Asa's situation clearly shows that seeking God can make all the difference in the results from a physician. Is it a lack of faith in God's promise if He answers a prayer through the hands of a physician? No, that is no different than a prayer that is answered by someone giving money to pay a bill. In fact, the ability to heal is a *gift* of God[17]. Are gifts only given

[11] Ps. 5:5; 59;9; 62:1, 5; 69:3; 123:2; Isa 25:9; 64:4; Jer. 14:22; Hos. 12:6; Mic. 7:7; Rom. 8:19.
[12] Also Matt. 26:11; et al.
[13] Isa. 1:6; Jer. 8:22; Ezek. 47:12; Luke 10:34; 1 Tim. 5:23; Jas. 5:14
[14] 2 Chr. 16:12.
[15] Mark 5:26-27; Luke 8:43-44.
[16] Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31.
[17] 1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30.

to those in the Body of Christ? No. Many possessed their gifts before conversion. But even if a physician can help, sometimes a person cannot afford their services. If God answers a prayer for healing and it involves a physician, God can also provide the means to pay for it if necessary. This is no different than when someone asks God for food and another person buys it for them. It is all part of Giving & Receiving.

The point of this is not to convince anyone they must seek medical intervention or to call their faith into question. It is to emphasize that many times God answers prayer through *people*—including physicians who are often avoided in times of need. Someone who asks God for healing does so in faith—whether or not that includes help from a physician. Physicians can do many incredible things today but ONLY GOD CAN GUARANTEE THE OUTCOME. (I realize also that traditional medicine is sometimes NOT the answer.)

God provides for BOTH the giver and receiver for the purpose of good works and so that ALL give thanks to Him! He *gives* to both—HOW and WHEN He does so is up to Him. The bottom line is that God established Giving & Receiving as a statute for important purposes:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:111-13 while *you [the givers] are* enriched in everything for all liberality *[to give to the poor]*, which causes thanksgiving through us to God *[both the givers and the poor]*. 12 For **the administration of this service** not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also **is abounding through many thanksgivings to God**, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, **they *[the poor]* glorify God** for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal sharing with them *[as givers]* and all *men*,

Giving & Receiving is an Administrative Service established by God as the means by which HE provide for the needs of the Body of Christ. Blessings of gifts and abundance are for the sole purpose of serving and providing for OTHERS. This Administrative Service "**not only supplies the needs of *[ALL]* the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God**." Giving & Receiving is an Administration Service for the perfecting of the saints:

> ISAIAH 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: "**I dwell** in the high and holy *place*, **With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Only those who are CONTRITE (repentant) and HUMBLE will be God's eternal children. BOTH givers and receivers require a contrite and humble spirit for Giving & Receiving to function as intended by God!

Giving & Receiving is an Administrative Service ordained and established by God as a means for perfecting His works of growing agape love in us!

God chooses who has abundance and who is poor or needy. Whichever state we are in is not a measure of righteousness. As in all things, it is according to His will, which is for His works in us to bring us all unto perfection as His children. Giving & Receiving is The Way and The Life that are the foundation of eternity with Him. And, whether through abundance or poverty, all have opportunities to give thanks to God our Father and Jesus our Lord!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-02-10—GIVING & RECEIVING #5

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Previous Sabbath Thoughts explained that God established the principle of Giving & Receiving as an statute separate from tithing, which provided for the temple work of the Levites and priests. Taking care of the poor and needy is not only independent of tithing[1], it is a very serious and personal responsibility levied by God that provides for the needs of family and neighbors[2]. In fact, it is not only a commandment (statute) of God, in the NT it is called an Administrative Service to provide for ALL the saints[3] in the Body of Christ.

To that end, God gives blessings of abundance to some and that abundance is intended to be used for the needs of others[4]. That abundance is not to be withheld from the poor or needy out of selfishness or greed. Givers are to be "ready and willing" to share[5] and do so with a cheerful heart[6] out the joy for helping others. Praying and asking God for the means and opportunities to serve and give to others is a sign of agape love. On the other hand, an attitude of reluctance or resentment may result in losing that abundance—Job 1:12 says, "… The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away … ."

Trials, grief, sadness, illness, disease, sickness, or poverty are experienced by everyone at times in their lives. Some are short-lived while others can last a lifetime. Regardless, these things are all aspects of being poor or needy. When those things come upon us, our first response should be to pray and ask God for relief[7]. Jesus Christ absolutely PROMISED that "whatever you ask in My name, that I will do." (John 14:13-14). But many are not willing or able to RECEIVE God's help if it comes through the hands of other *people*.

Receiving can be difficult. Pride, or not wanting to be indebted to others, can prevent us from accepting help; however, there are other obstacles that show just how hard it is to let agape love abound in our hearts[8] whether we are giving or receiving.

An example might serve to illustrate the roadblocks that we create in our minds. When someone causes an offense, it is hard to admit a wrong and sincerely apologize (repent to the victim). But it can also be just as difficult for a victim to receive it. But this exchange is required if the offender and victim are to reconcile.

---

[1] Deut. 15:7-11.
[2] Lev. 25:35.
[3] 2 Cor. 9:8-13.
[4] 2 Cor. 9:8
[5] 1 Tim. 6:17-19.
[6] 2 Cor. 9:7.
[7] Heb. 4:16.
[8] Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:12.

Too many times the offender cannot or will not repent and the victim too often continues in their anger or disappointment rather than to accept the apology.

It is not surprising that many do not even know HOW respond to offenses. Saying "I'm sorry" requires humility and love, something that has 'waxed cold'[9] in this day and age. Humility and love are required of the offender to repent but they are also required of the victim to forgive (even though the victim is required to be *willing* to forgive whether or not the offender apologizes[10]).

Although the above example is about reconciling offenses, there is a similar problem with Giving & Receiving. When an answered prayer is not due to a direct miracle from God but comes at the hand of people, many may find it hard to receive it. Not knowing how to receive help from others, pride, not wanting to feel indebted, or just being unwilling are many times a problem. However, rejecting the help of others can also be a rejection of God's answer to prayer.

Regardless, both giving and receiving are outward expressions of agape love between people. However unintentional, the walls that are raised when it comes to Giving & Receiving also cause something else. In the time just before the birth of Jesus Christ, the Israelites knew His appearance was imminent[11]. But when God finally came the people did something unbelievable:

> JOHN 1:10-11 He *[Jesus]* was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and **His own did not receive Him**.

What does the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel have to do with Giving & Receiving? Everything. God gives an abundance to some to be received by the poor or needy. When someone refuses to *give* of their abundance OR declines to *receive* it from others, they can be rejecting Jesus Christ! Notice:

> MATTHEW 10:40 "**He *[the receiver]* who receives you *[the giver]* receives Me *[Jesus]*, and he who receives Me receives Him *[God]* who sent Me.**
>
> MATTHEW 18:5 "Whoever **receives** one little child like this in My name **receives Me *[Jesus]***.
>
> ROMANS 15:7 Therefore **receive one another, just as Christ also received us**, to the glory of God.

To "receive one another" requires someone who gives and another to receive. It may not be intentional, but refusing to give or receive can be a rejection of our Lord and Savior! How can that be? Because it prevents a very special connection between

[9] Matt. 24:12.
[10] Refer to the booklet *Offenses—Ordinance of God* on the website.
[11] Luke 2:25-26—Simeon had received a prophecy that he would see the Christ before his death.

people. If the whole purpose of God's Law is agape love out of a pure heart[12], then the statute of Giving & Receiving is the fulfillment of the two Great Commandments of Love. In other words, Giving & Receiving bonds our hearts together.

Having abundance from God to give to the poor or needy brings a feeling of utter joy. From that comes thanks-GIVING to God, especially if it is an answer to the prayers of a giver to have the means and opportunity to help others.

Those who receive the things they prayed for know it was from God and they give thanks to Him for His mercy and compassion. They also give thanks to the GIVER, which is an expression of agape love for their help and generosity. Grateful thanks back to the giver is heartfelt affection and gratitude.

And THAT is the whole purpose for the Administration of Service[13] called Giving & Receiving! If everyone had exactly what they need and no one lacked anything, what kind of relationship would God's children have with each other? Giving & Receiving is not only about exchanging physical things, it is about the giver showing love for someone in need and the one in need reciprocating that love.

Who has given to someone and not been overwhelmed by the thanks, gratefulness, and appreciation they receive? Who has received from someone in a time of need and not felt utterly blessed with love, mercy, and compassion of such acts of kindness? Giving & Receiving draws people together like nothing else. It does not matter what is exchanged—it can be physical things, money, emotional support, spiritual help, etc.

Giving & Receiving is The Way and The Life of the eternity to come. Jesus said He went back to God to prepare a place for His people but He also mentioned something quite interesting:

> JOHN 14:2-6 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place *[in the Kingdom]*** for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 "And **where I go you know**, and **the way you know**." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, the truth, and **the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Jesus said the disciples KNEW where He was going and the way to get there. But Thomas countered and said that they did NOT know. The disciples were obviously thinking of a physical place and wanted directions to get there. But Jesus said HE is BOTH "... **the way**, the truth, and **the life**." Jesus IS the direction and the destination—The Way and The Life! He was not talking about a physical place with a better political, economic, and judicial systems. He was talking about a spiritual Kingdom

[12] 1 Tim. 1:5.
[13] Refer to the Sabbath Thought Giving & Receiving #4.

based upon HIMSELF! Who is He? HE is The Way = AGAPE LOVE! HE is The Life = GIVING & RECEIVING!

> The Way is AGAPE LOVE and The Life is GIVING & RECEIVING!

If eternity is nothing more than endless learning to sing or play an instrument, construction of planetary cities and gardens, or permanent sightseeing trips to the ends of the universe there will eventually come a point when there is nothing that has not been learned, built, or experienced. Perhaps it will not happen for the first few billion or even trillion years, but eternity is a very long time. Still, surely a time must come when everything is either built or, after a few billion cities, it becomes boring and uninteresting.

Those were my thoughts in times past, gloomy as they were. But then I realized that eternity is not FOUNDED upon those things. God IS agape love and we are to BECOME as He is! Eternity will be founded upon RELATIONSHIPS with billions of God's children. If a mere million years is spent getting to know ONE of them, that is a lot of zeros—15 of them to be exact (1 billion people times 1 million years/person = 1 trillion years). Peter said that receiving the salvation of our souls will be a "joy unspeakable."[14] I truly believe he was describing an eternity of relationships alongside developing talents and doing whatever works will exist in the New Heavens. It will be a time of *the way* of agape love and *the life* of Giving & Receiving. It is spending time loving and being loved, talking and listening, learning and teaching, helping and being helped, serving and being served—all in the unimaginable fullness of the agape love of God our Father and our Brother Jesus Christ! Notice what Paul said:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:28 Now when all things are made subject to Him *[Jesus]*, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him *[God the Father]* who put all things under Him, **that God *[the Father]* may be all in all**.

And so ends this series on Giving & Receiving. There is so much more that can be said and, yet, we can never truly imagine the fullness of it. When the Kingdom has fully arrived, God will be ALL—His perfect agape love and way of life—in ALL!

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 Thanks *be* to God for His **indescribable gift**!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[14] 1 Pet. 1:3-9.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-02-17—DESIRING GIFTS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The sole purpose for the existence of humankind is to fulfill the desire of God to give people the gift of eternal life. But it is not a gift in the sense that the English word suggests. Many times, a gift is given without the recipient specifically asking for it. Gifts are also given without any expectation of reciprocity; that is, without anything in return. But the gift of God is slightly different. It is in all regards undeserved and unmerited. We do not deserve it because the gift of eternal life is through the torment, torture, and sacrifice of God's Son. (We are also required to repent of sin, but that is not the emphasis here.) Notice the last part of one of the most well-known scriptures:

> ROMANS 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life **through Christ Jesus our Lord**.

Eternal life is the gift of God but it would not exist if it were not for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Not only did God pay a price for that gift, but it is something that must be earnestly sought out:

> MATTHEW 13:44-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and **sells all that he has** and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and **sold all that he had and bought it**.

The One Gift of eternal life came at great cost so it is given only to those who recognize it as a priceless treasure and value it above else. Unlike gifts of men, it is given only to those who seek it:

> JOHN 4:10-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew **the gift of God**, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' **you would have asked** Him, and He would have given you **living water *[the Holy Spirit]***." 11 The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? 12 "Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" 13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But **the water *[the Holy Spirit]*** that I shall give him **will become in him *[grow into]* a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life**."

But God the Father desires to give many other gifts to those who lay hold of the gift of eternal life. Those who have received the Holy Spirit are His children and, as such, are also under His grace—favor and goodwill:

EPHESIANS 4:7-8 But **to each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, **And gave gifts to men.**"

The gifts Paul mentions are are beyond the One Gift (eternal life) that is possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There are many others:

JAMES 1:17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father** of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Again, the gifts from above are given to those who earnestly seek after them. They are not given unless someone ASKS for them:

MATTHEW 7:7-11 "**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.** 9 "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!**

There are many gifts of God and several are listed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. There, you will find gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

While the One Gift of eternal life is above all others, have you sought out and asked for any of these other gifts? I am certain that many ask for the first three—wisdom, knowledge, faith—but what about the rest? Do you ask for healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, or the interpretation of tongues? If not, then why not? Do you think it is impossible to have even one of those? Or do you imagine that they are only given to ordained elders in the ministry of God? Is it because these gifts require greater faith than you have? Or is it because of fear of failure? The gifts of healing, for example, cannot be denied when someone is miraculously restored. I wonder if we do not seek after—and earnestly ask of God—for these other gifts because we are afraid that we will fail.

Perhaps the reason many of these gifts are seemingly absent from among the *ekklesia* is that people do not understand the PURPOSE of God's gifts. Maybe, we do not have the right motives when we ask for them. Paul says that every gift is unique but all gifts are meant to profit the whole of the *ekklesia*. Notice what he says in the same chapter *before* he lists the gifts:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1, 4-7 Now concerning **spiritual *gifts***, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: … 4 There are **diversities of gifts**, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries *[referring to good works, NOT elders]*, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same **God who works all in all**. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one **for the profit *of all*:**

Paul understood that gifts of God are meant to edify the *ekklesia*. This is why he talked at length about the various *parts* of the body in verses 12-27. He was emphasizing that each member has abilities and gifts from God so that the body benefits. Together, the multitude of gifts profits the entire *ekklesia*.

But did you know that gifts are part of the good works of agape love? I cannot imagine that anyone who reads my articles does not know that I write often about salvation that is through becoming agape love and doing good works (which includes Giving & Receiving as discussed in the previous five articles). Notice how Paul ends the chapter where he discusses gifts in the Body of Christ:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 But **earnestly desire the best gifts**. And yet I show you **a more excellent way**.

Again, gifts from God are given to those who earnestly seek them. But notice the last sentence: "I *Paul* show you **a MORE EXCELLENT way**!" What is he referring to? Paul explains it in the next chapter—most know it as the 'Love Chapter':

> 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but **the greatest of these *is* love**.

What does agape love have to do with gifts? Everything. God gives diverse gifts to His people for the PURPOSE of good works, serving, giving and receiving, etc. What is the *motivation* for all good works? Agape love! When we ask God for certain gifts, we must not only ask in faith but also seek them for the purpose of serving the brethren! Still unconvinced? Paul concludes chapter 13 by saying "now abide *[remains]* faith, hope, love, these three; but **the greatest of these *is* love**." In the next chapter, he focuses on gifts of prophecies, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, but notice what he says about *all* gifts:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1, 12 **Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts***, … 12 Even so you, since **you are zealous for spiritual *gifts, let it be* for the edification of the [ekklesia] *that* you seek to excel**.

Gifts from God are always to serve the Body of Christ IN agape love. Everything that God does is founded upon agape love so everything WE do should be motivated by it and that includes gifts that are needed within the *ekklesia*. Peter also talked about the connection between agape love, gifts, and serving:

> 1 PETER 4:8, 10-11 And above all things **have fervent love for one another**, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." … 10 **As each one has received a gift, minister it *[the gift]* to one another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks *[this is a a gift], let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers *[this is a a gift], let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that **in all things *[good works]* God may be glorified through Jesus Christ**, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Gifts from God are by His grace—favor and goodwill. They not only enrich the individual but also the Body of Christ. What is interesting about gifts is how much Paul emphasized their value in the lives of God's begotten children. In fact, gifts are the first thing he mentions in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9 I thank my God always concerning you for **the grace of God** which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that **you were enriched in everything by Him** in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that **you come short in no gift**, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gifts are seemingly rare among God's children today, especially those of healings and ministering[1] (charitable aid) to others. Many are suffering today and in need of healing and ministering. Above all, do not avoid earnestly desiring a particular gift because you do not think yourself capable or worthy of it. As Paul said:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 7:7 … **each one has his own gift from God**, one in this manner and another in that.

So, the question now is, what gift can you earnestly seek after and ask of God that is needed in the body of the *ekklesia*?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[1] 1 Cor. 12:5.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-02-24—RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE, & FAITH

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The apostle Paul liked to use metaphors. They can be quite effective but only if we understand their underlying meaning. For example, he portrays righteousness as a breastplate of armor:

> EPHESIANS 6:14 Stand therefore, … having put on the **breastplate of righteousness**,

You have likely heard many messages about how the breastplate protects the torso of the body and, hence, the all-important heart. We see this in Scripture where the heart and righteousness are connected in a number of places such as:

> PSALM 40:10 I have not hidden **Your *[God's]* righteousness within my heart**; …

It all makes sense—or does it? What is righteousness?

> 1 JOHN 5:17 All **unrighteousness is sin**, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

> 1 JOHN 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**.

Unrighteousness is sin and sin is transgression of the Law; so, righteousness is *keeping* the Law; that is, not sinning. With that, Paul's metaphor of the breastplate of righteousness makes sense, especially when we read:

> JEREMIAH 31:33 "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put **My law** in their minds, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Keeping the Law of God should come from a desire within the heart. And that is what Paul was alluding to with his metaphor. He even quotes from that same Scripture in Hebrews 10:16. However, Paul seems to discount his first metaphor because he uses the breastplate to describe something else:

> 1 THESSALONIANS 5:8 … putting on the **breastplate of faith and love**, …

At first glance, it might be tempting to say that 'love' has an obvious connection to the heart but how does 'faith' fit in? Did he simply forget what he wrote to the Ephesians and made something up? Or is Paul redirecting his metaphor to something completely different? It is highly doubtful that Paul would forget much; remember, he knew Scripture inside and out and quoted it quite often. In reality, Paul is absolutely consistent when he connects righteousness to love and faith. First of all, Paul tells us that agape love is the RESULT of keeping the Law:

> 1 TIMOTHY 1:5 Now **the purpose of the commandment *[Law]* is *[agape]* love from a pure heart**, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith,

This should be obvious. Just as in a parent-child relationship, the parent sets down rules that provide the best opportunities for an independent life. The goal is that the child will eventually have the self-discipline to follow the rules with the understanding that the rules ensure the best life possible. Likewise, the Law are rules to be simply obeyed initially but eventually become a desire of our hearts. By association, keeping the Law is *righteousness*. 1 Timothy 1:5 plainly connects keeping the Law, righteousness, and agape love to the hearts of God's children.

All of these are simple and basic truths that are at the core of many, if not most, Sabbath Thought articles. But Paul throws in *faith* with righteousness and agape love. The two metaphors could be a source of confusion if we do not understanding how faith plays a part in keeping the Law (righteousness) and growing in agape love. Interestingly, faith is something in both God's children and our Father:

> PSALM 40:10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared **Your faithfulness** and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

There is even a hymn titled "Great is Thy *[God's]* Faithfulness," likely inspired from Lamentations 3:23. God's faithfulness is also declared in Psalm 89[1], which could be called the 'Faith Chapter' of the OT:

> PSALMS 89:1-8 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; With my mouth will I make known **Your faithfulness** to all generations. 2 For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever; **Your faithfulness** You shall establish in the very heavens." 3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 4 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' " Selah 5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; **Your faithfulness** also in the assembly of the saints. 6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? *Who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? 7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all *those* around Him. 8 O LORD God of hosts, Who *is* mighty like You, O LORD? **Your faithfulness** also surrounds You.

One example of God's faithfulness is in giving His children a Law that leads to TRUE life. However, faith among the saints is most often equated to believing that God will fulfill our prayers and supplications. On several occasions healing is directly tied to the faith of the one who asks for it. One example is:

> MATTHEW 9:27-29 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" 28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith** let it be to you."

[1] Also Deut. 7:9; Ps. 92:2; 119:75, 90, 138; 143:1; Hos. 11:12.

But healing is only one aspect of faith; or, rather, it is one EXAMPLE of faith. Paul made this plain:

> HEBREWS 11:6 But **without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him [God]***, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

If faith were about healing, then how could someone DISPLEASE God if they simply had too little faith to be HEALED? Would God condemn someone just for that? Obviously, faith is required for much more including faith that God gave us His Law for our good, casts out demons (Matt. 17:15-20), provide the means and opportunities for good works (Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25:14-30, i.e., "good and **faithful servant**"), supply our physical needs (Luke 12:22-30), help us endure trials and sufferings (Acts 14:22), etc. In these examples, faith is believing that God provides for, and preserves, His saints:

> PSALM 31:23 Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! *For* **the LORD preserves the faithful**, And fully repays the proud person.
>
> ROMANS 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "**The just shall live by faith.**"

Another very important aspect of our faith is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

> JOHN 20:26-29 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here,* and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**"

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is reflected in the fact that baptism is done solely in the name of JESUS[2]. Why? Because "there is no other name *[than Jesus]* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). However, none of these aspects of faith explain the connection with righteousness (keeping the Law) and agape love. Once again, Paul provides an answer:

> ROMANS 3:20-31 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. 21 But now **the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe**. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in **Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through**

[2] More information is in the booklet titled *Baptize in the Name of Jesus Christ* available on the website.

> **faith, to demonstrate His *[God's]* righteousness**, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. 27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but **by the law of faith**. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. 29 Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 **Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.**

And there is the answer: "**the righteousness of God** … is revealed" because it is "**through faith** in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." Faith is belief that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers our sins (violations of the LAW) whereby God then forgives us. This is why it is called the Law of FAITH (v27)! Where does agape love fit in? As explained in the beginning, the purpose of keeping God's Law is to become agape love. The Law of God is encapsulated by the two Great Commandments: Love God and love your neighbor[3]; so, by extension, it is also the Law of AGAPE LOVE!

Simply put, righteousness is NOT transgressing the Law (sin). But all have sinned and the only remission (cancellation) of sin requires faith or belief that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ leads to God's forgiveness. Through forgiveness, God imputes or establishes us in His righteous[4] and perfect keeping of the Law. But to want to *keep* the Law to begin with requires a desire of the heart—agape love. This cycle of repenting in faith whereby we receive God's forgiveness and righteousness is how we become more perfect in keeping the Law. All of this is motivated by agape love. This IS the work of God in us to bring us to the perfection in the "day of *[our]* visitation."[5] If we stay committed, then all this is our "good fight of **faith** 'working through **love**', *[to]* lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession." (1 Tim. 6:12 and Gal. 5:6).

When Paul compared a breastplate—the protector of the heart—to righteousness and also agape love and faith, he was perfectly consistent because they are all part of God's work in us, which leads us in The Way unto The Life[6]!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[33] Matt. 22:36-40; Luke 10:27; Mark 12:28-31.
[4] Ps. 32:2; Rom. 4:5-25; Jas. 2:23.
[5] 1 Pet. 2:12.
[6] John 14:6.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-02—GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Protestants, generally speaking, have an aversion to God's Law. That is somewhat of a mystery to me because laws allow and benefit all manner of relationships among people as well as with God. So, if they reject the Law that defines our relationship with God, what is left? A skewed understanding of agape love (most of the time they talk in terms of human love rather than agape). But the Bible clearly says that God has rules of behavior required of people if they want a relationship with Him. In contrast, since their beginnings in the early 1900s, the COGs rejected the Protestants who exclude God's Law but, in doing so, they also relegated agape love as secondary to the Law to avoid sounding like the Protestants.

But both the Law and agape love are the foundation of The Way to The Life[1] established by God the Father and Jesus Christ. They cannot be separated—the Law defines behavior that leads to agape love. And that total perspective is the heart and soul of the Sabbath Thought writings.

However, there is a question that is common to both the Protestants as well as those who have had a connection with the COGs. Both certainly acknowledge that God loves mankind who are His creation of flesh and blood beings made in His image. This is clear by the sacrifice of God's Son at His own hands[2]:

> JOHN 3:16 "For **God so *[lit. 'in this way']* loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him *[Jesus Christ]* should not perish but have everlasting life.

All know this, at least intellectually or maybe in terms of the wider Body of Christ. However, many find it difficult to believe that God loves them PERSONALLY. There are many reasons for this but some arise from problems during childhood—difficult parents (especially fathers), not having one or both parents, abuse, etc. I have personally seen the impact—there were 27 foster kids that came though my door over time many years ago.

But I think there is another reason that makes it difficult to believe God personally loves us. Actually, I would guess it affects everyone from time to time if we are honest with ourselves but, for some, it is something they struggle with every day. And that problem is sin—whether it is sin that happens on occasion, a habitual sin, or just the fact that ALL have sinned and are imperfect before God. Basically, the problem is accepting that God loves us in our less-than-perfect state.

The solution to sin is sorrowful repentance—faith that the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers sin, which God then promises to forgive sin. Obviously that applies to

[1] John 14:6.
[2] For more information, refer to the 2023-03-11 Sabbath Thought *Who Killed Christ?*

the occasional sin, but what about habitual sin? How often does God forgive true repentance? Would God forgive less than He requires of us?

> MATTHEW 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to **seventy times seven**.

Jesus answer to Peter's question about forgiving a brother was an unimaginable 490 times. Is it even possible to sin against one person that many times? Would God the Father limit Himself to a lesser extent. Or is He a God of immeasurable grace and mercy who wipes away the tears of those who repent and will do so until the Kingdom comes? I believe you know the answer but, regardless of the reason for anyone doubting God's personal love, the Bible proves that He does—and it started when you were CALLED:

> ROMANS 1:5-7 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom **you also are the called** of Jesus Christ; 7 To all who are in Rome *[insert your town here]*, **beloved of God, called *to be* saints**: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord**, because **God from the beginning chose you** for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,
>
> 1 JOHN 3:1 Behold **what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us**, that we should **be called** children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

If we were enemies before our calling wherein God loved us enough to sacrifice His Son, consider how great His love is AFTER repentance, which honors Him THROUGH that sacrifice! One problem, though, is that we have never seen or heard His voice. Unlike a human family, we cannot hear His voice directly nor see His expressions when He gazes upon us. John, perhaps more than all the other apostles, understood the agape love of our heavenly Father. Notice what he said about God's love for each of those He calls:

> 1 JOHN 4:12-16 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *as* Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And **we have [come to know] and [come to believe] the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him**.

I corrected verse 16 according to the Greek because it is *perfect indicative active*, meaning it applies a *past* action that has become the *present* state of things. In

other words, God's love for us started in the past and continues today so, to "come to know and come to believe the love that God has for us" takes time. And that is why our calling is the first proof. It caused us to recognize the depths of the sacrifice God the Father and Jesus Christ made for us, which leads to true, sorrowful repentance. And that is the true miracle—God showed us His love WHEN He CALLED us! Everyone who is baptized experienced that tremendous moment—God forgave our sins and begat us with His seed of a spiritual birth! He literally changed us from enemies to His children by calling us, which was an act of love.

That calling then led to baptism where ALL sins perish in a watery grave—we literally 'DIE to sin'[3] and become a 'NEW creation.'[4] But it can be hard to believe God's love has continued without ceasing from the time of our baptism; after all, we have sinned since that day. It seems impossible at times to avoid it. But that is exactly why God is doing a WORK in us:

> HEBREWS 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 **make you complete** in every good work to do His will, **working in you what is well pleasing in His sight**, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.
>
> PHILIPPIANS 2:13 for **it is God who works in you** both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:6 And there are diversities of activities, but **it is the same God who works all in all**.

If baptism made anyone perfect, then why is God WORKING in us? If nothing is impossible for the Almighty God[5], then how can anyone think God will FAIL you? But then again, He knew before He called you what would be required to bring you into His family. He loves us so much "that He who has begun a good work in you **will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ**." (Phil. 1:6). Now, that is an interesting phrase—"will complete it." It is *future indicative active* meaning God *will complete* His work but at the same time God *will BE completing* His work in us. In other words, His calling of you not only is proof of His love but also it was the beginning of His work in you. And whatsoever God does, it is guaranteed to be completed.

If you still have doubts that God loves you personally, then read the prayer of Paul. He actually got down on his knees and prayed for all of God's children to truly come to understand His love for us *personally*:

> EPHESIANS 3:14-21 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom **the whole family** in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He

[3] Rom. 6.
[4] Col. 3:1-3, 10.
[5] Luke 1:37.

> *[the Father]* would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that **you, being rooted and grounded in love**, 18 **may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height**– 19 **to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God *[His agape love]***. 20 Now to **Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him *be* glory in the *ekklesia* by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Paul did not pray just for the Ephesians; he starts by mentioning the WHOLE family of God the Father. He then prays that ALL the saints become "rooted and grounded in *[God's agape]* love." He goes on to ask God to help "ALL the saints" come to "comprehend" (lit. *seize* or *possess*) the depths of Christ's love and the fullness of Himself. What is the "fullness of God?" God IS love so His fullness is agape love! Paul concludes by reminding us that God's abundance EXCEEDS ALL that we ask or think! If Paul prayed all this for YOU, do you think God ignored this supplication of His greatest apostle[6]? How great is God's love? Paul tries to describe it in several scriptures but, perhaps, his best words are found in his epistle to the Romans:

> ROMANS 8:35-39 **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things **we [more than conquer] through Him who loved us**. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

God's children will "MORE than conquer" through God's love for us because NOTHING can separate us from His love. NOT. ONE. THING. Not the sins we struggle against, not the trials and sufferings of this physical life, and certainly not anyone who tries to destroy us. "What then shall we say to these things? *[Do you still doubt God's love for you?]* **If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?**" (Rom. 8:31).

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[6] 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 11:23-28.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-09—GRACE INSTEAD OF ANGER

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Every war is motivated by anger. Ironically, peace treaties and international alliances are formed on the basis of a common anger toward other nations. Politics has always been a dirty business and the history of every nation that has ever existed testifies of the anger that is behind the fight for all positions of authority from kings and presidents down to lowly mayors. It has always been this way. In fact, we are only shocked when anger is NOT a part in the world around us. There have always been angry people but they generally did not express it so openly and with such extreme irrational and uncontrolled behaviors as is done today.

However, religion is the foundation for almost all of the anger. Religious beliefs underpin every single institution of this world and set the bounds of everything from individual nations to social gatherings. People associate with others based upon common beliefs whether they are Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, atheists, or agnostics. (Atheism and agnosticism are both religions. If God does not exist, then why do these people get insanely angry at those who believe in God?[1] Is it because they actually know there is a God and hate Him?) The intensity and displays of anger grow with the size and public awareness of the association or institution. For example, anger in a local election is usually much less overt than at the state level, which is but a shadow of the extent of vitriol expressed in national forums.

Religion actually *breeds* anger. Some belief systems, such as Islam, openly teach it to their adherents. But anger is also the result of those with nice sounding doctrines of peace such as those of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism. The former bred India's anger toward Pakistan. The latter was the national religion of Japan before WW2 but those teachings of peace did not prevent the anger behind the terrible atrocities on a massive scale. The same can be said for every single religion because religions breed an adversarial view of non-adherents.

Anger is even found among those who believe they are the true Christians. Does that surprise you? Well, consider how many identify with one of the plethora of religious organizations generally referred to as Churches of God. Even those who do not belong to or attend with them take upon themselves the title of 'Independent', which is a group in and of itself. (Although much less 'organized', they still tend to align themselves according to a common belief system.)

It might seem overreaching to accuse everyone of anger, but what is the difference between a religious organization and a political party? Both consist of multiple groups who oppose others with contrasting beliefs. The 'platform' of the COGs are their doctrines, which they publish as sizeable documents on every topic imaginable. Even the independents assess others based upon differences of beliefs.

[1] A prime example is Richard Dawkins who has dedicated his life to denying God.

What is wrong with that? Does that justify saying they are all angry? Well, there may not be the extremes of political groups but that is how Satan works:

> MATTHEW 12:25-26 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "**Every kingdom divided against itself** is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

Satan means adversary, which is simply someone who works against others. Someone is an adversary for only one reason—they are opposed to those who hold contrasting beliefs. Without some means of redirecting this satanic and adversarial view of others, it leads anger. It is what led Paul to persecute the *ekklesia*:

> ACTS 8:1-3 Now **Saul was consenting to his *[Stephen's]* death**. At that time a great persecution arose against the [ekklesia] which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. … 3 As for **Saul, he made havoc *[lit. brutally ravage or maim]* of the [ekklesia], entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison**.

Saul did not simply consent or agree to Stephen's murder, the Greek indicates he was GRATIFIED by it. Paul saw everyone whose beliefs contrasted with his as enemies and his anger led him to persecute and murder them—and Paul knew it:

> ACTS 9:1-2 Then **Saul, still breathing** threats and **murder** against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Therefore, I stand by my claim that an adversarial stance against those with DIFFERING beliefs is, at the very least, a catalyst for anger. It may not start out that way, but it can become anger if we allow it. So, how do we avoid anger? More to the point, how should we think and feel toward others who have differing beliefs? There will NEVER be complete unity of beliefs among God's people. Such was the case even for the apostles[2]. Avoiding anger toward God's children should be easy compared to the differences with Protestants or the vast antithesis with Muslims.

First, it is vital to recognize *why* anger arises toward those of opposing beliefs. Anger is actually a sign that we think OUR beliefs are the ONLY truth. While there some very critical beliefs required for salvation, all others are inconsequential. But should we be adversaries of those who have differing salvational beliefs? Is that not a matter between them and God? How is it that we think we have any role in their relationship with God or have authority over THEIR salvation?

There are many topics in the Bible that will never be completely understood in this life and it not gotten easier in the last two thousand years. How much is lost

[2] Acts 15:36-40.

because of linguistic incompatibilities, cultural vagueness, and missing historical sources? To highlight these things I often ask, what is the difference between "no work" and "no servile work" on Sabbaths and holydays? Or, what constitutes work? It takes longer and requires more effort to get dressed than it does to boil an egg. Not knowing makes it difficult to keep those days as God intended.

An adversarial response to differing beliefs has spread among God's children to the point that non-salvational differences in understanding of prophecy, the meanings of holydays, et al causes the *ekklesia* to partition into many, many separate identities who not only view outsiders as lesser believers but, many times, utterly refuse to associate with them. Why? Because they are angry they have differing beliefs. How many times have you heard a group leader say, "We have more truth than all the other organizations?" There is a lot of pride and anger behind that statement. But disunity was NOT the prayer of Jesus Christ:

> JOHN 17:9-11, 20-22 "**I *[Jesus]* pray for them**. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one** as We *are*. … 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "**that they all may be one**, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one** in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one** just as We are one:

Jesus repeated this plea to His Father several times, indicating He knew how adversarial God's children would be and it greatly troubled Him that we are NOT one with each other. NO ONE can be unified with God the Father and Jesus Christ if they are angry toward others. So, what is the answer in light of the fact that there will NEVER be a consensus of beliefs in this life?

It begins with humility, recognizing that no one—not one single person—has all understanding. Anyone who believes that God has revealed more to them than everyone else actually is testifying that God does not regard them at all because they are overcome with pride[3] believing they know God's thoughts:

> ISAIAH 55:8-9 "For **My thoughts *are* not your thoughts**, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.
>
> ISAIAH 66:2 For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist," Says the LORD. "**But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit**, And who trembles at My word.

The other preventative for anger is grace:

[3] Also Ps. 34:18; Isa. 57:15.

PROVERBS 3:34 Surely He *[God]* scorns the scornful *[lit. those who scoff/sneer/mock/ridicule others]*, **But gives grace to the humble.**[4]

Scripture demands that we show grace toward those with opposing beliefs even if they are mistaken:

2 PETER 3:15-18 and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation–as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are **some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures**. 17 **You therefore, beloved**, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

HEBREWS 13:9 **Do not be carried about with various and strange *[different or new]* doctrines.** For ***it is* good that the heart be established by grace**, not with foods *[beliefs and doctrines]* which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Grace is free and unmerited favor toward others. God has shown unimaginable grace unto all in this world but especially those of the *ekklesia*, so He expects us to be vessels of grace toward others regardless of their affiliations or beliefs. Grace is the result of agape love; therefore, anger is the enemy of grace because it is in OPPOSITION to—an adversary of—love.

Who seriously believes they have perfect understanding even in salvational matters? Even if that were the case, why does it matter if someone disagrees? God judges all so leave that to Him. Grace is result of agape love and humility—recognizing the preeminence of God and that no one is without ignorance or sin. A name tag with the name of a church organization (including 'independent') does not assure eternal life. Do not be angry toward anyone with differing beliefs even if they are salvational. God's grace is evident in "love covers all sins"[5] but to receive His grace, we also must give grace—especially to those of the *ekklesia*.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[4] Also Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6.
[5] Prov. 10:12; Jas. 5:20.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-16—DO I NEED TO FORGIVE MYSELF?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

From the beginning, the Creator God determined allowable behaviors for all who would be subjects of His Kingdom. This was ratified in the form of the Law of Agape Love[1]. All behaviors contrary to it are sin—transgressions of the Law[2]—for which the penalty is death[3]. The problem is, of course, that all have sinned[4] so all have the judgment of death upon them. That was a serious problem for God because He created mankind with the desire that they would become citizens of His Kingdom. If all have sinned and are under judgment of death, no human could ever enter into that Kingdom because all will be dead. Therefore, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is fundamental to God's plan for humankind because God's task is much more than CREATING children, it requires SAVING them from death. Since all have sinned, God is working a 'Plan of SALVATION'.

All of this is, hopefully, plainly obvious and nothing new. However, the critical question is, exactly how does the sacrifice of Jesus Christ change the judgment for sin and what is the role of the Father?

Before God and Jesus get involved, the sinner must admit to the sin. If the agape love of God is working in the sinner, the result of recognizing that sin occurred is deep and heartfelt sorrow. This leads the sinner to come before God the Father in all humility and contriteness[5]—a lowly attitude of heart and mind. This is when the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ is sprinkled[6] on the sinner to atone for the sin. By this simple act, sin is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, which the Bible refers to as the remission of sin:

> MATTHEW 26:28 For this is **My *[Jesus Christ's]* blood** of the new covenant, **which is shed for many for the remission *[pardon or release from guilt and judgment]* of sins**.
>
> NOTE: Life is within the blood[7] of physical beings and animals. Whether sacrificed animals or the death of our Lord, the English always describes the killing as '*shedding*' of blood. The underlying Hebrew (*shaphak*) and Greek (*ekcheo*) words for *shedding* both mean to pour or gush out, so shedding never implies anything less than a complete discharge of blood that always results in death.

But Jesus Christ's death also substitutes for the sinner's death because He submitted to that penalty in our stead. In simple terms, His death was the ransom[8] for our lives:

> MATTHEW 20:28 "just as **the Son of Man** did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give His life a ransom for many**."
>
> TIMOTHY 2:5-6 For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man **Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all**, to be testified in due time,

[1] Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28.
[2] 1 John 3:4.
[3] Rom. 5:12; 6:16, 23; 7:5; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:56; Jas. 1:15; 1 John 5:17.
[4] Rom. 5:12.
[5] Isa. 57:15.
[6] Heb. 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2
[7] Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:14, et al.
[8] Also Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:15; Eph 1:7; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5.

The problem with sin, however, is the temptation that led to it does not always vanish with the remission of sin. This is especially true if deeply ingrained in the mind and heart. But another marvel of the blood shed by Jesus is it also washes away and cleanses of sin[9]:

> REVELATION 1:5 … To **Him *[Jesus Christ]* who** loved us and **washed us from our sins in His own blood**,
>
> 1 JOHN 1:7 … **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**.

Still, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was much more than just the shedding of blood to atone and cleanse sin. His death was a long agony—He was not quickly impaled with a spear. Not only did He have the agony of crucifixion on the cross, but He endured flesh-tearing stripes or lashings that were torments and tortures to His body and soul. Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to suffer? It is because sin not only demands death, but sin also requires restitution or compensation[10]:

> DEUTERONOMY 32:35 Vengeance is Mine *[says the LORD]*, **and recompense** …
>
> ISAIAH 34:8 For *it is* the day of the LORD's vengeance, **The year of recompense** for the cause of Zion.

For example, restitution for a victim is required rather than punishment in the case of theft (Exod. 22:1, 4). The problem is that no one can repay or compensate God who owns everything[11]. All sin is against God[12] so, if it is not possible to recompense God, then the Law demands *punishment*. Notice:

> PSALMS 89:31-32 **If they break My *[the LORD's]* statutes And do not keep My commandments**, 32 Then **I will punish** their transgression with the rod, And **their iniquity with stripes**.

Therefore, sin not only has the penalty of death, but punishment is required as well. This is why Jesus Christ had to *suffer* before He died—to bear the punishment required for sin:

> ISAIAH 53:5 But **He *[Jesus Christ] was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities**; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And **by His stripes we are healed**.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ bears the punishments for sin, covers (or atones for) sin, ransoms or redeems the person from death penalty through His own death, and, finally, washes and cleanses sin.

But there are still two final acts of God the Father, the first of which is forgiveness. God always respects sincere and humble repentance. After remission of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God is utterly faithful to forgive:

> 1 JOHN 1:9 **If we confess our sins, He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins** and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[9] Also Rev. 7:14.
[10] Also Isa. 35:4; 59:18; 65:6; 66:6; Jer. 16:18; 25:14; Ezek. 7; Rom. 12:17, 19; et multi alii.
[11] Deut. 10:14; Ps. 24:1.
[12] Ps. 51:4.

It might seem an unusual question but what is the purpose of God's forgiveness? If the sacrifice of Jesus Christ takes away the punishment, covers (or atones for) the sin, ransoms the sinner from death, and washes the person clean, then what remains to be done? Why does God the Father also *forgive* sin?

God is the High Judge[13] so His forgiveness is the *verdict*. It is when He announces that the person is 'NOT GUILTY' following the remission of sin from punishment and death. But there is one last act of God that remains.

Life in the Kingdom will be an eternity WITHOUT sin … EVER. Once physical life is converted to spirit, there is no more blood sacrifice for sin, so all those who are transformed from flesh to spirit must be *incapable* of ever sinning[14]:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-53 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**– 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead **will be raised incorruptible *[incapable of being imperfect]***, and we shall be changed. 53 For **this corruptible *[imperfection]* must put on incorruption *[perfection]***, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

Therefore, all subjects of the Kingdom must be PERFECT, just as God is perfect[15]:

> MATTHEW 5:48 "Therefore **you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect**.

But all have sinned, so can anyone be perfect? God's forgiveness (after the remission of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ) establishes the person as innocent. But the 'record' of the sin still exists. The person is now innocent but the record of the sin shows they were not PERFECTLY keeping the Law. How can anyone be perfect, especially in this life? The answer is JUSTIFICATION, which follows God's forgiveness. After the sin is remitted by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God then forgives the sinner. The final act of God is to then *justify* the sinner by imputing His own PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS to the person:

> ROMANS 4:6-8, 11-12 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom **God imputes righteousness** apart from works: 7 "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; 8 Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." … 11 And he *[Abraham]* received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that **he might be the father of all those who believe**, though they are uncircumcised, **that righteousness might be imputed to them also**, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but **who also walk in the steps of the faith** which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.

What does justification do to the record of sin? It complete erases it:

> PSALM 103:12 **As far as the east is from the west, *So* far has He *[the LORD]* removed our transgressions from us.**

[13] Dan. 7:22.
[14] Also 1 Pet. 1:3-4.
[15] Also 1 Pet. 1:15.

Justification imputes GOD'S righteousness—His perfect keeping of the Law—to the sinner. Since God has never sinned, a person who has been ascribed with the righteousness of God is now PERFECT in His eyes:

> ACTS 13:38-39 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that **through this Man *[Jesus Christ]* is** preached to you **the forgiveness of sins**; 39 "**and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses**.

Those whom God forgives He also justifies—imputes or ascribes with His righteousness—and all those He justifies are then counted as PERFECT keepers of the Law. And that is how beings of flesh become PERFECT subjects of the Kingdom!

However, even though sin is completely erased by God the Father, some struggle with their sins even AFTER repentance and forgiveness. It is commonplace to feel guilt or shame even after God forgives them. Some say those feelings must be dealt with by *forgiving oneself*. But that, I believe, misses the mark.

How can a person forget a sin that produced deep grief and sorrow unto repentance? It is common that memories and feelings of serious sins last a lifetime. Nothing completely erases them, so true comfort only comes from FAITH that God TRULY forgives and erases sin. In other words, we must believe the sin no longer EXISTS and there is NO record of it according to God. This does not remove it from a person's memory, but God abounds in agape love, righteousness, mercy, and compassion and we can TRUST in HIS forgiveness and justification. Considering how deeply involved God and Jesus Christ are when we repent, it is vital not to continue judging oneself guilty and bearing the shame of sin—it is completely gone.

> JAMES 5:15 And **the prayer of faith will save** the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And **if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven**.

> 1 JOHN 1:9 If we confess our sins, **He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

The idea that the guilt and shame associated with a sin is a signal that you need to forgive yourself is not biblical. What is important is BELIEVE that GOD forgives sin and erases it from heaven and earth. The memories and, especially the feelings, that linger after a sin are normal for those who have God's agape love working inside them. They are reminders of a failure and the pain it caused that help us never to repeat it. It can be tempting to want to condemn ourselves for sin, but what matters most is that God completely absolves us of sin upon repentance.

Be comforted through FAITH in the unconditional promises of God the Father who absolutely forgives sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who perfects us in His righteousness through justification, and completely expunges the sin for all who humbly and sincerely repent!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-23—HOW MANY WILL DIE?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus Christ gave three very serious warnings about things that lead to the loss of salvation. Everyone who has even a rudimentary knowledge of Scripture is familiar with them. As a result, one might think that His warnings of eternal death would prompt believers to meditate long and hard about such matters, but it appears they are largely ignored. Hopefully, that is just my perception. The first warning is contained within a PRAYER of Jesus Christ:

> MATTHEW 6:9-13 "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And **forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors**. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

To emphasize verse 12, Jesus said this immediately afterwards:

> MATTHEW 6:14-15 "For **if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you**. 15 "But **if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**.

In verse 12, the Greek word for *debts* means something that is *owed*. The prayer is clearly referring to both debts we owe and debts that others owe us. These are in the context of asking GOD to forgive them ONLY AS we forgive those who are indebted to us. But when Jesus expounded on this in verse 14, He uses *trespass*, a Greek word that means *fault*, *trespass*, or *transgression* in the context of forgiveness BETWEEN people. Trespasses are obviously offenses between people. From GOD'S perspective, offenses are a case where one person OWES something to another person; that is, an offense results in a debt between people. Before GOD, those debts are SIN against Him regardless of whether it is the offender or the victim. And God only forgives our debts (our part in an offense) if we forgive the offenses of others against us. Mark explained it this way:

> MARK 11:25-26 "And whenever you stand praying, **if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses *[offenses]*. 26 "But if you do not forgive *[others who offend you]*, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses *[offenses]*.**"

Make no mistake—refusing to repent to a victim OR withholding forgiveness to the offender who sincerely repents can have serious consequences. Reconciliation, which requires the offender repenting to the victim and the victim forgiving the offender, is a HUGE issue among believers. I cannot think of any other problem among God's people that is so universally ignored even though it is a MAJOR theme throughout the Bible. Notice this small sampling about reconciliation[1]:

[1] Also Matt. 5:21-24; 18:21-35.

EPHESIANS 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you**.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-13 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 **bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do***.

NOTE: While the whole topic of reconciliation cannot be covered in this article, the booklet "Offenses, Ordinances of God" on the website contains a full discussion.

But the problem goes deeper. Notice this warning:

MATTHEW 7:1-2 "**Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**"

Jesus' admonition may sound like He is continuing to address offenses, but judgment goes *beyond* the offense. Judgment means to try, condemn, and punish. It is a common response to an offense of either or both the offender and victim, but bystanders can judge others even if they were not directly involved in the offense. How does judgment come into it? It happens when an offender says something like, "The victim got what was coming to them," or the victim says, "I hope God punishes the offender." In the case of bystanders, they judge others when they take sides and show resentment, anger, or malice toward either the offender or victim. Read what James said about ANYONE who judges (tries, condemns, punishes) and, without a doubt, he does not mince words:

JAMES 2:4 have you not shown **partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts**?

JAMES 2:13 For **judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy**. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

JAMES 4:11-12 **Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.** 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. **Who are you to judge another?**

Offenses are the cause of many (most?) serious problems within the Body of Christ. Unreconciled offenses usually involve judgment as well. But they are made much worse when bystanders get involved because they, too, judge those involved. Those who side with the victim only make it more difficult for the victim to forgive when bystanders condemn the offender and it is hard enough for an offender to repent to the victim without others justifying the offense. But there is a reward for reconciling offenses and putting aside judgment: we regain a BROTHER or SISTER[2]!

[2] Matt. 18:15.

The third serious warning of Jesus Christ that can lead to the loss of salvation is refusing to do good works. Paul describes good works as an administrative service[3] of Giving & Receiving. Read this wonderful passage:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15 Now **concerning the ministering to the saints**, it is superfluous for me to write to you; 2 for I know your willingness *[to give to others]*, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. 3 Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready *[to give to others]*; 4 lest if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. 5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift *[given to others]* beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation. 6 But this *I say:* **He who sows *[gives]* sparingly will also reap *[receive]* sparingly, and he who sows *[gives]* bountifully will also reap *[receive]* bountifully. 7 *So let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you *[received from God]*, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance *[to give]* for every good work**. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad *[received from God]*, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower *[received from God]*, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have *sown [given to people]* and increase the fruits of your righteousness *[received from God]*, 11 while *you are* enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 12 For **the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints *[giving]*, but also is abounding *[receiving]*** through many thanksgivings to God, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal sharing *[giving TO them]* with them and all *men*, 14 and by their prayer for you *[receiving FROM them]*, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. 15 Thanks *be* to God for **His indescribable gift**!

Giving and receiving are all about good works! God desires to give an ABUNDANCE to all so that we have the opportunities and means for good works. But one of the most serious warnings is to those who refuse or fail to DO good works when they are given the means and opportunity by God:

> MATTHEW 25:31-46 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. 33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger *[lit. a foreigner, alien, or guest]* and you took Me in; 36 'I

[3] 2 Cor. 9:12.

was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited ***[lit. to inspect or relieve]*** Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' *[these are good works]* 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You,* or thirsty and give *You* drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You?* 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' *[these did NOT do good works]* 44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.' 46 "**And these *[those who did NOT do good works]* will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**"

Simply sending a check to a faraway organization does not absolve us of good works because this whole passage is to the SHEEP, not exclusively elders or ministers. Everyone in the Body of Christ is His sheep! None of the works that Jesus described are outdated or only works to be done before this modern age. They are simple, but things that make a huge difference in someone's life—providing food, drink, or clothing to those who lack, providing shelter for those in need, relieving the sick (the meaning of "visiting the sick"), or visiting prisoners.

While money can help with many of these problems, how much more personal is it if you are directly involved? I want to offer a challenge to everyone. Ask God to give you the means and opportunity to serve. And before you send your next offering, instead of sending it to an organization, find someone you can help directly. If you do not know someone, ask others for suggestions. Get to truly know your brothers and sisters. I guarantee that everyone benefits from having a relationship with brethren and you will eventually find something you can do for someone. It does not always require money—just some prayer and time and effort.

One of the other benefits of having relationships with brethren is they go a long way to preventing AND reconciling offenses. It also helps to avoid judging others. Offending and judging others is MUCH harder if we KNOW the person. And doing good works unifies us all. How many will die because they refuse to reconcile, quit judging others, or reject doing good works? These can be personally rewarding. In fact, Jesus says the reward is eternal life! But everyone has the choice. So, brethren, be about doing these things so all may "**eat from the tree of life**, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7).

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-30—REMEMBER THE EXODUS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Bringing the ancient Israelites out of Egypt was a monumentally historical event. At no other time from the beginning of the world was God so intimately involved and doing such hugely miraculous works for a people. He began by establishing the infant Moses as an accepted member of the clan of the ruling Egyptian Pharaoh while, at the same time, ensuring his upbringing as an Israelite. That is quite astounding by itself because Moses was not just accepted as an Egyptian ruler, but he believed in God instead of being forced to convert to the worship of Egyptian gods. Throughout his life, God was not just involved with Moses, He was focused on him. Moses' first forty years were spent in Egypt and he was in exile the following forty years in Midian. When God spoke with Moses at the burning bush, it began another span of forty years in which God was directly involved with both Moses and ancient Israel. During this time, God was constantly present in the lives of the Israelites and performed numerous miracles, the like of which has not been known before or since. And God wanted all those works to be REMEMBERED forever[1]:

> DEUTERONOMY 24:18, 22 "But **you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you from there**; therefore I command you to do this thing. … 22 "And **you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt**; therefore I command you to do this thing.

Even when God 'introduced' Himself to the ancient Israelites, it was not as Creator or God Most High but in the context of the *Exodus*. He said, "**I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage**." (Exod. 20:2)[2]. The rescue of ancient Israel was so significant that God commanded them to remember their exodus from Egypt every WEEK on the seventh-day Sabbath:

> DEUTERONOMY 5:15 And **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there** by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; **therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day**.

On top of that, God appointed seven days each year as a memorial of being liberated as slaves from Egypt:

> DEUTERONOMY 16:3, 12 "You shall eat no leavened bread with it *[the Passover]*; **seven days you shall eat unleavened bread** with it, *that is,* the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that **you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life**. … 12 "And **you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt**, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

The weekly seventh-day Sabbath and seven annual holydays are days to remember the Exodus. They are memorials of being slaves, God working with Moses from the

[1] Also Deut. 15:15.
[2] Also Exod. 6:6.

days of his infancy to his death, the destruction of the Egyptians, the liberation of the ancient Israelites, and all the signs and wonders. Did you know that God performed at least 42 MIRACLES (not including the burning bush) over the events of the Exodus? This means that, according to the modern Gregorian calendar, there are 59 days each year dedicated to remembering all that God did to bring the enslaved ancient Israelites into the Promised Land. In other words, God wanted the Exodus to be a memorial an astounding 16% of the year! That is MORE than once a week! The Exodus is to be remembered every seven days PLUS seven days a year. There are a lot of 'sevens' in the memorial of the Exodus. No other events in the history of the world are given such recognition by God or even in the other holydays.

But all that is in the past, right? Today people give very little thought to the tale of the Exodus. It is certainly not mentioned in secular history books and not even taught in schools anymore. But archaeological evidence proves the ancient Egyptians were completely destroyed even though no army arose against them and the ancient Israelites conquered an entire country without firing a shot (so to speak). So why is it missing from our awareness? The really important question is what does the Exodus mean to YOU? God certainly wanted the world to forever remember what He did[3]:

> DEUTERONOMY 4:9 "Only **take heed** to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, **lest you forget the things your eyes have seen**, and **lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life**. And **teach them to your children and your grandchildren,**

In addition to all the events and miracles as well as the presence of God during the Exodus, He wanted people to remember something else that was vitally important—the covenant of the Law of God:

> DEUTERONOMY 4:20, 23 "But **the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people**, an inheritance, as you are this day. … 23 "Take heed to yourselves, **lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you**, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.
>
> EXODUS 13:6-10 "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the LORD. 7 "Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. 8 "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ***'This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.'** 9 "**It shall be as a sign to you** on your hand and as **a memorial** between your eyes, **that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.** 10 "You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.

What is interesting is that the Exodus memorial was to be kept IN the Promised Land, well *after* it occurred so it was meant for all future generations:

> DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12 "So it shall be, **when the LORD your God brings you into the land** of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees

[3] Also Exod. 13:14; 20:2; Lev. 25:42; 26:13; Deut. 5:6; 6:21; 7:8; 8:14; 9:7; 13:5, 10; 15:15;.

which you did not plant–when you have eaten and are full– 12 "*then* **beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage**.

During the year, 59 days are for memorials of God bringing His people out of Egypt, establishing a covenant with them, and bringing them into a Promised Land. But there was one problem—the Promised Land was guarded by enemies of God:

EXODUS 13:3-5 And Moses said to the people: "**Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt**, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the **LORD brought you out of this *place.*** No leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 "On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. 5 "And it shall be, **when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites**, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month.

The land was filled with many great and powerful people. These were enemies of God because of their idolatry. Before the people could take over the land, God had to destroy the inhabitants who would otherwise be too much for the Israelites to conquer:

DEUTERONOMY 7:1-2 "**When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you**, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations **greater and mightier than you**, 2 "and **when the LORD your God delivers them over to you**, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

It is hard to imagine that anyone can forget the Exodus. In fact, it should be nigh on to impossible if it is a remembrance 59 days of the year. But it has happened and will continue to be forgotten for one very sad reason:

DEUTERONOMY 8:11-16a "**Beware that you do not forget** the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, 12 "lest–***when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them;* 13 "and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 "when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage**; 15 "who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, *in which were* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 "who fed you in the wilderness with manna, …

Prosperity and abundance always cause people to forget afflictions, struggles, and suffering. It is the nature of mankind. But forgetting the Exodus brings the worst punishments of God:

DEUTERONOMY 4:25-27 "**When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God** to provoke Him to anger, 26 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, **that you will soon utterly**

> **perish from the land** which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong *your* days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.
>
> DEUTERONOMY 8:17, 19-20 "then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' … 19 "Then it shall be, **if you by any means forget the LORD your God**, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that **you shall surely perish**. 20 "**As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish**, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God.

Events of the Exodus are POWERFUL because the REMEMBRANCE of it brings blessings—ALWAYS. Even when people forget, if they turn back to God and remember the great works of God during the Exodus, He will restore all that which was lost and MORE[4]:

> DEUTERONOMY 30:1-2, 5, 9-10 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, 2 "and **you return to the LORD your God** and obey His voice, … 5 "Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. **He will prosper you** and **multiply you more than your fathers**. … 9 "The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, 10 "if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, *and* if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Every seventh-day Sabbath plus the seven Days of Unleavened Bread are a memorial of God saving His people out of slavery; of the great power of His miracles, signs, and wonders; of the covenant with His people; and of the destruction of the enemies who guarded the Promised Land. Is the Exodus not the story of the greatest works of God in the history of mankind?

It was also the historical precedence for a modern Exodus: A spiritual calling forth from sin and death, God's Holy Spirit of power in His people, a New Covenant of eternal Life, and His destruction of the Enemy guarding the entrance to the Promised Land. And like the first Exodus, all of these new events began with the Passover. Knowing all this, how important is it now to remember the Exodus?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[4] Also Lev. 26:44-45; Deut. 4:29-30.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-04-06—SACRIFICE FOR SIN

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

"All have sinned[1] and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Those simple words describe the defect in every human heart beginning with Adam and Eve. The problem is that sin causes an insurmountable gulf between the sinner and God[2]. Not only that, but "the wages of sin is **death**" (Rom. 3:23); that is, the death of the *sinner*.

This is a world in which everyone will be dead because of sin, and that is a real concern for God who desires all to receive the gift of eternal life[3]. To avoid having to kill everyone, God initially instituted animal sacrifices in which a sinner would confess their sin over an animal and then sacrifice it for the purpose of covering the sin with the blood. Great! Now those who repent can avoid death. But animals are not a complete solution because there remained a problem:

> HEBREWS 10:4 For ***it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**.

When it came to sin, the Law demanded the blood of the SINNER so the sacrifice of an innocent animal did not eliminate sin. Only the blood of the sinner is acceptable. Concerning animal sacrifices, Paul said:

> HEBREWS 9:8-10 the Holy Spirit indicating this, **that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest *[made apparent]* while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience**– 10 *concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

Because animal blood does not remove sin, there could be no access to the mercy seat inside the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Though it was simply an earthly *representation* of the heavenly reality, animal sacrifices did not allow someone access even to the SYMBOLS of God's throne much less bridge the separation with God in heaven. So what was the purpose of animal sacrifices if they did not remove sin and grant people access to Him?

> HEBREWS 9:13-14 For if **the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh**, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works** to serve the living God?

[1] "Sin is the transgressions of *[God's]* Law." (1 John 3:4).
[2] Isa. 59:2.
[3] John 3:16.

The blood of animals only purified or cleansed the flesh. It did NOT "cleanse your conscience;" that is, it failed to bring REMISSION of sin, which is a pardon from guilt and a release from death. Animal sacrifices NEVER absolved the death penalty for a sinner so people were obviously still separated from God. Animal sacrifices accomplished one thing only—purification (cleansing) of the flesh.

But that still does not answer the question of why God instituted animal sacrifices if they were for purification only. The answer is that the first covenant was established by the blood of animals, which was limited to blessings of physical life. In it, the people did not have direct access to God and, consequently, there remained a gulf between them. This is why Paul said:

> HEBREWS 9:22-23 And according to the law **almost all things are purified with *[animal]* blood, and without shedding of blood *[of the sinner]* there is no remission *[of sin]***. 23 Therefore *it was* necessary that **the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these**, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Animal blood was sufficient for everything in the first covenant—including the *purification* of sin—because the first covenant did NOT eliminate DEATH. Those under the first covenant received promises of blessings of a physical life but they still DIED under that covenant. It was not one of eternal life; therefore, the penalty of death for sin still existed.

God's plan of eternal life for mankind obviously needed something that went beyond purification to bring REMISSION of sin but THAT required a human blood sacrifice. Clearly, the alternative to animals was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But how was His life in the flesh the solution to sin? The answer to that requires understanding how Jesus Christ BECAME a sacrificial offering. It all began when God the Father laid the sins of mankind upon Him:

> ISAIAH 53:5-12 But He *[Jesus Christ] was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And **the LORD *[God the Father]* has laid on Him *[Jesus Christ]* the iniquity of us all**. … For **He was cut off** from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My *[God's]* people He was stricken. 9 And they **made His *[Jesus Christ's]* grave with the wicked**– But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When **You *[God the Father]* make His *[Jesus Christ's]* soul an offering for sin**, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My *[God's]* Righteous Servant *[Jesus Christ]* shall justify many, For **He *[Jesus Christ]* shall bear their iniquities**. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because **He *[God the Father]* poured out His *[Jesus Christ's]* soul**

unto death, And **He *[Jesus Christ]* was numbered with the transgressors**[4], And **He *[Jesus Christ]* bore the sin** of many, And **made intercession for the transgressors**.

The result was that Jesus Christ was made sin:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 For **He *[God the Father]* made Him *[Jesus Christ]* who knew no sin *to be*** **sin for us**, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

However, Jesus was not literally *made* into sin. Instead, Jesus was made a SACRIFICE for sin when God laid the sins of the world upon Him[5] and then had Him killed:

HEBREWS 10:5-10, 23-28 Therefore, when He *[Jesus Christ]* came into the world, He said: "***[Animal]* Sacrifice and offering You *[God]* did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me *[to be offered]***. 6 In *[animal]* burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You *[God]* had no pleasure *[were not pleased]*. 7 Then I *[Jesus Christ]* said, 'Behold, I have come– In the volume of the book it is written of Me– To do Your will, O God.' " 8 Previously *[or, 'Again']* saying, "*[Animal]* Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You *[God]* did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He *[Jesus Christ]* said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first *[that is, animal sacrifices]* that He may establish the second *[the sacrifice of Jesus Christ]*. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ** once *for all*. … 23 Therefore *it was* necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves **with better sacrifices than these *[the animal sacrifices]***. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 **not that He should offer Himself often**, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another– 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, **He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so **Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many**. …

When Jesus died with the sins of the world on Him, He became the human blood sacrifice that would satisfy the Law that requires death for sinners. But how does someone have that sacrifice APPLIED to their sins? Jesus clearly VOLUNTEERED to be the human blood sacrifice for the sins of mankind, as is evident when He said, "**I have come to do Your will**, O God" (vv. 7, 9)[6]. But that does not mean that the Judge of mankind—God the Father—is REQUIRED to apply that sacrifice to anyone. In other words, the blood of Jesus Christ is absolute remission of sin but it is not *automatically* applied to every sinner.

[4] Jesus was crucified between two other men—Mark 15:28.
[5] Also Heb. 9:28.
[6] Also John 10:15-18.

What is required for God the Father to apply the blood of Jesus Christ to someone's sins? Faith, repentance, and baptism! Why faith? One must BELIEVE that His blood is remission of sin AND that God the Father will forgive it:

> 1 JOHN 1:9 **If we confess our sins, He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins** and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But there also has to be repentance, which is the humble and contrite[7] confession of sin. This was reflected in animal sacrifices when sins were confessed over the animal. Even though the sins of the world were upon Jesus before His death, a sinner must still confess their OWN sins[8]:

> MATTHEW 3:6 and were **baptized** by him in the Jordan, **confessing their sins**.

In the animal sacrifices, sins were confessed over the head of the animal and then the SINNER killed the animal. But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is different. When someone confesses their sin to God, the sacrifice for sin—Jesus Christ—had already died. So a sinner cannot actually kill the sin sacrifice (Jesus Christ). Instead, the sinner must symbolically die by joining with Jesus Christ in HIS death since He has already been sacrificed. This happens through baptism wherein the sinner 'dies' in a grave of water[9]:

> ROMANS 6:2-5 Certainly not! How shall **we who died to sin** live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that **as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death**? 4 Therefore **we were buried with Him through baptism into death**, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if **we have been united together in the likeness of His death**, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection,

God the Father applies the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to those who confess their sins with heartfelt remorse and die for their sins by being joined in the death of Jesus Christ. In other words, remission of sins is by faith, repentance, and baptism. The final act of baptism is being raised out of that watery grave, picturing the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

> ROMANS 6:2-11 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life**. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly **we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection**, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body

[7] Isa. 57:15.
[8] 1 John 1:9.
[9] Also Col. 2:12.

> of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now **if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead**, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but ***the life* that He lives, He lives to God**. 11 Likewise you also, **reckon yourselves** to be dead indeed to sin, but **alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

After baptism, a person is a NEW CREATION[10] dedicated to Jesus Christ LIVING in them[11]. The gulf between mankind and God is bridged by FAITH in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and the forgiveness of God, sincere and heartfelt REPENTANCE of sin, DYING through baptism into the death of Jesus Christ, and finally being RAISED unto a physical life of serving God and Jesus Christ and having promises of eternal life.

The first covenant was established by the blood of animals who are dead so the promises do not go beyond physical life. The second covenant was established by the blood of Jesus Christ who was resurrected and is alive in heaven so it is one of *eternal* spirit life. Life after baptism is a new physical life seeded with the Holy Spirit of eternity. This new life is under the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ[12], enduring in obedience to God's Law, repentance of sin, and growing in agape love. So why did animal sacrifices exist at all?

> ROMANS 3:25-26 … **because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed *[BEFORE the sacrifice of Jesus]*, 26 to demonstrate at the present time** His righteousness, that He *[God the Father]* might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus *[Christ's sacrifice]*.

Purification under animal sacrifices portrayed the remission of sin under the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He also "made the first *[covenant]* obsolete" (Heb. 8:13) because His blood established the New Covenant of eternal life. At last, the gulf is bridged and mankind can enter into the Holy of Holies before God and Jesus Christ!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[10] 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.
[11] Also Gal. 2:20; Phil 1:21.
[12] Heb. 9:28; 10:1, 10.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-04-13—COME OUT MY PEOPLE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Revelation chapter 17 describes The Harlot and The Beast in the last days. The Harlot, who rules over The Beast for a time, is that "great city" called Babylon (v. 18) and her name is "Mystery *[Secret]* Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth." (Rev. 17:5). I assume that most accept that Babylon is a symbol for any belief system that is against God and, specifically, an icon of the Roman Catholic Church. Her name is interesting because she is not only the mother, or progenitor, of "harlots," which are religious offshoots, but she is the "mother" or source of all ABOMINATIONS of the earth. Because of this, there will be a worldwide warning against Babylon in the last days:

> REVELATION 18:1-3 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3 "For **all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication**, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance *[miraculous power]* of her luxury."

The angel who proclaims the warning is one who has GREAT authority and whose glory is so brilliant that he lights up the entire earth. This being of the heavenly host is obviously very powerful. His message begins by describing the fall of Babylon and, not just some, but ALL nations who engage in her evil ways. The Greek does not exclude ANY nation. Every nation upon this earth—both gentile and Israelite—will commit fornication with The Harlot and become rich by drinking the "wine of the wrath of her fornication." Now that is a rather puzzling phrase. It is repeated in Revelation 14:8 and again with very similar wording in 17:2. What does it mean exactly? Perhaps Jeremiah provides the answer:

> JEREMIAH 51:7 **Babylon *was* a golden cup** in the LORD's hand, That made **all the earth drunk.** The nations drank her wine; therefore **the nations are mad [deranged]**.

Babylon is a likened to a cup of wine, which causes all the earth to be drunk; that is, *mad* or *deranged*. So, the phrase "wine of the wrath *[madness, derangement]* of her fornication" describes a world that will be enticed by the wealth and luxury of Babylon so much so that it is a madness or derangement that is like an addiction. I think Paul also prophesied of this state of the world:

> 2 TIMOTHY 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

Perilous in the Greek means *dangerous* but also implies *furious*. The root means 'reducing the strength'. Paul is referring to times when people will be addicted by—not have the strength to resist—the evil of the world and they will pursue wealth and luxury with a lustful fury. He describes these people as:

> 2 TIMOTHY 3:2-7 For men will be **lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal *[savage],* despisers of good, 4 traitors *[betrayers],* headstrong, haughty *[conceited],* lovers of pleasure** rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

People will LOVE themselves and money. They will be BOASTFUL, PROUD, and BLASPHEMERS (abusive, defamatory, irreverent). They will have NO LOVE, be UNFORGIVING, and lack SELF-CONTROL. They will be SAVAGE, BETRAY one another, and be CONCEITED. I think Paul is describing a world that follows after the abominations of The Harlot and becomes addicted to pleasures, wealth, and self-gratification. Simply put, they are drunk on the "wine of the [madness, derangement] of [The Harlot's] fornication *[abominations]*."

These few verses portray a world that is hard to imagine but impossible to deny since there is a madness that has already come upon many and every aspect of life is promoted as and motivated by pleasure and wealth. But are these unconverted people? Read the next verse:

> 2 TIMOTHY 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do **these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved *[rejected]* concerning the faith**;

Believe it or not, Paul is talking about those who KNOW the Truth but RESIST it! They UNDERSTAND the Faith but REJECT it! Paul, in fact, told Timothy to rebuke those who are supposed to be *teachers* in the previous chapter. He told Timothy to remind them not to "subvert" the *ekklesia* (v14), not to "increase to more ungodliness" (v16), and not to "overthrow the faith of some" (v18). Really? Will ministers be so corrupt and ungodly? Here is another of his rebukes:

> 1 TIMOTHY 6:3-5 If **anyone teaches otherwise** and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to **the doctrine which accords with godliness**, 4 he is **proud**, knowing nothing, but is **obsessed** with disputes and arguments over words, from which come **envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions**, 5 useless wranglings of **men of corrupt minds** and destitute of the truth, **who suppose that godliness is a *means of* gain**. From such withdraw yourself.

Notice that there will be teachers/ministers who use GODLINESS as a means for PERSONAL GAIN. They are PROUD and OBSESSED! Outwardly they appear as servants of God but they only do it to satisfy their personal lusts. It is bad enough that the nations of the earth will be that corrupted but is it possible that this applies to some ministers? Sadly, there is more. After the angel ended his warning to Babylon, John heard another voice from heaven, which said:

> REVELATION 18:4-5 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her *[Babylon]*, **My *[God's]* people**, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. 5 "For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

While the mighty angel's message will be to the entire world, the voice from heaven will be a warning for God's people to come out of Babylon. Who are God's people? Does it refer to physical Israel and Judah, to the *ekklesia*, or both? Take note that Revelation 18:4 repeats some OT scriptures:

> ISAIAH 52:11 Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean *thing;* Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, **You who bear the vessels** of the LORD.
>
> JEREMIAH 51:6, 45 Flee from the midst of Babylon, And every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, For this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance; He shall recompense her. … 45 "**My people**, go out of the midst of her! And let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the LORD.

Reading these verses in context, they certainly refer to physical Israel and Judah in the last days; however, Paul used them when speaking to converted Corinthians:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For **you are the temple of the living God**. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be **My people**." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "**I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters**, Says the LORD Almighty."

Clearly, "My people" also refers to those of the *ekklesia*. This is a warning for God's people to come out of Babylon in the last days to both physical Israel and Judah as well as the true *ekklesia*!

Putting it all together, there will be those of the *ekklesia*, including teachers and ministers, that become drunk on the "wine of the wrath *[madness, derangement]* of [The Harlot's] fornication." Here is more proof:

> EZEKIEL 34:2, 4, 7-8, 10 "Son of man, **prophesy against the shepherds of Israel**, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! **Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?** … 4 "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back **what was driven away**, nor sought what was lost; but **with force and cruelty you have ruled them**. … 7 'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 "*As* I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because *there was* no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but **the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock**"– … 10 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, **I *am* against the shepherds**, …

None of the leaders or kings of Israel were ever given the title or had the role of shepherd (David was a shepherd but his title was king). Moreover, Ezekiel lived during the time when Judah was exiled to Babylon and they never had another king from that point onward. So, who are the shepherds Ezekiel prophesied against?

Elders and ministers in the Body of Christ! In the last days, they will rule over God's children "**with force and cruelty**." And it is apparent even now. How many brethren have been "driven away" because they fellowship with brethren of a different church organization, disagreed on a point of prophecy, or did not get 'approval' for marriage or other personal matters? How many have felt "forced" to pay tithes to church organizations at the expense of their family? Is it not "cruel" when church organizations spend millions of dollars in donations on buildings, cars, salaries, and pensions while brethren live in poverty? I could go on and on, but Ezekiel 34:1-10 (and Jeremiah 23) is a condemnation of shepherds who "feed" themselves instead of the flock. Now notice his warning to the sheep:

> EZEKIEL 34:17-21 'And *as for* you, O **My flock**, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, **I shall judge between sheep and sheep**, between rams and goats. 18 "*Is it* too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture–and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? 19 "And *as for* **My flock, they eat what you have trampled** with your feet, and **they drink what you have fouled** with your feet." 20 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, **I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep**. 21 "Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad,

Judging between "sheep and sheep" is referring to judgment of fat sheep who live luxuriously but do not help the lean sheep. How many brethren have the finest houses, cars, clothes, etc. and withhold from helping brethren in serious need? Doing nothing proves their faith (and prayers) are DEAD (Jas. 2:16-17). How many wealthy go to exotic foreign festival sites but ignore the indigenous brethren or later brag about all the fun they had and things they bought to those who could not afford to even attend locally? Like with the shepherds who only feed themselves, I could list many more examples of fat sheep.

The point of all this is that there is a serious judgment of God coming against shepherds who do not feed God's flock and against the fat sheep who have abundance but leave the poor sheep in leanness. Babylon is "the Mother of *[both]* Harlots and Abominations." The cry of the voice from heaven to "Come out of her, My people" is to physical Israel AND those of the *ekklesia* who will become drunk on the "wine of the [madness] of [Babylon's] fornication". It is a warning and plea from God to return to the way of agape love and serve the brethren:

> ROMANS 12:9-13 ***Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil**. Cling to what is good. 10 ***Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;** 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 **distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-04-20—PASSOVER THOUGHTS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Being called by God and having a heart convicted of sins that are transgressions of the Way of the Law of agape love leads us to true repentance, which cannot be feigned since the Holy Spirit reveals the thoughts of the mind. Repentance is fulfilled in baptism, whereby we join in the death of our Savior in a watery grave. DYING to our sins is the only way unto TRUE life as we are raised up from the baptismal grave to live by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But none of this would be possible without the Passover.

Passover is special. It stands above all the holydays (Passover is not a holyday) because it is a very unique feast:

> EXODUS 12:14 'So **this day *[Passover]* shall be to you a memorial**; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

Passover is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant was established by the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb—through the blood of Jesus Christ[1]:

> LUKE 22:15-20 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; 18 "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it,* and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; **do this in remembrance of Me**." 20 Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood**, which is shed for you.
>
> HEBREWS 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **through the blood of the** everlasting **covenant**.

Many times over the decades I have heard it said that Passover is a renewal of the covenant with God. Let me assure you, however, it has nothing to do with renewing any covenant. Our covenant with God is eternal and everlasting—it does NOT expire nor does it need to be renewed annually like a magazine subscription.

> EXODUS 12:14 'So **this day *[Passover]*** shall be to you a memorial; and **you shall keep it** as a feast to the LORD **throughout your generations. You shall keep it** as a feast by **an everlasting ordinance.**
>
> HEBREWS 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through **the blood of the everlasting covenant**.

Is Passover important? Absolutely. Those who disrespect it bring judgment upon themselves because our Savior COMMANDS us to REMEMBER His death:

[1] Heb. 10:29; 12:24; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 7:14; 12:11.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29 For I *[Paul]* received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same [Passover]* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; **do this in remembrance of Me**." 25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. **This do**, as often as you drink *it,* **in remembrance of Me**." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death** till He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord **in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord**. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For **he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself**, not discerning the Lord's body.

Some say Passover is a renewal of vows; however, the New Covenant with God is established with vows, which are made at baptism. No vows are said during Passover. Our covenant with God is finalized at baptism, which is ETERNAL. For that reason, a person IS (present tense) baptized not WAS (past tense). Someone is either baptized or not—in covenant with God or not—and only those who are can partake of the Passover:

EXODUS 12:43, 48 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: **No foreigner shall eat it.** … 48 "And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. **For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.**

Only circumcised citizens of ancient Israel could keep the Old Covenant Passover; likewise, only those who are baptized may keep the New Covenant Passover. They, too, have a unique citizenship—they are members of the household of God through the unique circumcision of the heart:

EPHESIANS 2:19 Now, therefore, **you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**,

PHILIPPIANS 3:20 For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

ROMANS 2:29 but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and **circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit**, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

Passover also cannot be kept by those who are unclean or defiled:

NUMBERS 9:10, 13 Now there were *certain* **men who were defiled** by a human corpse, so **that they could not keep the Passover on that day**; and they came before Moses and Aaron that day. … 13 'But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.

2 CHRONICLES 35:6 "So slaughter **the Passover** *offerings,* **consecrate *[cleanse, sanctify]* yourselves**, and prepare *them* for your brethren, that *they* may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses."

EZRA 6:20-21 For **the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them *were* clean**. And they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 Then **the children of Israel** who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who **had separated themselves from the filth of the nations** of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel.

Even though baptism is itself a cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ, *remaining* clean requires constant examination and effort. Are there unreconciled offenses? What about unrepented sins? These things defile us:

MARK 7:20-23 And He *[Jesus]* said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 "**For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil** thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 "**All these evil things come from within and defile a man.**"

1 JOHN 1:7, 9 But if we walk in the light as He *[God the Father]* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**. … 9 **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just** to forgive us *our* sins and **to cleanse us** from all unrighteousness.

It is vital to only partake of the Passover in a spiritually clean state. For that reason (and other legitimate issues) there is a second Passover:

NUMBERS 9:10 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: '**If anyone** of you or your posterity **is unclean** because of a corpse, **or *is* far away on a journey,** he may still keep the LORD's Passover. 11 '**On the fourteenth day of the second month**, at twilight, they may keep it.

The importance of keeping the Passover in a clean and undefiled state cannot be overemphasized. If need be, simply keep the second Passover 30 days later.

Another misconception is that Passover commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the Passover would be meaningless without it, His resurrection occurred just before the evening of the Wavesheaf offering on the first day of the week, which was three days and three nights AFTER His crucifixion. Passover is a memorial of His crucifixion whereas the Wavesheaf offering was the day that the risen Jesus Christ was glorified upon His triumphal entry into the heavenly Mount Zion:

JOHN 20:1, 17 Now **on the first *day* of the week** Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. … 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for **I have not yet ascended to My Father**; but go to My brethren and say to them, '**I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God.**' "

PSALMS 24:3, 7-10 **Who may ascend into the hill *[Mount Zion]* of the LORD?** Or who may stand in His holy *[of holies]* place? … **7 Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. 8 Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He *is* the King of glory. Selah.**

Some have suggested that Passover is a day when leavened bread can be eaten but I believe Scripture is plain:

> EXODUS 12:18 '**In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month *[Passover]* at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread**, until the twenty-first day of the month *[last Day of Unleavened Bread]* at evening.

I have also heard it said that the Passover ceremonial bread was leavened because the Greek word refers to 'normal' bread. However, consider these verses:

> EXODUS 34:25 "**You shall not offer the blood of My *[God's]* sacrifice with leaven**, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of **the Passover** be left until morning.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since **you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us**. 8 Therefore let us **keep the feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but **with the unleavened *bread*** of sincerity and truth.

Even though *bread* in verse 8 is not specifically written in the Greek, it is obvious that the Passover is to be kept in an UNLEAVENED manner. How is that accomplished if LEAVENED bread is eaten???

Jesus Christ is our true Passover Lamb, sacrificed at the hand of God the Father to ransom us from the penalty of death for sins. They gave everything so that we might be called the children of God[2]. There are a few who will be partaking of the Passover for the first time and I say, "Hallelujah!"—God be praised! To all who will be partaking of the Passover, I pray that God the Father and Jesus Christ are with you and blessing you. May your hearts be filled with humility and reverence as you keep this day of remembrance as we await the fulfillment of the New[3] Passover in the Kingdom:

> LUKE 22:15-18 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 "for I say to you, **I will no longer eat of it *[the Passover]* until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God**." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; 18 "for I say to you, **I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God** comes."
>
> LUKE 22:18 "Assuredly, I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day **when I drink it *[brand]* new in the kingdom of God**."

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[2] Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:26; 1 Pet. 2:10.
[3] Also Matt. 26:29.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-04-22—MEANING OF LEAVEN

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When it comes to leaven, it has been taught for decades that it pictures all sin; however, that does not square with Scripture. Can you think of any verse in the Bible that directly connects leaven with **all** sin? You might think about 1 Corinthians 5, but read it carefully:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8 Your glorying *is* not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore, purge out the old leaven, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with ***the* leaven of malice and wickedness**, but with *the* unleavened ~~*bread*~~ of sincerity and truth.

Verse 8 is the go-to place for claiming that leaven represents all sin, but it does not say that. It says, **leaven represents "malice and wickedness."** While malice and wickedness are sins themselves, it never says that leaven represents *all* sin. To understand more, look at the definitions for these words:

DEFINITIONS:
Malice = desire to do evil unto others.
Wickedness = conduct that is evil.

Malice and wickedness are a type of *leaven*. Saying it another way, *leaven* is the result of malice and wickedness so it is a **type** of sin. Why? Because people whose conduct is evil or who have a desire to do evil can cause others to also commit serious sins. Remember what Paul said, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (v6). Malice and wickedness is a quality or state of the heart and mind that can **spread to others**. But this is not the only type of leaven. Notice something Jesus Christ said:

> MATTHEW 16:6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out, and be on guard against the **leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees**."

This statement puzzled the disciples who imagined that He was referring to bread. Jesus then reminded them of feeding 5,000 people from only a few baskets of fish and bread. He then flat out said that He was NOT speaking about bread:

> MATTHEW 16:11-12 How is it that you do not understand that **I was not speaking of bread** *when I told* you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?" 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of **the doctrine *[teachings]* of the Pharisees and Sadducees**.

Instead of referring to bread, Jesus said leaven is the result of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. How can teachings be leaven? Because the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were hypocrites! In Matthew 23 we find a harsh condemnation of them where Jesus tells them over and over, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites**!" A hypocrite is someone who says one thing but does things that contradict what they say. The Greek word for hypocrite is *hupokrites* and it is a compound of "under" (*hupo*) and "condemnation" or "judgment" (*krises*), so it literally means someone who is "under condemnation". Interestingly, it is what they called *actors*. So, **leaven also represents hypocritical teachings**. Again, that is something that can *spread to others*.

Do you see a pattern here? **Leaven represents serious sins that are spread to others.** It is not **all** sin. Sin is the transgression of the law, but when it spreads to others, it becomes leaven. Now "leaven" makes a lot more sense, right? This exactly portrays what happened in Corinth with the man who was fornicating with his stepmother.

Also, *leaven* is an AGENT! It is not bread by itself. It is put into dough when making bread but the dough itself is not bad. Dough can become leavened OR unleavened bread. We are like dough. We have all sinned so we are leavened to some extent but we need to continue in a state of being unleavened by NOT putting any more leaven into our "dough." Leaven portrays serious sins that are intentionally spread to others just like deliberately adding leaven to dough. The Corinthians were puffed up because they allowed fornication to continue in their midst:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2 *It* is commonly reported *that* ***there is*** **sexual immorality among you**, and such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—*allowing* one to have *his own* father's wife. 2 **You are puffed up** and did not grieve instead, so that he who did this deed might be taken out of your midst.

The Corinthians all knew about their brother in Christ who was committing fornication (*porneia* = sexual immorality) and his actions affected the entire group. He continued in his sin even though everyone knew it. Such sin can spread—and THAT is why it is called leaven. It is much worse than a sin that does not involve other brethren.

Now, what about the opposite of leaven; that is, what is "unleavened bread"? Look again what Paul said:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 Therefore, purge out the old leaven, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as **you are unleavened**. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with ***the*** **unleavened ~~*bread*~~ of sincerity and truth**.

We ARE unleavened because we are no longer putting more leaven into our lives. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are to be *unleavened* by sincerity and truth. (It is *unleavened*, not unleavened bread—*bread* was wrongly added.) To be *unleavened* is not

adding any more leavening. So, *unleavened* is living without leaven and having a heart and mind of sincerity and truth! What do those words mean?

DEFINITIONS:

Sincerity = conduct that is free from deceit or hypocrisy.

Truth = a quality or state of being pure or unconcealed.

To be *unleavened* is to have a heart and mind that is free of deceit and hypocrisy. If we are unleavened, our hearts and minds are pure before God and Jesus Christ is LIVING in us[1]! Of all who ever lived as flesh and blood, only Jesus Christ is perfectly unleavened. In contrast, we ALL are leavened because once leaven is added to dough it can never be removed. Since we all sinned and were enemies of God[2], we all had leaven in us. It is not something we can change at this point. However, we are to stop adding leaven and allow Jesus Christ to live in us so we move forward in an unleavened state. Now we have all the pieces to understand what leaven and unleavened means:

DEFINITIONS:

Leaven = represents the spreading of serious sins to others. It is the result of a heart and mind filled with deceit, malice, wickedness, or hypocrisy.

Unleavened = represents a heart and mind that is pure. Unleavened does not mean that a person is without sin, it is staying sincere and true to God even when we do sin. Such a heart and mind does not intend to spread sin to others.

Now, this topic would not be complete without addressing "old leaven:"

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 Therefore, **purge out the old leaven**, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not **with old leaven**, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with *the* unleavened ~~*bread*~~ of sincerity and truth.

When Paul mentioned "old leaven," it was in the context of the sexual immorality of the man and his stepmother. The Corinthians were gentiles and their entire culture was one of idolatry and sexual immorality and they were struggling to come out of it. The "old leaven" was referring to the practicing and spreading of idolatry and sexual immorality that the Corinthians lived with *before* their conversion.

This is similar to the ancient Israelites in Egypt. They lived in a culture that taught and spread the sin of idolatry. Why do we keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

[1] Gal. 2:20.
[2] Rom. 5:10.

> EXODUS 12:15, 17 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall **put away leaven** out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. … 17 And **ye shall observe *the feast of* unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt**: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.

God brought the ancient Israelites out from a nation that worshipped false gods. In fact, a reason for the 10 plagues was to judge their gods[3]. The plagues destroyed their idolatry! God brought the Israelites out of Egypt so that they would no longer follow after idolatry. They saw God destroy the Egyptian gods and that way of life. That should have humbled them because God certainly showed there is "none other gods before Me[4]". The "old leaven" was the idolatry of Egypt that had spread into the lives of the Israelites. Just like their bread that did not have time to become leavened, God wanted them to come out from the source of the "leaven" and stop adding more of that "leaven" into their lives.

Paul told the Corinthians to "flee idolatry"[5]. This seemingly does not fit the context because he begins talking about the Passover symbols (read all of 1 Corinthians 10). But fleeing idolatry fits perfectly in Paul's discussion because the "old leaven" of Corinth was affecting God's people the same way Egypt affected the ancient Israelites. They "lusted after evil things"[6] and it was intentionally taught (spread) as a part of their culture. The same thing was happening with the Corinthian brethren so Paul's warning was very appropriate to the discussion of keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

All are leavened except Christ. After conversion, we are to put away our "old leaven" and stop adding more leaven of serious sins through deceit, malice, wickedness, or hypocrisy. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is about remaining steadfast in an unleavened state through Jesus Christ living in us!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[3] Exod. 12:12.
[4] Deut 5:7.
[5] 1 Cor. 10:14.
[6] 1 Cor. 10:6.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-04-27—FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The previous Sabbath Thought discussed the meaning of leaven and sin. Leaven is not **all** sin, but rather it represents serious sin that is spread to others. Scripture clearly defines it as idolatry and witchcraft[1], divisions and offenses[2], malice and wickedness[3], hypocrisy[4], sexual immorality[5], etc. They can be personal sins that affect or influence others, taught as part of a national culture such as idolatry, or evil works that are publicly flaunted as is the case with homosexuality and abortion. Leaven sin, at the very least, exposes others to it. At the worst, leaven sin entices others to commit sin. Solomon mentions the very worst of (and most common) leaven sins:

> PROVERBS 6:16-19 These six *things* **doth the LORD hate**: yea, **seven *are* an abomination** unto him: 17 A **proud look**, a **lying tongue**, and **hands that shed innocent blood**, 18 An heart that deviseth **wicked imaginations**, feet that be swift in running to **mischief**, 19 A **false witness** *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth **discord** among brethren.

Whether or not we partake of those sins, they are ever-present everywhere. Many of us participated in leaven sins in the past such as by keeping and promoting the pagan holidays. Paul calls those sins the "old leaven"[6] because we participated in them prior to our conversion when we followed the ways of the world. After baptism, we are to live in the unleaven of sincerity and truth[7]. This means that when we do sin, we feel shame and remorse and go before God and Jesus Christ in the fullness of repentance. PERSONAL SINS ARE NOT REPRESENTED BY LEAVEN BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT TO DO THEM AND ARE NOT TRYING TO SPREAD THEM. Sincerity and truth **is** unleaven because they are foundational for true repentance and required when we come before God and ask His forgiveness for our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So, what is the meaning behind the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Read what Moses told the ancient Israelites when they left Egypt:

> EXODUS 13:3-8 And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, **in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this *place***: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. 4 This day came ye out in the month Abib *[or Nissan 15]*. 5 And

[1] Especially 1 Sam. 15:23. Also 2 Kings 21:11; Isa 31:7; Ezek. 23:49; 37:23; Hos. 13:2; et al.
[2] Rom. 16:17.
[3] 1 Cor. 5:8.
[4] Mat. 16:6, 12; 23.
[5] 1 Cor. 5:1-2.
[6] 1 Cor. 5:7.
[7] 1 Cor. 5:8.

it shall be **when the LORD shall bring thee into the land** of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. 6 Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day *shall be* a feast to the LORD. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters. 8 And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, *This is done* because of that *which* the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt.

There are several key aspects mentioned in these verses. First, God brought the ancient Israelites OUT of bondage. While that was specifically physical slavery, it also, and more importantly, included the idolatry of the Egyptians. However, just as central to the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the fact that God brought them INTO a land AWAY from the leaven of the Egyptian idolatry.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be a remembrance of when the ancient Israelites came OUT of idolatry (leaven) and INTO a land purged of idolatry (unleaven) because God intended to "cut off" the indigent nations along with their leaven sin:

EXODUS 23:23-24 For mine Angel shall go before thee *[to the promised land of Canaan]*, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and **I will cut them off.** 24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but **thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.**

If dough represented the ancient Israelites, they were leavened in Egypt by idolatry; however, God wanted them to stop adding leaven to their lives. If they had "baked in" the Law of God into their hearts and minds, they would stop adding leaven and each succeeding generation would become more and more unleavened. Instead, they kept **returning** to the idolatry of the other pagan nations[8]. This is absolutely clear in Ezekiel 20:7-10.

We are to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the same manner God intended for the ancient Israelites. It begins with a holy convocation on the first day, which is "a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this *is* **That Night of the LORD** to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations." (Exod. 12:42). The evening of the first day is called "That Night of the LORD" because it is GOD who liberated them (and us). It a night to be *much observed*. The English translation "much observed" does not give a full sense of the Hebrew meaning, the root of which means to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to, and preserve. That Night of the Lord is much more than recalling our personal salvation by God—we

[8] Exod. 34:12-18; 2 Sam. 7:23; 2 Kings 17:7-11.

are to guard, protect, attend to, and preserve it. How do we do that? By purging out the "old leaven," avoiding the "leaven of malice and wickedness," and living in the "unleaven of sincerity and truth:"

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8 Your glorying *is* not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore, **purge out the old leaven**, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, **not with old leaven, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with *the* unleavened ~~*bread*~~ of sincerity and truth**.

While Paul talked about the unleaven of sincerity and truth, he understood this from the teachings of Joshua. In his last days, Joshua reminded the ancient Israelites of all that God did in bringing them out of Egypt and into the promised land (Josh. 24:1-13). He finished by saying:

> JOSHUA 24:14 Now therefore fear the LORD, and **serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD**.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a time to PROTECT the memory that God liberated us from leaven sin; a time to renew our efforts to GUARD against the leaven sins of this world; and a time to ATTEND TO and PRESERVE our hearts and minds in the unleaven of sincerity and truth through humility and repentance under the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul concluded his discourse to the Corinthians on the Feast of Unleavened Bread by saying:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-11 I wrote to you in an epistle **not to associate with the sexually immoral**; 10 And *yet*, ***you can* not altogether *avoid contact* with the sexually immoral** of this world, or **with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters**, since you would then have to go out of the world. 11 But now, I have written to you **not to associate** with anyone who is called a brother, **if *he be* either sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner**; with such a person *you are* not even to eat.

What is his message? DO NOT ASSOCIATE with others who are committing and spreading serious sins. They are spreading leaven! How do you recognize leaven sins? They are spread publicly without remorse or shame—they are "in your face," so to speak. They affect others the same way leaven affects dough. We must come away from them; avoid them; and STAY unleavened. We must have humility, sincerity, and truth in our hearts and minds through avoidance and repentance. Leaven sin was a serious problem for the Corinthians. Paul dealt with it in his first epistle to them as well as his second:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and lawlessness *have* in common? And what fellowship *does* light *have* with darkness? 15 And what union *does* Christ *have* with Belial? Or what part *does* a believer *have* with an unbeliever? 16 And **what agreement *is there between* a temple of God and idols? For you are a temple of *the* living God**, exactly as God said: "I will dwell in them and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17 Therefore, **come out from the midst of them and be separate," says *the* Lord, "and touch not *the* unclean**, and I will receive you;

As the name implies, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is about being in a state of unleaven—avoiding ALL leaven as much as possible. It is hedging about, guarding, protecting, attending to, and preserving our hearts and minds in the unleaven we have through Christ's sacrifice. But is it even possible to entirely avoid leaven sin considering the wickedness of the world and its evil works? No, but we should not intentionally let it into our lives and do our best to steer clear of it. So, how do we stay unleavened in the midst of a world swimming in leaven?

> EPHESIANS 6:11-18 Put on the whole armor of God so **that you may be able to stand against the wiles** of the devil 12 Because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against principalities *and* against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual *power* of wickedness in high *places*. 13 Therefore, take up the whole armor of God so **that you may be able to resist** in the evil day, and having worked out all things, **to stand**. 14 **Stand** therefore, having your loins girded about with **truth**, and wearing the breastplate of **righteousness *[of God]***, 15 And having your feet shod with *the* preparation of the gospel of **peace**. 16 Besides all *these*, take up the shield of the **faith**, with which you will have the power to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; 17 And put on the helmet of **salvation**, and the sword of the **Spirit**, which is the **Word of God**; 18 **Praying at all times with all prayer and supplication in *the* Spirit, and in this very thing being watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints**;

We have the truth and righteousness of God, the peace and faith of Jesus Christ, and the salvation and sword of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. This is the POWER of God; this is the SALVATION of God, and this is the PROMISE of God!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-05-11—THE ASSUMPTION THAT DESTROYED THE USA

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The United States of America had its beginning when representatives of the thirteen states unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Before listing the many grievances against Britannia's rule, it was clear that their decision was not made lightly. Included in the second paragraph of the Declaration is this statement:

> "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that **Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes**; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that **mankind are more disposed to suffer**, while evils are sufferable, **than to right themselves by abolishing the forms *[of government]* to which they are accustomed**."

There is no question that Britain considered the Christian Bible as the basis of its religion, authority, and rule. But they had corrupted the Law of God through despotic oppression of all who were not participants in the power and acquisition of wealth behind the monarchy and its appointed authorities.

Even so, the Bible was not ignored in the formation of the new nation. The founding fathers rejected the corrupt rule of Britain but not the Law of God. They embraced it as the guarantee of the blessings that come from obedience to God. They penned this in the preamble:

> "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people … to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the **Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them …
>
> "We hold **these truths to be self-evident**, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.--**That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.**"

What followed the War of Independence from Britain was creation of the Constitution of the United States approved on March 4, 1789. It established the structure of the federal government into the three branches: the Congress, Presidency, and Supreme Court. The government was formed in order to:

> "… establish justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

However, clearly absent from the Constitution was the means that would guarantee justice, tranquility, defense, welfare, and liberty. This came later in the form of the Bill of Rights ratified on December 15, 1791. It specified the "freedoms and rights" pertaining to speech, press, assembly, religion, and bearing of arms as well as

limitations to judicial processes and power. In fact, the Constitution was only approved because of promises to include the amendments in the Bill of Rights.

Forming the governments for a new nation was incredibly difficult so it is stunning that the original Constitution itself failed to simply list the freedoms and rights denied under Britain. The reason was, as James Madison wrote, "the government can only exert the powers specified by the Constitution." In other words, the people and states kept any powers not specifically authorized in the Constitution. Beyond that, all other authority was retained by the people and states, as was spelled out in the Ninth and Tenth Amendments of the Bill of Rights.

The Bill of Rights was assurance that the federal government would be constrained by the Constitution. However, the founding fathers made one critical mistake. The Declaration of Independence records that they absolutely and commonly believed that the earth was established under the Law of God. This is evident when they wrote of the existence of "… the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God …." Their thinking, indeed the very foundation of their very being, was such that they held "these truths to be self-evident, that all men … are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights …." That God created the earth and established His Law for all people was as unquestioned as air is for life.

But the Law of God never made it into either the Constitution *or* the Bill of Rights. They ASSUMED that successive generations would continue to regard God and His Law as the foundation for government, laws, freedoms, rights, and prosperity of the nation. And that assumption is disaster for us today.

Take, for example, freedom of speech in the Bill of Rights. It never included ALL speech. Speech that is harmful to individuals or the nation was never protected. Freedom of speech ensured that all are heard in matters that affect "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," which is the PURPOSE of the Bill of Rights.

The same is true for freedom of the press. It was to be an institution that reports facts so that all would be informed and able to personally make decisions on matters pertaining to their "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The Bill of Rights does not allow the press to use deception and lies to sway public opinion.

The founding fathers always thought of freedom as being under the constraints of the Law of God. In true form it was not *complete* freedom but LIBERTY they tried to establish. They wanted freedom FROM oppression, servitude, and confinement; however, freedom requires constraints. Limited freedom is properly called liberty. It is living as we should, not as we please. However, they wrongly assumed that the Law of God would continue in the generations that followed. NOT specifically writing the Law of God into the Constitution or Bill of Rights has destroyed this country.

The corruption started with the "exercise of religion" free of government influence and control. The founding fathers believed they were creating a nation committed to the one true God and that religious freedom would be the guarantor of that. They never imagined it would be twisted to open the door to Satanists, witches, Islamists, pagans, atheists, and all other evil religions.

Once religious freedom was interpreted to allow every non-Christian abomination, it was only a matter of time before the principle of unconstrained freedom was applied to everything else. All of this is the outcome of *assuming* that the nation would continue to worship God who gave the earth 'unalienable' laws that guarantee "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

But what was so critical to establish the freedoms in the Bill of Rights? The Ten Commandments. They are entirely absent from the Constitution and Bill of Rights. True liberty only exists if freedoms are constrained by laws, which is exactly what God with the ancient Israelites:

> DEUTERONOMY 4:39-40 "Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that **the LORD Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is* no other**. 40 "You shall therefore **keep His statutes and His commandments** which I command you today, **that it may go well with you and with your children** after you, and **that you may prolong *your* days in the land** which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

The founding documents were *ideologically* based upon the Law of God. It was not written into them even though that was the mind and heart of the founding fathers. Think about what was once foundational to all classrooms—the Christian Bible and prayer. After they were banned from schools in 1962-3, everything changed.

Today, the rights and freedoms in the Bill of Rights are gone. Ten Commandment plaques in government buildings have been torn down; owners are "deprived of property" by squatters and illegal aliens; abortion is legalized murder; "freedom of speech" protects porn and lies are no longer prosecuted as libel or slander; sexual perversity is taught to children instead of the Bible; violence is protected by the "right to assemble"; "unreasonable search and seizure" is up for interpretation; arrest warrants are issued without "probable cause"; people languish for months or years in jail without being charged so they are denied a "speedy trial"; there are no "impartial juries" and voir dire during jury selection is no longer 'truth saying' (the meaning of the French phrase); oaths are not binding and perjury is rampant; "cruel and unusual punishments" are inflicted upon victims as offenders go unpunished; government officials are no longer "Representatives" but dictators who live luxuriously on bribes; and the government regularly "denies and disparages the rights retained by people" by destroying political and moral opponents.

If the Ten Commandments were written into the governing documents of this country and religious freedom assured worship of the one true God, this country could still have some form of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" and such blessings might continue for many years. Instead, the founding fathers assumed that God would remain in the hearts and minds of people. For all their good intentions, that assumption has destroyed this country.

The Ten Commandments are the most amazing simplified law the world has ever known because every single crime, evil act, and abomination that takes away "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" is encapsulated by them. But only for people who acknowledge the Supreme God. Those who do not … well, they are the same as those who are destroying this country.

The founding fathers could quote a lot of Scripture but, more importantly, they *understood* it. However, they overlooked the fact that even God did not leave things to chance. God knew that freeing the ancient Israelites from slavery was not enough. First and foremost, He established the Ten Commandments because He knew the human heart is "deceitful above all"[1]. Biblical statutes address real crimes. Do they cover every possibility? No, so judges of the Law were appointed to deal with the fact that "every intent of the thoughts of *the* heart *of people is* only evil continually."[2]

The founding fathers focused on freedoms and rights, assuming that God would be in the hearts and minds of future generations. The Law of God is the constraint that assures "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." But people forget. Not including the "Thou shall not's" in the founding documents was a terrible mistake.

In the end, the work of the founding fathers has failed but that would have been the result regardless of how well they wrote the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. This is obvious because no nation has lasted without God and His Law. Regardless, this nation has proven one thing to be true. When the Law of God is in the hearts and minds of people, they enjoy blessings of true liberty. When He is absent, the nation is destroyed. The founding fathers certainly knew this but the solution was also out of their reach:

> JEREMIAH 31:33 "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, **says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Constitutional lawyers and Supreme Court justices of today battle whether the Constitution and Bill of Rights should be 'interpreted' according to the founding fathers or the needs and desires of the people. Both are wrong. Scripture says "the Word of God is living."[3] It is the means to *life*; not that it changes. Omitting the Ten Commandments from the founding documents has allowed wicked people to 'forget' that God and His Law is the foundation for freedoms and rights that bring "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." So, it is all vanishing away. Until God and His Law becomes the cornerstone of people's hearts and minds, we are witnessing the suffering and death of a nation that once had every blessing of God.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[1] Jer. 17:9.
[2] Gen. 6:5; Deut. 31:21; Jer. 7:24; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12.
[3] Heb. 4:12.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-05-18—BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus Christ began His work in Galilee after John preached of baptism:

> ACTS 10:36-37 "**The word which *God* sent** to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ–He is Lord of all– 37 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and **began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached**:

That work was the foundation of the ministry of Christ and is called the Gospel:

> MARK 1:14 Now after John was put in prison, **Jesus came** to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**,

Just what is the *gospel*? The Greek word translated gospel is *evangelion*, meaning 'good message'. An evangelist is one who preaches the 'good message'. However, English Bibles most often use *gospel*, which is not the same thing. Back in the 14th century when the Bible was translated, they used the old English word *godspel*, the combination of *god* + *spel*. In those days, *spel* was the word for story. Today, the letter 'd' has been dropped so most think *gospel* is 'good news'; however, the word literally means 'God's story'; i.e., it is a tale of—and from—God.

Gospel = Godspel = a story FROM God and ABOUT God.

But God's story is more than *news* of the "Kingdom of God." It has been around for a very long time so, in a sense, it is not 'news' (which implies NEW information). Notice what Paul said:

> ROMANS 1:1-2 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the **gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures**,

God's story has been told for at least as long as there have been prophets. This means it goes back to the time of Adam because Enoch, who was alive at that time, was a prophet: "Now **Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied** about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints." (Jude 1:14). But over the ages God's story was frequently forgotten. For this reason, it has been repeated over and over again through prophets, apostles, and preachers. In that regard, it is news to those who hear it for the first time even if the story is old. Paul reflected on this in his epistle to the Romans:

> ROMANS 10:14-21 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him **of whom they have not heard**? And **how shall they hear without a preacher**? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of **those who preach the gospel** of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16 But **they have not all obeyed the gospel**. For Isaiah says, "LORD, **who has believed our report**?" 17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18 But I say, **have they not**

> **heard**? Yes indeed: "**Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.**" 19 But I say, **did Israel not know**? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." 20 But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." 21 But to Israel he says: "**All day long I have stretched out My hands** To a disobedient and contrary people."

Even though the story is old and has been repeated countless times, what exactly is God's story?

> MARK 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching **the gospel of the kingdom of God**, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God** is at hand. Repent, and **believe in the gospel**."

It is one about God's Kingdom. While the story seems simple enough, Jesus said it is something one has to BELIEVE. But believe what—that God exists? Not likely:

> ROMANS 1:20-23 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**, 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. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and **changed the glory of the incorruptible God** into an image made like corruptible man–and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

The universe is vast and complex. Most of it has no purpose other than as irrefutable testimony of God's existence and power. So, no matter what atheists or agnostics claim, they absolutely know about God. However, they knowingly deny Him because they are simply God-*haters*[1].

But what is there about the godspel that must be *believed*? To answer that requires understanding God's story and the purpose for it:

> REVELATION 14:6-10 Then I *[John]* saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting **gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth–to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people**– 7 saying with a loud voice, "**Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him** who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." 8 And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." 9 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "**If anyone worships the beast** and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 "**he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God**, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

[1] Rom. 1:30.

The message of the first angel will be for people to turn to God and worship Him. The message of the second and third angels will be to all God-haters of their pending destruction. As hard as it might be to imagine, there are many who have the audacity and impudence to believe they can escape God's judgment:

> ROMANS 2:3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those **practicing such *[evil]* things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God**?

The other reason for preaching the godspel is:

> 1 PETER 4:6 For this reason **the gospel was preached** also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but **live according to God in the spirit**.

God's story is one about Him and His coming Kingdom. Those who hear and take heed will be saved whereas those who do not will be destroyed. When a warning goes out of a storm such as a hurricane, some will evacuate and some will remain. Even though everyone knows how destructive hurricanes can be some, for reasons that are baffling, they utterly refuse to listen. In other words, some will believe the warning and others will not.

> MARK 16:15-16 And He *[Jesus]* said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 "**He who believes** and is baptized **will be saved; but he who does not believe *[unbelievers]* will be condemned.**

For those who believe, God's story is more than just a simple warning or prophecy of His Kingdom. There is a depth to it that tells of the great works of God through the loving sacrifice of His own Son to bring many children into His Kingdom.

> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4, 11, 20, 24-28, 56-58 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received and **in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved**, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you–unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: **that Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, 4 and **that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day** according to the Scriptures, … 11 Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so **we preach and so you believed**. … 20 But now **Christ is risen from the dead**, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. … 24 **Then *comes* the end, when He *[Jesus]* delivers the kingdom to God the Father**, when He *[Jesus]* puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He *[Jesus]* must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 **The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death.** 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under *Him*," *it is* evident that He *[God]* who put all things under Him *[Jesus]* is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him *[God]*, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him *[God]* who put all things under Him, **that God may be all in all**. … 56 The **sting of death *is* sin**, and the strength of sin *is* the law. 57 But thanks *be* to **God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**.

Those who refuse to believe the godspel will be destroyed; however, it is a Way out of death unto Life for those who believe it. In all regards, God's story has been—

and always will be—preached throughout the ages. Still, there are many who have not yet heard the story:

> ACTS 17:22-23, 30 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, **the One whom you worship without knowing *[ignorantly]***, Him I proclaim to you: … 30 "Truly, these times of **ignorance** God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

Those who heed the godspel are called *Believers,* those who refuse it are called *Unbelievers*, and those who have not yet heard it are called *Ignorant*. Eventually, however, there will only be Believers and Unbelievers.

God's story is a simple message of the coming Kingdom of God. But it is also profoundly deep because it is the story of a Creator who has such a longing for children that He sacrificed His first Son for them. Believers of the godspel are those with *faith*. Biblically, there is no difference between *belief* and *faith*—they are the same Greek words—so Believers and the Faithful are one and the same. But it is not belief or faith that distinguishes those who hear the godspel. In fact, there are only two reasons it is preached:

> MATTHEW 11:5-6 "… ***the* poor have the gospel preached to them**. 6 "And **blessed is he who is not offended** because of Me."

It is preached as a hope for life as well as a warning of death. Believers humble themselves when they hear it whereas Unbelievers scoff at it in their pride:

> PSALM 10:4 The wicked **in his proud countenance does not seek *God;* God *is* in none of his thoughts**.

> PROVERBS 16:18, 20 **Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. … 20 He who heeds the word wisely will find good, And whoever trusts *[believes]* in the LORD, happy *is* he.**

The godspel is God's story to the world about who He is and what He has purposed for mankind. It is an ancient tale that has been around since the beginning and will continue until there is nothing left of this physical age. For Unbelievers, it is a warning of a storm of destruction that they will ignore in their pride. True Believers, however, will humble themselves upon hearing it. For them, the story begins with the heartbreak of sin and death but ends when God's agape love triumphs in a glorious victory of Life. It was written before the world began and is the greatest love story of all. And the best part? You and I are among the main characters in it!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-05-25—IS GOD REAL?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

One of the most important and fundamental statutes in God's Law of Agape Love deals with repentance and forgiveness of offenses. Clearly, reconciliation is *required* for eternal life. Below is a recap of the very words spoken by Jesus Christ[1]:

> MATTHEW 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses *[offenses]*, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But **if you do not forgive men their trespasses *[offenses]*, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses *[offenses]***.
>
> MATTHEW 18:34-35 "And **his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers** until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "**So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses *[offenses].***"

There is almost no topic of conversation among brethren where there are not differing opinions. Except for the important matters pertaining to salvation, many mysteries exist in the Word of God; however, none of them should be a catalyst for offenses. Since deciding to publish my thoughts on the website, I have received the occasional comment from perfect strangers who are filled with anger, hatred, and malice. Part of their tirade includes belittling me against their years of keeping the holydays and their vast scholarly biblical knowledge, all done with prideful perfection. I have learned much from many brethren who have been faithful for many decades but always find it hard to listen and learn from anyone who is condemning. Their vitriol is also a sad contrast to the agape love that is the core of the Bible and the coming Kingdom.

It is ironic, too, that all these vehement comments were addressing topics that are absolutely non-salvational. The last comment condemned me over a topic that is *not even mentioned in the Bible*. I shake my head in disbelief when I read them because I seriously doubt they would say those things if they remembered God hears every word. Scripture is clear: the consequence of anger, hatred, and malice is eternal death. Paul rebuked the saints for this:

> ROMANS 2:1-9 Therefore **you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself**; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And **do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?** 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But **in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent *[unrepentant]* heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**, 6 who "will render to each one according to his

[1] Also Mark 11:26.

> deeds": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness–**indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil**, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;

I would guess that most have never personally met or talked with any President of the USA. Whether you agree with them politically is beside the point. But does *anyone* doubt his existence or authority even though they have never seen the leader of this country? If no one believes the president sits in the Oval Office then why do people submit to the laws that he signs?

This should not be any different when it comes to God. No one has seen Him, but most believe He exists and has all authority. Why, then, do people who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ act as if God is NOT real? God the Father and Jesus Christ have commanded us to put away anger, hatred, and malice and reconcile offenses. In clear violation of this, some deliberately TRY to offend. Given their behavior, they must not believe God is REAL or that He rules over all of the heavens and earth, requires obedience from all, and will harshly judge those who refuse to do so with the gravest of consequences—and that is a fearful thing[2].

Jesus Christ, speaking of the Tribulation to come, said "the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). He was not speaking to unbelievers but to the *ekklesia*. What are the fruits of the Spirit of Life from God? Agape love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, mercy, humility, affection, meekness, compassion, and forgiveness[3]. What fills the heart when love is absent? Anger, hatred, and malice and the fruits of the Spirit wither and die in the midst of such emotions.

Resorting to anger, hatred, and malice when confronted with differences is something that was taught to members in various ways in the church organization wherein I was baptized. It was the basis of preaching, newsletters, and radio and TV broadcasts where the leaders and preachers condemned Protestants, Catholics, and anyone else not associated with them for not keeping God's Law, especially the Sabbath and holydays. This was followed by demands of repentance with angry words. They knew the world is deceived but they also believed they should be condemned for their ignorance. Instead of pulling aside the curtain of deception with the joyous message of the Kingdom, salvation of repentance through Jesus Christ, and obedience to a perfect Law of Love, they used words of anger, hatred, and malice accompanied with harsh looks and fist-pounding to get their attention. Looking back, it had an impact—they *convinced* many of the Truth but time has proven that a number of them were never *convicted* of it.

Being convinced of something is NOT the same as being *convicted*. When someone is convicted of something that was counter to their previous beliefs, they are not only convinced in their mind but they are humbled in the HEART!

[2] Heb. 10:31.
[3] Matt. 5; Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12; Phil 2:1.

Conviction is KNOWING we were wrong, ACCEPTING we were wrong, REGRETING we were wrong, and CHANGING our ways accordingly.

Is that not the same as repentance? Can anyone repent or forgive while they are angry, hateful, or malicious? Those who are filled with anger, hate, and malice may be CONVINCED of God, but they are not CONVICTED. If they were, they would be HUMBLE toward others because we not only received everything from God, but all of us were ENEMIES of Him:

> COLOSSIANS 1:21 And **you, who once were alienated and enemies** in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.

And what does God require of everyone who were once HIS enemies?

> LUKE 6:27-35 "But I say to you who hear: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.** 29 "To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. 30 "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. 31 "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 "And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 "**Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 37 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

Biblically, an enemy refers to anyone who is *hostile*, *odious*, or *hateful*, which can include a brother or sister in Christ. However, the true *ekklesia* are to PRAY for their enemies and do GOOD for them. Why? Those who are no longer enemies of God are to become as He is—we are to love our enemies just as He loved us when we were His enemies. Responding to evil with *evil* is the way of Satan whereas responding to evil with *good* is the Way of God. God's children must purge their hearts of Satan's fruits:

> EPHESIANS 4:31-32 **Let all bitterness *[literally*, poison*]*, wrath, anger, clamor *[vehement shouting]*, and evil speaking *[reviling]* be put away from you, ~~with~~ *[including]* all malice.** 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

God repeats this over and over and over again in scriptures such as Colossians 3:8; Psalm 37:8; Galatians 5:19-20; Matthew 5:22; Proverbs 19:11; James 1:20; and Romans 12:19. Anyone who is filled with anger, hatred, and malice toward brethren will NOT have eternal life. The Kingdom of God will be an eternity with billions of people having DIFFERING thoughts, ideas, feelings, and desires. Satan turned to

anger, hatred, and malice to resolve his differences and we know how that worked out. Differences are not the issue—it is HOW those differences are resolved that matters. There is no place for anger, hatred, and malice in the Kingdom. Instead, differences will be resolved with humility in agape love. Those who fail to grow in agape love and put aside anger, hatred, and malice in this life will be among those who weep and gnash their teeth regardless of how much of the Bible they know and how perfectly they keep the Law.

The heart is vitally important because it is the basis for relationships and resolving differences. Those with agape love will show compassion, mercy, and kindness. Those filled with evil will show anger, hatred, and malice. Regardless of what is in someone's heart and even if their judgments perfectly align with God's Law, the heart is also the basis for God's reciprocal judgment upon each person:

> ECCLESIASTES 12:14 For **God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.**
>
> MATTHEW 7:1-2 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 "For **with what judgment you judge, you will be judged**; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.
>
> JAMES 2:13 For **judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy**. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Is God not REAL when He says He will NOT FORGIVE the offenses of those who do not forgive others? Is God not REAL when He says He will judge WITHOUT MERCY all those who show no mercy? I can only guess that God must not be REAL to those filled with anger, hatred, and malice; otherwise, they would FEAR the judgment they are bringing upon themselves.

It will be a dreadful day when the wicked are destroyed in the Lake of Fire. If we truly love our enemies, it will be a day of grief and sadness to witness their deaths. Even though the judgment of God is a just, merciful, and necessary end to their miserable and tormented lives, it will be a day of sorrow for people who lose eternal life. Too many will end up destroyed but some simply because they do not believe God is REAL enough to fear Him and put aside anger, hatred, and malice. All deserve our love, good works, blessings, and prayers but especially our enemies[4]. After all, God our Father sacrificed His Son Jesus Christ for Their enemies.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[4] Luke 6:27.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-06-01—COMMISSION OF LIGHT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and earth. In describing the earth, it says it was without "form and void". Those two words can also mean *desert* and *empty*, respectively. I picture the earth resembling planets such as Mars, which is empty of everything except desert. It is interesting, though, that the earth was also in total darkness at that point:

> GENESIS 1:1-2 In the beginning **God created the heavens and the earth**. 2 **The earth was without form, and void; and darkness** *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

It does not say that the rest of the heavens were in darkness, just the earth and the first thing that God did was *remove* the darkness:

> GENESIS 1:3-4 Then God said, "**Let there be light**"; and there was light. 4 And **God saw the light, that *it was* good**; and God divided *[separated]* the light from the darkness.

The Bible says God SAW the light and it was *good*. Without light, nothing is 'good'. God and Jesus Christ ARE light so They are also the *source* of light, whether it is the created sun or Their own glory. For this reason, all who would be children of God must also become *light*. Like the earth that was in darkness, nothing is good that is in darkness. Only light is acceptable to God. Light is not just a metaphor either. It is a spiritual condition or state of existence. It is real, not imaginary. When someone is called, they are called into the light of God the Father and Jesus Christ:

> 1 PETER 2:9 But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of **Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**;

As long as people are in darkness, they cannot find God. When they are called into the spiritual light of God, they can finally see and know Him:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6 For it is the **God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God** in the face of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Bible are descriptions of God bringing people out of darkness into light. Why does the Bible talk so much about *light*? In the beginning, God created light to rid the earth of darkness. That is a physical condition that was 'good' at the time, but not perfect. For God, the physical is temporary whereas He is eternal spirit. If the earth is to be perfect, a different kind of light must be created:

> JOHN 4:24 "**God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**"

Only spiritual light brings perfection. Physical light is unimaginably dim compared to spiritual light, which is so bright that physical beings are destroyed in God's glorious light[1]. Perfection is only possible in the spirit, so those who worship God must BECOME children of spiritual light[2]:

> JOHN 12:36 … believe in the Light, that **you may become children of light**. …"

Without spiritual light, no one can see or know God. Again, this is not some vague analogy. The light of God is not a physical one. Those who have the light of God IN them are a brightness that is LITERALLY visible in the spirit realm:

> PHILIPPIANS 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, **children of God** without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **you shine as lights in the world**,

I imagine the spiritual light of the children of God shines ever so brightly even though no physical beings can see it. But the children of God are able to sense this special light:

> PSALM 43:3 Oh, **send out Your *[God's]* light and Your truth! Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle**.

> PROVERBS 4:18 But **the path of the just *is* like the shining sun**, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

Even if we cannot see the light of God manifested in us, it lights up the path of salvation because it is through the Holy Spirit we are able to follow that light. Physical beings see spiritual light "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12) but it is there, nonetheless:

> JOHN 16:13 "However, when it, **the Spirit** of truth, has come, **it will guide you** into all truth; for it will not speak on its own *authority,* but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come.

Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word *is* **a lamp to my feet And a light to my path**." The spiritual light of God lights up the path to the Kingdom. Where does it come from? It is light of the righteousness that God imputes to us:

> PROVERBS 13:9 **The light of the righteous** rejoices, But the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

> PSALM 37:6 **He *[the LORD]* shall bring forth your righteousness as the light**, And your justice as the noonday.

[1] Exod. 33:20.
[2] Also Luke 16:8.

Children of God have a light shining about them that is the righteousness of God in them! It is given to those who obey Him and have the Law of Love in their hearts.

The earth is lit up by the sun and makes it beautiful to our physical senses. But imagine this world as God sees it. It is a world that is in utter *spiritual* darkness except for the very few children of light. His people are scattered here and there around the world. They appear as pinpricks of lights in a sea of darkness. Pictures of the earth at night show the earth is black except for lights from cities. Now imagine there are only a handful lights scattered around the world and that is how God sees this earth. To Him, it is complete blackness except for those pinpricks.

God is bringing this earth into the fullness of spiritual light. He is separating the darkness from light once again; only this time it is not with a physical sun but with billions of children of light. The light of God in His children allows them to come out of the darkness. That is when people see and know God. As more people become shining lights of God, the less darkness there will be on the earth.

That spiritual light is also a beacon of the gospel, the good message of a spiritual life in a Kingdom that is only light:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the **light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God, **should shine on them**.

The gospel IS that spiritual light that shines in the children of God. What is the gospel? The "**GLORY OF CHRIST**." It is a message of LIGHT itself—the ultimate spiritual light! The term 'gospel' likely brings to mind some long and complicated story of sin, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, obeying the Law of God, baptism, etc. However, as I wrote in the previous Sabbath Thought "Believe the Gospel," the term *gospel* is derived from the Old English for "God's Story". The gospel is God's Story. It is a story FROM God and ABOUT God. It is about bringing mankind out of spiritual darkness into the true, eternal spiritual light of God.

Many organizations promote the idea that they alone have the responsibility to preach the gospel to the world in order to fulfill the commission of Jesus Christ given to the apostles. However, that is simply not the case. In my experience, very few people came to hear the truth of God through an organization. Most came to *believe* through contact with existing *believers*—not a preacher, TV or radio broadcast, or magazine. This is why organizations that think they alone have the responsibility and means to fulfill the commission actually hinder it. The truth is that God makes His people children of light for the very purpose of spreading the "light of the gospel"—the story of God and Jesus Christ. Darkness spreads darkness and LIGHT spreads LIGHT. The LIGHT of the gospel is spread by children of LIGHT.

Believers ARE the pinpricks of spiritual light in this world. Wherever they go, their light shines. Most hide or run away from that spiritual light because "**the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness** rather than light, because their deeds were

evil." (John 3:19). But there are those few who can sense it when the darkness is exposed by the light of one of those pinpricks. Scripture says:

> JOHN 6:44 "**No one can come to Me *[Jesus Christ]* unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day.

How does God draw people? By exposing them to the "**light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**" from those who are children of light. God has never drawn anyone to an organization. It is the righteousness of each SAINT that SHINES in this world. Scriptures actually says each of YOU are the LIGHT that shines!

> ROMANS 2:19 … **YOU yourself are** a guide to the blind, **a light to those who are in darkness**,
>
> ISAIAH 58:8, 10 Then **YOUR light shall break forth** like the morning, … And **YOUR righteousness shall go before you**; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. … 10 … **YOUR light shall dawn in the darkness *[upon those who are called]***, And your darkness shall *be* as the noonday *[to those who are called]*.
>
> ACTS 13:47 "For so the Lord has commanded us: '**I have set YOU as a light** to the Gentiles, That **YOU should be for salvation to the ends of the earth**.' "
>
> PHILIPPIANS 2:15 … **children of God** without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **YOU shine as lights in the world**,

When it comes to doing the 'work' of God, EVERY believer is commissioned by Him to have a part in it. EVERY CHILD OF GOD IS A LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL. Do not cover or hide your light from others but make sure it is like a city on a hill, shining for all to see:

> MATTHEW 5:14-16 "**You are the light of the world**. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 "**Let your light so shine** before men, **that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven**.

God expects all of His children to bring spiritual light to a very spiritually dark world. Be one of those lights that is shining brightly so that God draws others out of darkness into YOUR light!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-06-08—THE FORTY & TEN DAYS OF PENTECOST

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon and was buried just before sunset. He was resurrected three days and nights later at the end of the Sabbath at sunset, which was also the beginning of the Wavesheaf Offering day. That day is important because it determines the date for the Feast of Weeks. The name refers to counting seven weeks or 49 days from the day of the Wavesheaf Offering. But the Feast of Weeks is also known as Pentecost, which is Greek for 'count fifty' because it is 50 days after the Sabbath, the day before the Wavesheaf Offering. There is much symbolism surrounding the counting of Pentecost. There are 'seven sevens' (seven weeks) and 49 plus one (50), but 50 is also the sum of two significant numbers: forty and ten. Take a look at some of the biblical events that lasted forty days beginning with the forty days Jesus Christ spent with the disciples after His resurrection:

> ACTS 1:1-3 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and **teach**, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them **during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God**.

Jesus' last forty days on earth were spent teaching and "**speaking** of things pertaining the **Kingdom of God**"—a very important topic indeed. With that in mind, notice some other instances of forty days, starting with the rains during the flood in Noah's day:

> GENESIS 7:12 And the **rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights**.

Another occasion was the forty days the ancient Israelites reconnoitered or searched out the land of Canaan, also known as the Promised Land:

> NUMBERS 13:25 And they *[the twelve spies]* **returned from spying *[searching]* out the land after forty days**.

One of the most well-known forty day periods was when Moses was on Mount Sinai where God taught him the Law and he received the two stone tablets:

> DEUTERONOMY 9:9 "When I *[Moses]* went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the **tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights**. I neither ate bread nor drank water.

Notice that God not only taught Moses the Law but gave him the "tablets of the **covenant**." Moses later also fasted twice for forty days each because of the sins of the people. The first was when they made a golden idol and the second was their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea when they refused to enter into the land of Canaan:

> DEUTERONOMY 9:18 "And I *[Moses]* fell down **before the LORD**, as at the first, **forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your *[the ancient Israelites']* sin** which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

DEUTERONOMY 9:25-26 "Thus **I *[Moses]* prostrated myself before the LORD; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the LORD had said He would destroy you**.

Then there was Elijah who fled from Jezebel to Mount Horeb after killing the prophets of Baal. His journey lasted forty days:

1 KINGS 19:8 So he *[Elijah]* arose, and ate and drank; and **he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God**.

Forty days was also the time Nineveh had to repent before God destroyed the city:

JONAH 3:4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "**Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**"

Finally, forty days was the duration Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan the Devil:

MARK 1:13 And **He *[Jesus]* was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan**, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

In these examples are several aspects of the Kingdom. Most are probably obvious except, perhaps, the rain during the flood. All life requires rain, but Hosea said something interesting about rain—the knowledge of God is like *rain*:

HOSEA 6:3 **Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD**. His going forth is established as the morning; **He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter *and* former rain** to the earth.

These examples might be said to represent forty-day periods of:

- The flood rain portrays receiving knowledge of God,
- The spies searching out Canaan is seeking the eternal Promised Land,
- Moses on Mount Sinai is being taught the Law of God,
- Moses fasting for the sins of the people is repentance and seeking God's forgiveness for sin,
- Moses receiving the covenant tablets is entering into covenant with God,
- Elijah fled to the mountain of God (Horeb) is journeying to reach God's dwelling place,
- Nineveh's warning is to repent before it is too late,
- Temptations of Jesus are trials and testing.

All of these things pertain to the Kingdom. The forty days in the count to Pentecost are all things someone must DO. The forty days begin in the middle of the days of Unleavened Bread that picture coming out of Egypt (sin). These events begin when people truly *SEEK* God[1]. Their minds are then opened to *KNOWLEDGE* of Him and His *LAW*[2]. The Law reveals *SIN*[3], which leads to *REPENTANCE*, *FASTING*, and *FORGIVENESS*[4]. Forgiveness leads to

[1] Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10; Acts 17:27.
[2] Matt. 5:17-19.
[3] Rom. 3:20; 7:14.

baptism[5] and baptism to a *COVENANT* with God[6]. These things are the beginning of the path to the Kingdom, which is a *JOURNEY* of growing in agape love and enduring testing and trials. But there is a time limit. Procrastination will eventually result in God's calling being withdrawn.

THE FIRST FORTY DAYS OF THE COUNT TO PENTECOST REPRESENTS ALL THINGS PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

But what about the remaining 10 days? Notice what Jesus told the apostles:

> ACTS 1:4-5, 14 And being assembled together with *them,* He *[Jesus]* commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the Promise of the Father**, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; 5 "for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now**." … 14 These **all continued *[in Jerusalem]* with one accord in prayer and supplication**, …

When Jesus ascended into heaven at the end of the forty days, He told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Notice these other examples of ten days:

> DANIEL 1:12, 14-15 "Please **test *[prove]* your servants for ten days**, and let them give us *[Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego]* vegetables to eat and water to drink. … 14 So he *[the steward]* consented with them in this matter, and **tested them ten days**. 15 And **at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh** than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies.

Daniel and his friends waited ten days for God to miraculously change their bodies. Also, Jeremiah waited ten days for God to answer his prayer for the remnant that Ishmael tried to destroy (the remnant later went against what God told Jeremiah):

> JEREMIAH 42:2-3, 6-7, 43:7 *[The Israelites]* said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please, let our petition be acceptable to you, and **pray for us to the LORD your God, for all this remnant** (since we are left *but* a few of many, as you can see), 3 "that **the LORD your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do**." … 6 "Whether *it is* pleasing or displeasing, **we will obey the voice of the LORD our God** to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God." 7 And it happened **after ten days that the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah**. … 43:7 So they *[the remnant]* went to the land of Egypt, for **they did not obey the voice of the LORD**. And they went as far as Tahpanhes.

Finally, the saints in Smyrna were cast into prison where they were tried and tested as they waited ten "days" (years) to be liberated:

---

[4] Acts 2:36-38.
[5] Acts 2:38.
[6] Heb. 8.

REVELATION 2:10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to **throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days**. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

THE LAST TEN DAYS OF THE COUNT TO PENTECOST ARE A TIME OF WAITING FOR GOD TO FULFILL HIS PROMISES.

The Firstfruits are now waiting for God to fulfill His promises of being changed to eternal spirit. The count to Pentecost started with the first forty days that portrays ALL things pertaining to the Kingdom. The last ten days are a continuation of that journey but they reflect a mature believer who has come to a point in their spiritual life where they no longer need the milk[7] of "things pertaining the **Kingdom of God**" but feed on the meat of the Kingdom. A mature believer will spend more time toward the end of their journey waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of the Kingdom as they often meditate on it and pray earnestly for it. And that brings us to the 50th day after the Wavesheaf Offering—Pentecost. Fifty is also a significant number—the number of the Jubilee:

LEVITICUS 25:8-10 'And you shall count **seven sabbaths** of years for yourself, **seven times seven** years; and the time of the **seven sabbaths** of years shall be to you **forty-nine** years. 9 'Then you shall cause **the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound** on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. 10 'And **you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty** throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants. **It shall be a Jubilee** for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.

Pentecost is the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That day is the end of the wait for the Firstfruits. It is the day when God will give them that eternal Promised Land:

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with **the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And **thus we shall always be with the Lord**.

Fifty is forty plus ten. Forty days is everything pertaining to the Kingdom of God and ten days is waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of that Kingdom. That happens on Pentecost—day fifty of the count. It is like a Jubilee for the Firstfruits when they end their journey and are finally given that Promised Land of paradise!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[7] 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-06-15—PENTECOST LIBERTY & RETIREMENT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Pentecost is determined by counting or numbering 50 days starting with the day of the Wavesheaf Offering during the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. There is an obvious connection with the Jubilee year, which occurs every 50 years:

> LEVITICUS 25:8-10 'And you shall **count seven sabbaths of years** for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. 9 'Then **you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound** on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall **make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land**. 10 'And you shall consecrate the **fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants**. It shall be a Jubilee for you …

Like Pentecost, the Jubilee is counted or numbered. When year 50 of the Jubilee count arrives, a trumpet is sounded throughout ALL the land and a *proclamation* of liberty goes out. The Jubilee is a year when all those who were forced into servitude, usually because of debts or crimes, are liberated. The proclamation goes out to ALL THE LAND, even though only a few are actually liberated.

Obviously, counting the 50 days to Pentecost is similar to counting the 50 years to the Jubilee. But there are more associations. At the fulfillment of Pentecost when the count is complete, a *proclamation* similar to the Jubilee goes out:

> 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17 For **the Lord Himself will descend** from heaven with **a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The return of our Lord and King is preceded by a shout from an archangel and a trumpet blast, proclaiming the day. What does it proclaim?

> ROMANS 8:19-21 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; 21 because **the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage** of corruption **into the glorious liberty of the children of God**.

The Jubilee is proclaimed throughout the land, not just to those in bondage. The same is true for the Pentecost proclamation—it goes out to the entire earth: the "**whole creation**." Just as with the Jubilee, the whole world hears the shout of the angel and blast of a trumpet proclaiming Pentecost but only a few—"**the [children] of God**."—are liberated from "the bondage of corruption."

Another interesting connection between Pentecost and the Jubilee is found in the Hebrew word for *proclamation* in Leviticus 25:10. It literally means *to call by name*

or *to call forth*. This is exactly what happens to the children of God at the proclamation of liberty when Pentecost is fulfilled:

> GALATIANS 5:13 For **you**, brethren, **have been called to liberty** …
>
> REVELATION 17:14 "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and **those *who are* with Him *are* called**, chosen, and faithful."

Those who are called out of "the bondage of corruption" to liberty on the day of Pentecost are the CHOSEN. As Scripture says, "many are called, but **few *are* chosen**" (Matt. 22:14) of the "whole creation" to be *liberated*. But the Jubilee liberty was far more than just being released from bondage. It restored *possessions* and *family*:

> LEVITICUS 25:10, 13 'And you shall **consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty** throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of **you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family**. … 13 'In this Year of Jubilee, **each of you shall return to his possession**.

Many saints have lost physical possessions and family in this life. But the Pentecost liberty will be an even greater 'restoration':

> MATTHEW 19:29 "And **everyone who has left houses *[possessions]* or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children *[family]* or lands *[possessions]*, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold**, and inherit eternal life.

The Pentecost liberty brings about an eternal family, one consisting of God the Father, Jesus our Elder Brother, along with all Their chosen children:

> MATTHEW 12:48-50 But He *[Jesus]* answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And **He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.**"

Pentecost also restores an inheritance that mankind was intended to possess before Adam sinned:

> DANIEL 7:18 'But **the saints of the Most High shall** receive the kingdom, and **possess the kingdom forever**, even forever and ever.'
>
> MATTHEW 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you** from the foundation of the world:

Pentecost has much in common with the Jubilee. However, the fulfillment of Pentecost will be small and limited by comparison with the final Jubilee because only a "**few *are* chosen**" to be liberated out of "the bondage of corruption" of this world. But the Pentecost liberation will be an unspeakable joy of being 'restored' or brought into the *family* of God and *possessing* the Kingdom.

But there is still more when Pentecost is fulfilled. There will be new roles for the children of God. Looking back, the Levites were chosen by God at Mount Sinai from among all the tribes of Israel for the service of work in the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple:

> DEUTERONOMY 21:5 "Then the priests, **the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD**; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be *settled.*

Like the Levites, the saints are chosen by God and they will enter into the new priesthood on the day Pentecost is fulfilled:

> 1 PETER 2:9 But you *are* a **chosen** generation, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

> REVELATION 20:6 Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but **they shall be priests of God and of Christ**, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

The Levites had to strive for perfection in their work in the Tabernacle and Temple. This required experience and maturity so there was a minimum working age for the Levites. But it was also rigorous and hard work, so they were retired at age 50:

> NUMBERS 4:2-3 "Take a census … from among **the children of Levi**, by their families, by their fathers' house, 3 "**from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting**.

In this physical life, the saints are striving to become perfect as they do the works pertaining to the Body of Christ[1]:

> MATTHEW 5:48 "Therefore **you shall be perfect**, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

> EPHESIANS 4:15-16 but, speaking the truth in love, may **grow up *[mature]*** in all things into Him who is the head–Christ– 16 from whom **the whole body**, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to **the effective working by which every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The letters from Jesus to the *ekklesia* in the seven cities in Asia Minor (Revelation chapters 2-3) each begin with Him saying, "I know your works." God's people are *working* in this life—maturing and becoming perfect. The Levites served the Tabernacle and Temple and so, too, will the saints. Their works apply to the Body of Christ, which IS the Temple of God:

> REVELATION 3:12 "He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God** …

[1] Also Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8, 14.

REVELATION 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple**.

Interestingly, even though a Levite stopped work at the mandatory retirement age of 50, he entered into a *new* service:

NUMBERS 8:24-26 "This *is* what *pertains* to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; 25 "and **at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more**. 26 "**They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they *themselves* shall do no work.** Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties."

Fifty was the age of retirement for the Levites from the physical work in the Tabernacle and Temple. But it was not the end of their service. When they retired, they left the rigorous physical work of the furnishings and duties to "**minister**" to the younger Levites and "**attend to their needs**."

The saints will likewise 'retire' from this physical life when Pentecost is fulfilled after the counting of days reaches 50. On that day, the children of God will cease from their physical work:

HEBREWS 4:9-10 **There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.** 10 For **he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works** as God *did* from His.

They will assume a new service within the royal priesthood. Like the retired Levites, they will minister to the people who remain on earth and attend to their needs:

ISAIAH 30:20-21 And *though* the Lord gives you *[the rescued captives]* the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, Yet **your teachers** will not be moved into a corner anymore, But **your eyes shall see your teachers. 21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This *is* the way, walk in it,"** Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

The Jubilee is liberty for this world after the return of Jesus Christ but Pentecost is very much a jubilee for the Firstfruits that is fulfilled when He returns. It is not only liberation from the bondage and corruption of this world, it 'restores' us to both a family and a Kingdom into the new priesthood. When Pentecost is fulfilled, the saints will enter into an eternal "rest," the greatest 'retirement' plan ever!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-06-22—THE WOMAN WHO BANNED GOD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

In the days before the Declaration of Independence when this country consisted of thirteen colonies, most of them were firmly grounded in, if not founded upon, some form of Christianity. These included Puritans, Quakers, Methodists, Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Lutherans, etc. Examples include Massachusetts that began with the Puritans arriving at Cape Cod on the Mayflower and Pennsylvania that was settled by Quakers under William Penn. While the colonies were separated geographically, they were also generally segregated along doctrines of worship, too. The country was basically thirteen colonies under the British flag and king but they were independent from each other when it came to religion.

Most of the colonies (including even the less religious Jamestown expansion into the southern colonies) were originally motivated by freedom from religious persecution that was rampant in Europe and Britain. However, over the course of time, their original zeal for religious piety was waning. This was the catalyst for what is known as the (First) Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s. During this time, there arose several preachers, including the notable mentions of George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards, who traversed the country with messages of unity in biblical beliefs, piety, and salvation. They appealed to the colonies for unity in spite of all their differing beliefs. The following is a snippet from a sermon by George Whitefield and heard by tens of thousands. He preached a story about seeing Abraham in heaven:

Whitefield: “Father Abraham answered, whom have you there with you? Have you Catholics?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Have you Protestants?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Have you Churchmen *[Anglicans]*?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Have you dissenters?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Have you Presbyterians?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Quakers?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Anabaptists?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield: “Whom have you here? Are you alone?”

Abraham: “No.”

Whitefield concluded by saying, "My brethren you have the answer to all these questions in the words of my next text. 'He who feareth with God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him.' **God help us all to forget having *[religious organizational]* names, and to become Christians in deed and in truth.**" His story was even heard by the likes of John Adams.

This was a critical time because a number of principles behind the Declaration of Independence and, later, the Bill of Rights were either taken directly from those sermons or were the foundation of them. Among the most well-known is "all men are created equal" with rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" endowed by the Creator.

As the British tyranny over the colonists increased, they found themselves being united in their sufferings under the oppression of the English monarchy as well as their belief in the Almighty Creator. For many years, the colonists tried to reason with the king and his puppet governors through pleas and legal appeals. It was, obviously, all in vain.

So, on March 5, 1770, when a British soldier struck a child with the butt of his rifle as punishment for a disparaging remark about one of the officers, a crowd formed around the child and soldier. This prompted the loyalist governor, Thomas Hutchinson, to send troops to disperse the crowd. However, one soldier shot a man in the crowd who was wielding a rock or stick, setting off a volley of shots from the other soldiers that killed a total of five people. This one act was considered by many during those difficult years to be the single catalyst for the American Revolution.

Fast forward, now, past the Declaration of Independence and Revolutionary War to the time when the Constitution of the United States was being drafted. One of the utmost concerns among the colonists was the formation of a federal government that ensured religious independence. Remember, most people came to the New World because of religious persecution and the Great Awakening had brought about a new fervor for God and His word. As a result, the authors of the Constitution promised protection against federal interference. The idea of protecting religious freedom was not new. For example, a preacher by the name of Roger Williams who founded a colony in Providence, Rhode Island wrote a treatise on religious freedom. In 1644 he wrote that "a wall or hedge of separation" between the "wilderness of the world" and "the garden of the church" was required to protect the Christian church. His sermons were well regarded and even influenced the venerable Thomas Jefferson.

Protection of religious worship was finally manifested in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, ratified on December 15, 1791, which says, "**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise** thereof." This became known as the Establishment Clause. In fact, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 that the Establishment Clause was a "wall of separation between the church and state." But not even Jefferson thought of it as a protection FROM religion. During his presidency, he even signed treaties that authorized missionaries to *evangelize* to the Native Americans. In the minds of Americans, the Establishment Clause was NEVER to remove religious influence, beliefs, and piety from the hearts and minds of the elected representatives in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of

the federal government. Quite the opposite, in fact—the Establishment Clause was ALWAYS intended to PREVENT government influence and interference upon Christian religious beliefs and worship.

For the next 156 years, there was little debate about the meaning and intent of the Establishment Clause. But by the time of WW1 and WW2, there was such a diversity of thought in the country that people were interpreting the First Amendment as a literal "separation of church and state." But that phrase is NOT in the wording.

Interpreting the Establishment Clause to cause a literal separation of church and state was never intended. First of all, it has nothing to do with separation—it simply forbids Congress from making a LAW that shows preference for a particular religion. Second, it ONLY applied only to Christian religions—non-Christians were not recognized. Third, it only applied to the FEDERAL government. This is because any authority not specifically allowed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights was the sole providence of individual state governments. And fourth, it did NOT prohibit those serving in government positions from HAVING a Christian belief or religious 'bias'. Most presidents up to the early twentieth century had deep religious convictions. (These days, presidents only go to 'church' as a political show.)

This line of thinking eventually brought the case of McCollum v. Board of Education to the Supreme Court. This was a landmark case in 1948 where the court was petitioned to *interpret* the Establishment Clause based upon the idea of "separation of church and state." Specifically, the court was asked to rule on what was called 'released time' in which public schools allocated time for students to receive religious instruction in the classroom.

In the end, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. The result was the First Amendment protection of religion was interpreted to mean there was a wall of separation between church and government. Worst of all, the court also ruled that the Establishment Clause was protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, which meant both federal AND *state* governments were required to abide by it.

In one simple ruling, the Supreme Court eliminated Christian religion and belief from all government and all public schools. It did not prevent the exercise of religion, but the effects impacted all founding documents. How? The preamble to the Declaration of Independence states:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are **endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights *[by His Law]***, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--**That to secure these rights *[from God]*, Governments are instituted among Men**, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles *[of God]* and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

From the beginning, the founding fathers as well as the majority of the country viewed governments of men as the PROTECTOR of laws, rights, and liberties granted by GOD in His word, the Bible:

> ROMANS 13:1-4 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For **there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God**. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For **he *[a ruler]* is God's minister to you for good**. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for **he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil**.

While they can be corrupt, God DEMANDS that all who are in government positions teach and uphold HIS Law. Earthly rulers do NOT have any authority over God and His Law! They are expected to UPHOLD the Law of God!

So, who was the plaintiff in the case of McCollum v. Board of Education before the Supreme Court? It was a woman named Vashti Ruth McCollum (nee Cromwell). Born November 6, 1912, she was appropriately named after Queen Vashti of Persia and was a women's rights activist and an avowed atheist after her father. From 1944 to 1948, she fought in court to prevent her son from being required to be given any religious instruction. She was once quoted as saying, "As long as the public school is used to recruit the child into any religious denomination or to segregate children as per varying religious doctrines or whose power of truancy is employed to make them attend theology classes, I'm against it."

The fallout from this Supreme Court ruling later included the banning of school prayer, religious displays on public property, and government funding of parochial schools. Vashti Ruth Cromwell took after her namesake in the book of Esther who rebelled against her husband, King Ahasuerus; however, instead of being banished or executed she succeeded in destroying a nation. In effect, this one woman, who died August 20, 2006 at the age of 93, was responsible for banning God from an entire country.

Soon, people around the country will celebrate Independence Day on July 4th. Originally it was a time to remember the events that brought about independence from the tyranny of Britain in 1776 and established a country where Christians can worship their Creator. This year, however, marks the 76th year when Independence Day took on new meaning—it was when the USA declared independence from God.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-06-29—PREACHING THE GOSPEL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

There were two main components in the earthly work of Jesus Christ. Obviously, He came as the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the world. Another purpose was to preach the gospel, which began shortly after He was tempted by Satan:

> MARK 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, **Jesus came** to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God** is at hand. Repent, and **believe in the gospel**."

His sacrifice for the sins of the world was paramount to everything. Without it, the gospel would be rendered moot because "all have sinned"[1] and the "wages of sin is death."[2] But His victory over sin meant that the gospel must then be proclaimed and Jesus ended His time on earth with this command to the disciples:

> MARK 16:15-16 And He said to them, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel** to every creature. 16 "**He who believes** and is baptized **will be saved**; but **he who does not believe will be condemned *[sentenced]***.

That set in motion the preaching of a gospel that has continued for thousands of years. Before this digitally connected world, many were inspired to spread that message, enduring great hardships as they traveled the world.

The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euaggelion* (*evangelion* in English), which simply means *good message*. An *evangelist* is someone who proclaims the 'evangelion' or good message. As discussed in the Sabbath Thought "Commission of Light" a few weeks ago, *gospel* combines the Old English words 'God's spel', or 'God's Story' in modern terms.

Today, evangelism is considered to be the purview of ministers. Few give this a second thought but is that biblical? Do the saints have a responsibility for preaching the gospel? The word *gospel* is entrenched in the vocabulary of believers, but how many know *what* the gospel message is or *why* it is proclaimed or *who* is responsible for proclaiming it? Answers to these questions are important to us personally. To begin, what exactly is the gospel?

> MARK 1:14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**
>
> ROMANS 14:17 for **the kingdom of God is** not eating and drinking, but **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**.
>
> ISAIAH 52:7 … **who brings good news *['gospel'],* who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good *things,* who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!**"

[1] Rom. 3:23.
[2] Rom. 6:23.

The gospel is a message of the Kingdom of God … and more. It includes "salvation," which, as Paul said, "we **preach Christ crucified**" (1 Cor. 1:23). That is vital because the Kingdom is only for those who repent of sin and obey God. The gospel is also a message of an eternal life of peace and joy. It is a simple message but one will have the greatest impact on mankind … ever.

The GOSPEL is a *message* of salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to life in an eternal Kingdom of peace and joy ruled by the God Most High!

Why is the gospel preached? There are two reasons, the first being:

> MATTHEW 24:14 "And **this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness *[testimony]*** to all the nations, and then the end will come.
>
> REVELATION 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having **the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth**–to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people– 7 saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for **the hour of His judgment has come**; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

Witness is better translated *testimony* in modern terms. A witness is someone who formally TESTIFIES of evidence. Preaching the gospel is done as a witness or testimony of a judgment against those who reject God because "there shall by no means enter it *[the Kingdom]* anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (Rev. 21:27). So, one reason for preaching the gospel is to warn the world of the judgment to come. The other reason for preaching the gospel is:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-18, 21-24 For Christ did not send me *[Paul]* to baptize, but **to preach the gospel**, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. … 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of **the message *[of the gospel]* preached to save those who believe**. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but **we preach Christ crucified**, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but **to those who are called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The gospel is preached to those who are CALLED[3] so they can be SAVED (vv. 21, 24) or it is given as a warning. The fact is that "**no one can come to Me *[Jesus]* unless the Father who sent Me draws him.**" (John 6:44). God draws those who are called to hear the gospel but it does not profit unbelievers. Who are those called by God?[4]

> MATTHEW 11:4-6 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 "*The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed

[3] Also 1 Cor. 1:26-31.
[4] Also Luke 4:18; 7:22.

and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and ***the* poor *[beggar, distressed]* have the gospel preached to them**. 6 "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Why are those to whom the gospel is preached called "poor?" The poor are humble and meek; they are not offended upon hearing they have sinned and must repent; they earnestly desire to obey God; and they "hunger and thirst for righteousness."[5] Simply put, the poor zealously "seek first the Kingdom"[6]—the gospel message.

Who is responsible for preaching the gospel? Is it ministers with the resources? Is there a role for individuals within the Body of Christ? Imagine being called today and God put it in your heart to seek Him. Now you have big questions and an urgent need for answers. Do you find them on a website? There are thousands so how does anyone choose one? Will their search lead them to false doctrines? Is Google is able to distinguish truth and falsehoods? Where does one find the answer to the big question, "What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

The reality is, and has been for a very long time, that those who are called and begin seeking God usually find the answers from converted PEOPLE, not through websites or sermons. But that requires something on the part of the saints:

1 PETER 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **always be ready to give a defense *[answer, plea]* to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you**, with meekness and fear;

Peter is talking to the SAINTS in general. What is the source of their hope? The fulfillment of the Kingdom of God! How did they come to have that hope? Through the preaching of the GOSPEL! Was that through a sermon or found on a website? Or did it come from a true believer?

The gospel is a very personal message from and about God, best delivered IN PERSON by a believer, not through a sermon or website. That is why ALL saints need to "be ready" to pass along that hope for the Kingdom of God. The gospel is a foundational part of EVERY begotten child of God:

EPHESIANS 6:11, 15 Put on the whole **armor of God**, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. … 15 and **having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel** of peace;

Paul used the analogy of armor to emphasize our battle against spiritual wickedness in this life. What, then, does "**having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel**" have to do with it? Armor is a means of *defense* against evil so what purpose does the GOSPEL serve?

ROMANS 10:14-15 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel**

[5] Matt. 5:6.
[6] Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31. Also, the parables in Matt. 13:44-52.

[Gk.* euaggelizo = *evangelize] of peace, Who **bring glad tidings *[Gk.* euaggelizo = *evangelize]*** of good things!"

NOTE: When Paul mentions a "preacher," he is not referring to everyone who is ordained—anyone can be a preacher. Take, for example, Apollos (Acts 18:25-28). He was not ordained when Aquila and Priscilla heard him.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 when he says those who "preach the gospel" have beautiful feet. Armor is protection for those fighting a battle. "**Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel**" is not for defense, but for the purpose of preaching the gospel to those God *calls*. They may be enemies or, perhaps, they were 'innocents' in this war. Regardless, God uses *soldiers* (saints) to 'enlist' others into His 'army'.

What does it mean to personally preach the gospel? Does it involve standing on a street corner proclaiming the Kingdom of God? Is it awaiting the happenstance of a stranger stopping to talk? Is it through friendships or relationships with people in our community? When Jesus first sent the disciples out to preach the gospel He said, "I send you out as **sheep in the midst of wolves**. Therefore **be wise as serpents and harmless as doves**." (Matt. 10:16). While God can and does protect His people, the saints are sheep among ravening wolves so they are to be both wise and harmless in whatever manner or situation the gospel is preached.

There are many potential opportunities for preaching the gospel but not all of them are necessarily wise choices. For example, I was recently asked whether we have a responsibility to proclaim the gospel to a woman going into an abortion clinic. She is likely *not* called because the woman is obviously living a life contrary to God. The gospel is for those God calls but it is "foolishness"[7] to all others:

HEBREWS 4:2 For indeed **the gospel was preached** to us as well as **to them *[unbelievers]***; but **the word which they heard did not profit them**, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it.*

Also, an abortion clinic is not necessarily the best place to have a serious discussion about the gospel. Today, just praying in front of one can even result in a prison term. Proclaiming the gospel in the midst of an angry, hateful, or malicious mob at an abortion clinic is being likely neither wise nor harmless.

On the other hand, Paul talks of "the **light** of the glorious **gospel** of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). What did Jesus say about the saints?

MATTHEW 5:14-16 "**You are the light of the world.** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 "**Let your light so shine before men**, that they may see your **good works** and glorify your Father in heaven.

If the gospel is light and the saints are the light of the world, then the saints must have a part in preaching the gospel. That can be as simple as exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit when around friends, neighbors, or strangers. It might involve time

[7] 1 Cor. 1:18.

and effort in doing good works without expecting a return. Finally, the greatest preaching of the gospel as a light in this world might entail having meaningful and humble conversations about God with someone who is sincere. Many times, that requires patience and commitment. There are brethren who spent years on and off talking with someone before they awakened to the gospel and were converted.

Should the saints also preach the gospel as a warning? Interestingly, none of the apostles focused on warning the world; they went about converting people. Today, some might think they are warning the world but it is NOT listening. Jesus commanded the gospel to be preached to "**every** creature" (Mark 16:15), not just leaders. What about in these latter times? Are the saints expected to preach the gospel as a warning?

> MATTHEW 10:7, 11-19, 23 "And as you go, **preach**, saying, '**The kingdom of heaven** is at hand.' … 11 "Now **whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy *[they did not preach to the entire city or town]***, and stay there till you go out. 12 "And when you go into **a household**, greet it. 13 "If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from **that house** or city, shake off the dust from your feet. … 16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. 17 "But **beware *[be cautious]*** of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. 18 "**You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.** 19 "But **when they deliver you up**, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; … 23 "**When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.** For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Did you notice what Jesus said? He said these saints "**will be brought**" and delivered up before the leaders. Not of their own volition or voluntarily but as *prisoners*. Jesus, in fact, warns them to "beware of men" and "flee to another city" when persecution arises. Does that sound like the saints are to preach a warning regardless of the consequences? The disciples were told to preach the gospel to individuals or a "**household**" but they walked away from those who rejected it.

Still, the fact remains, God expects His people today to have "**shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel**." They ARE the light of the world and must be ready to preach the gospel to all who are called by God. Perhaps *you* will be given an opportunity, if you have not already, to proclaim the gospel—God's Story—the greatest message the world has rarely heard! Be prepared to be that *preacher*!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-07-06—RIGHTEOUSNESS, FAITH, LAW, & GRACE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

How does righteousness, faith, the Law, and grace relate to one another? I dare say that all believers understand that obeying the Law of God is a state of righteousness because it is acting in perfect accord with it. Simply put, they are free from guilt or sin ("transgression of the Law"—1 John 3:4).

However, "whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is **guilty of all**." (Jas. 2:10). Breaking any point of the Law of God is *sin* and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). That is the state in which everyone exists because "**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8). Since "**all have sinned**" (Rom. 3:23), "**There is none righteous, no, not one.**" (Rom. 3:10). No one is righteous through Law-keeping so all are worthy of death.

Obviously, the solution to this problem was the sacrifice for sin by Jesus Christ who not only suffered the sins of mankind but also bore the sins of the world to His grave through the shedding of His blood. But how does one have that sacrifice applied to their sins? Repentance of sin and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ:

> ACTS 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins**, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance comes from remorse that brings about a change of both mind AND heart. Why does a sinner repent and become baptized? Because they seek to be saved from the penalty of *death* and lay hold on the promise of eternal life[1]:

> ACTS 4:10, 12 Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, **that in the name of Jesus Christ** the Nazarean, Whom you crucified, *but* Whom God has raised from *the* dead, by Him this *man* stands before you whole. … 12 **And there is no salvation in any other, for neither is there another name under heaven which has been given among men, by which we must be saved.**"

But repentance, and especially baptism, are meaningless without *faith*:

> ROMANS 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes *[has faith]***, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "**The just shall live *[have salvation]* by faith.**"

The GOSPEL is a message of salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to life in an eternal Kingdom of peace and joy ruled by the God Most High[2]! What is

[1] 1 Tim. 6:12, 19.
[2] Refer to the Sabbath Thought "**2024-06-29 Preaching the Gospel.**"

faith in the gospel? Believing that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ brings remission or pardon of sins[3]:

> 1 JOHN 5:10 **He who believes *[has faith]* in the Son of God** has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed **the testimony that God has given of His Son *[that He died for our sins]***.
>
> ACTS 10:43 "To Him *[Jesus Christ]* all the prophets witness that, **through His name *[Jesus Christ]*, whoever believes *[has faith]* in Him will receive remission of sins**."

No one is righteous because all have sinned and sin brings the penalty of death. Only through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is there remission or pardon of sin to eternal life. How are someone's sins remitted?

> 1 JOHN 1:9 **If we confess our sins *[repent]*, He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

God the Father FORGIVES the sins of those who repent of sin and are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ[4]. Forgiveness, however, is MORE than simply remission or pardon of sins:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 For He *[God the Father]* made Him *[Jesus Christ]* who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, **that we might become the righteousness of God** in Him *[Jesus Christ]*.

Forgiveness by God the Father is both a PARDON for sins *and* being imputed RIGHTEOUSNESS by Him!

After forgiveness, how is someone imputed righteousness? Does repentance and baptism make any human forever perfect in keeping the Law of God? No! Again, 1 John 1:8 clearly says so. Instead, righteousness is a free gift of God the Father:

> ROMANS 5:17 For if by the one man's *[Adam's]* offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the **gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Righteousness is *imputed* (esteemed, reckoned, or ascribed) by God the Father to those whom He FORGIVES:

> ROMANS 4:5-8 But to him who does not work but believes on Him *[God the Father]* who justifies *[imputes righteousness to]* the ungodly, his **faith *[in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ]* is accounted for righteousness**, 6 just as David also describes the **blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness** apart from works: 7 "**Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered**; 8 Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

[3] 1 Cor. 15:1-4.
[4] Rom. 6:3-4.

Righteousness is a GIFT from God to those He *forgives*—those who repent, believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and are baptized into His death.

Now comes the difficult part for many—understanding grace. Everyone knows this statement from Paul:

> ROMANS 6:14-15 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for **you are not under law but under grace**. 15 What then? Shall we sin because **we are not under law but under grace**? Certainly not!

Being "**under grace**" does NOT replace the Law. Paul CLEARLY stated that fact:

> ROMANS 6:1-4 What shall we say then? **Shall we continue in sin *[transgression of the LAW!]* that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life**.

Repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of God (remember, forgiveness is both a pardon for sin AND being imputed His righteousness) means that we are DEAD to sin! Anyone who was dead but is now alive is BY DEFINITION living a NEW life! Paul explains the new life is Jesus Christ living IN a person:

> GALATIANS 2:19-20 "For **I *[Paul]* through the law died** to the law that I might live to God. 20 "**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

That new life, as Paul said, is under GRACE, not under the Law! So, what does that mean? Does grace *replace* the Law? No! Does grace do away with the Law? Again, no! At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ made it very clear that He did NOT come to destroy the Law:

> MATTHEW 5:17-18 "Do not think that I *[Jesus Christ]* came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. **I did not come to destroy but to fulfill *[the Law]***. 18 "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

To *fulfill* the Law means to complete or perfect it. This is explained in the rest of the chapter. Beginning in Matthew 5 verse 21, Jesus mentions several examples of fulfilling the Law. He begins with the simple examples of equating anger with murder and lust in the mind with adultery. He ends with the GREATEST standard for fulfilling the Law:

> MATTHEW 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But **I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 "that you may be sons *[children]* of your**

Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Jesus went from saying that anger is murder to something far greater—LOVE your enemy. Jesus 'fulfilled' the Law by explaining the PURPOSE for keeping the Law is to BECOME agape love! This is the foundation of the two Great Commandments:

MARK 12:29-31 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments *is:* 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 30 'And you shall **love the LORD your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This *is* the first commandment. 31 "And the second, like *it, is* this: 'You shall **love your neighbor *[everyone around us!]*** as yourself.' **There is no other commandment greater than these.**"

Think of it this way. Someone strictly keeping the Law will NOT have any gods before the LORD God, practice idolatry, use God's name in vain, forget the Sabbath, dishonor parents, murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony, or covet. In simple terms, a Law-keeper follows the biblical 'Thou shalt NOT' rules. What is the purpose of rules? To prevent causing harm to others—but no further.

On the other hand, the Law is completely unnecessary for someone filled with agape love because they love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. They love their neighbor AND enemies. Agape love is not only OBEDIENCE to the Law, but it is the FULFILLING of it. For example, anger that leads to murder is replaced by love and lust that lead to adultery is replaced by love. Agape love goes BEYOND strict obedience to the Law:

GALATIANS 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is ***[agape] love***, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. **Against such there is no law.**

Obedience to the letter of the Law is a minimum requirement. The Law is FULFILLED by going beyond the 'Thou shalt NOT' rules by becoming agape love!

This is where the grace of God comes about. Paul compared Adam, who brought sin and death to the world with Jesus Christ, who brought eternal life. Read these verses after deleting the references to Adam's "offense:"

ROMANS 5:17-21 … **those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) 18 … through one Man's righteous act ***the free gift [God's righteousness imputed] came* to all men, resulting in justification of life**. 19 … by one Man's obedience **many will be made righteous**. 20 … where sin abounded, **grace abounded much more**, 21 … so **grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Righteousness is a GIFT from God to whom He *forgives*. Likewise, grace is a GIFT from God to those He has *justified* (imputed righteousness). What is the purpose of grace? It comes back to sin: "**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8). Even with the Holy Spirit, no one can avoid sinning—especially sins of ignorance. Since God esteems His children as righteous, how can they be righteous if they still sin? Again, Paul explains:

> ROMANS 3:21-24 But now the righteousness of God apart *[separate]* from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God, through faith** in Jesus Christ, to all and **on all who believe *[have faith]***. For there is no difference; 23 for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, 24 **being justified freely by His grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

There it is in all its beauty. Grace is the gift of God whereby He continues to justify and impute righteousness to His children when they sin. (NOTE: Agape love will always produce fruits of repentance for known sins. For all the rest, they are justified through God's grace.) Perhaps, the simplest description is found in Proverbs 10:12, which says, "**love covers all sins.**"[5] How? Through God's GRACE!

The gift of righteousness is upon all who believe (have faith) in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. But all still sin. Therefore, those who are esteemed as righteous also receive the gift of grace, whereby God justifies (regards as innocent) the sinner who is "dead to sin" through baptism.

Sadly, many believers still live under the Law and *not* under grace. Who are they?

> MATTHEW 7:16-20 "**You will know them by their fruits.** Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "Therefore **by their fruits you will know them**.

Someone living under Law is fond of rules and usually has a lot of anger. They spend much of their time policing others in order to point out their faults. They are rarely happy or content. And living under Law instead of grace risks eternal life:

> GALATIANS 5:4 **You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified *[Gk.* dikaioo = *be righteous]* by law; you have fallen from grace.**

Those living under grace are becoming agape love in the likeness of God the Father. They have agape love toward God, all mankind, and even their enemies. The agape love in them is reflected in desires to do GOOD WORKS, not just avoid harm to others. Interestingly, the means and opportunities for doing good works is also grace from God:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:8 And **God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you**, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, **may have an abundance for every good work**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[5] Also 1 Pet. 4:8.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-07-13—HOLD FAST

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Recently, I did a survey in the New Testament of threats to the *ekklesia*. When I finished, I was stunned by the sheer number of mentions of one particular danger. Over the years, all of us have read these scriptures but I found it amazing just how many there were when I listed them. What is the threat? Other 'BRETHREN', including those who do NOT have the Holy Spirit. Read this sampling and notice that most refer to the future with phrases like "last days," "the time will come," etc.:

JUDE 1:15-19 "… all who are ungodly *[lit. wicked]* among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly *[lit. wicked]* way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly *[lit. wicked]* sinners have spoken against Him." 16 These are **grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling *words,* flattering people to gain advantage**. 17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that **there would be mockers *[false teachers who mock and belittle other people and their ideas]* in the last time** who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are [worldly] persons, **who cause divisions, not having the Spirit**.

ACTS 20:29-30 "For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also **from among yourselves** men will rise up, **speaking perverse things**, to **draw away the disciples** after themselves.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2 Now the Spirit expressly says that **in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy**, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4 For **the time will come when they *[the SAINTS]* will not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they **will heap up for themselves teachers**; 4 and they **will turn *their* ears away from the truth**, and be turned aside to fables.

2 PETER 2:1-3, 9-10, 12-15, 17-19 … there will be **false teachers** among you, **who will secretly bring in destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways**, because of whom **the way of truth will be blasphemed**. 3 By covetousness **they will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. … 9 *then* the Lord knows how … to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. ***They are* presumptuous, self-willed.** They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, … 12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, **speak evil of the things they do not understand**, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, 13

and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, *as* those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while **they feast with you *[they are among us]***, 14 having eyes **full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have* a heart trained in covetous practices**, *and are* accursed children. 15 **They have forsaken the right way** and gone astray, … 17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when **they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped** from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5 But know this, that **in the last days perilous *[weakening]* times will come**: 2 For **men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure** rather than lovers of God, 5 **having a form of godliness** but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

TITUS 3:9-11 But **avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless**. 10 **Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that **such a person is warped and sinning, being condemned by his own words**.

1 TIMOTHY 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the **profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge– 21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith**. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

2 PETER 3:3-4 knowing this first: that **scoffers *[false teachers who mock and belittle other people and their ideas]* will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts**, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation."

COLOSSIANS 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you **through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world**, and not according to Christ.

TITUS 1:10-11 For there are many **insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision *[the* EKKLESIA*]***, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who **subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain**.

MATTHEW 24:4-12, 21, 24 And Jesus answered and said to them: "**Take heed that no one deceives you.** 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and **will deceive many**. 6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that

you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 "All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 "And then **many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another**. 11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and **deceive many**. 12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. … 21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. … 24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders **to deceive**, if possible, **even the elect**.

When I pondered why this hit me so hard since these are very familiar scriptures, I realized that my perspective has changed over the years. Evil is a relative measure for most people in the west. For example, crime dramatically increased in the last city where we lived to the point that an eye doctor has now hired a security guard. The main shopping areas have had them for a few years but a doctor's clinic? Really? Our friends there dismissed it by saying, "It is still not too bad in our neighborhood." How bad does it have to get before you leave? When we lived there someone broke into my garage and stole things. One night a couple of guys literally drove their pickup into the garage doors of about 20 houses, damaging all of them. They did not steal anything; it was simply vandalism. Another time a seemingly nice man committed suicide after the police surrounded his house. At one point, one of the more expensive houses in the neighborhood was purchased as a halfway house for released criminals who used it to deal drugs. Of course, the police do not respond to anything less than a clear and present danger any more. If the danger is already past they tell you to go to a police substation and fill out a 'complaint' form. Complaint? These things are well beyond any complaint. They are intolerable.

The same thing has happened with warnings in Scripture. I have become desensitized to the biblical warnings even though they are not just to the whole *ekklesia*, they are also for ME! So, I hope I can stir you up because these are serious threats to our ETERNAL LIFE. But I do not want to any to fear these things. In fact, the fullness of love casts out fear[1]. Instead, turn to God for help in time of need[2]. Do so with the fullness of peace knowing from where our strength comes.

Above all take comfort in know that God NEVER gives a warning without providing an answer. In the face of the threats from within the *ekklesia*, we are to HOLD FAST to God's word, which is our sword against all threats. In my survey, I found as many (or more) encouragements as warnings:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:21 Test all things; **hold fast** what is good.

HEBREWS 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us **hold fast** *our* confession.

[1] 1 John 4:18.
[2] Heb. 4:16.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:15 Therefore, brethren, **stand fast and hold** the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

HEBREWS 10:23 Let us **hold fast** the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.

2 TIMOTHY 1:13 **Hold fast** the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

HEBREWS 3:6, 14 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we **hold fast** the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. … 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we **hold [fast]** the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

REVELATION 2:13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is.* And you **hold fast** to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

REVELATION 2:25 "But **hold fast** what you have till I come.

REVELATION 3:3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast** and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

REVELATION 3:11 "Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast** what you have, that no one may take your crown.

I hope you all will consider the threats of these last days with all the seriousness they embody but also know that together, we can hold fast until the day of our visitation[3], especially as we renew our zeal to love and care for one another:

JUDE 1:20-21 But you, beloved, **building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God**, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ **unto eternal life**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[3] 1 Pet. 2:12.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-07-20—THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

In what is known as the Olivet prophecy, Jesus told the disciples of the many events pertaining to the Time of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation. Along with Revelation, Matthew chapter 24 is one of the best known and quoted in the entire Bible. Understanding prophecy has been a primary interest for many in the *ekklesia*, but that was not the main message of Jesus Christ. He focused on the coming Kingdom of God[1].

A significant portion of the Bible contains prophecy. In many instances, prophecy is proof of God. Any significant event, such as the birth of Jesus Christ, recorded in advance of the actual occurrence is beyond the capability humans through their own reasoning. Such things can only come from God.

Proof of God, however, is only one reason for prophecy. The other reason is so that the *ekklesia* are "**redeeming the time**, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:16). Our physical lives will either end in death or at the return of Jesus Christ. Regardless of which occurs first, all physical life is temporary. For those who are called, their eternal judgment of life or death is fixed at their physical death or when Christ returns. Knowing there is limited time, the saints have a serious task ahead of them.

Today, interest in prophecy is to try to predict the timing of the "last days"—the events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. Many have spent years looking into this, me included. However, I came to a point where I put it aside for the most part. Why? I realized that if the return of Jesus Christ was imminent, I was distracted and not preparing spiritually. I needed to be focused on growing and becoming agape love and being zealous for good works.

Besides all that, God put a limit on being able to predict the timing of prophetic events. Jesus concluded describing the major prophecies in Matthew 24 for the end times with this admonition:

> MATTHEW 24:42-44 "**Watch therefore**, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 "But know this, that **if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched** and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "Therefore you also **be ready**, for **the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**.

Is this telling us to watch in the sense of connecting prophetic events with the New World Order, wars, earthquakes, etc. that plague the world today? If so, then why did Jesus say "**IF**" the master of the house knew when his house would be broken into then he would have prevented it? Clearly the master of the house could NOT know when the thief would come. Jesus left no doubt when He said NO ONE WILL KNOW when the thief comes. The only solution to preventing the thief is to ALWAYS "be **ready**" for him. That does not mean to be continually 'updating' prophetic speculation with current world events. It means to prepare our *spiritual* house so a thief *cannot* break into it and steal. In the Bible, a house or temple is symbolic of a person's body. So, what would a thief want to steal from a spiritual 'house'? Spiritual salvation. How does anyone prepare and protect their spiritual house? Paul gave the classical answer in Ephesians 6:10-18 with the metaphor of the

[1] Refer to the Sabbath Thought 2024-06-29—Preaching the Gospel.

armor of God by which one defends against the Adversary. But even that still requires maintaining a watchful guard. Notice what he says AFTER putting on the armor:

> EPHESIANS 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, **being watchful to this end *[i.e., for this reason; that is, to be able to withstand in the evil day]* with all perseverance and supplication** for all the saints–

What did he mean to be watchful "to this end?" He was not referring to the completion of something but to be watchful for a *reason*. What was the reason?

> EPHESIANS 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to stand against the wiles of the devil**. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.* 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand**.

Like Jesus, Paul warns us to watch or guard our spiritual 'house'—be prepared to stand against the Adversary when (not if) he comes to steal salvation. Salvation is symbolized by the helmet in Paul's metaphor, something worn on the head. It is certainly fitting, then, that Jesus described losing salvation as having something taken from a person's head—their crown as mentioned in Revelation 3:11.

In all sense of the word, being watchful means to be focused on salvational matters, not prophetic events. Every word of Scripture is God-breathed[2]—the meaning of *inspired*—including prophecy. We should *not* ignore prophecy, history, and genealogies but personal salvation always comes *first*; otherwise, the others serve no purpose. Without agape love and good works there is no salvation.

Knowing the prophetic scriptures is important to not being deceived. But the revelation of prophecy only comes through a PROPHET of God:

> AMOS 3:7 Surely **the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets**.

Who is a true prophet of God?

> NUMBERS 12:6 Then He *[the LORD]* said, "Hear now My words: If there is **a prophet among you, *I*, the LORD, make Myself known to him** in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.

> DEUTERONOMY 18:21-22 "And if you say in your heart, '**How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?**'– 22 "when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, **if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken**; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid *[turn aside to hear]* of him.

To my knowledge, there have been no true prophets on earth for a very long time. The *ekklesia* are to test those who claim to have the answers to the major prophecies of the

[2] 2 Tim. 3:16.

Bible. Unless their credentials are established by God, everything they say is 100% human speculation. Only someone who prophecies of events that come to pass is a true prophet of God. Knowing the prophetic scriptures is important for that reason. Will there be a prophet of God in the end-times?

> MATTHEW 17:9-11 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision *[of the Kingdom]* to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." 10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, **Elijah is coming first and will restore all things**.

Jesus prophesied of one like Elijah the PROPHET coming before His return. No one has fulfilled that role to my knowledge. Until then, we are to watch and pray:

> LUKE 21:34-36 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly *[and find you unworthy]*. 35 "For it will come as a **snare *[like a thief in the night]*** on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 "**Watch therefore, and pray always** that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and **to stand before the Son of Man**."

Jesus said to watch our spiritual house and pray in order to be counted worthy to "escape all these things that will come to pass." Escape what? Events of the Time of Sorrows or the Great Tribulation? Perhaps. Or was He referring to eternal death? What is "that Day" (v. 34) that is coming? It is the time of God's judgment, both for the wicked and the saints. Judgment of the world brings the vengeance of the seven trumpets. Judgment on the *ekklesia* is "some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt."[3] Escaping the trials and tribulations of this world is NOT important. Instead, it is VITAL to *escape* the "snare" of JUDGMENT coming upon the whole earth. While some could be taken to a place of safety, end-time prophecies tell of many saints who will be killed and martyred[4]. In fact, the fifth seal is *dedicated* to martyrs[5]. Watching means having our minds and hearts on matters of SALVATION, not being concerned with escaping physical suffering or death. It is so we can STAND before Jesus Christ! No matter how well someone might fit end-time events with prophecy, the Bible is certain about one thing[6]:

> MATTHEW 24:36 "But of **that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, but **My Father only**.
>
> ACTS 1:7 And He *[Jesus]* said to them, "**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**"
>
> 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-2 But **concerning the times and the seasons**, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For **you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night**.

[3] Dan. 12:2.
[4] Rev. 17:6.
[5] Rev. 6:9-11.
[6] Also 2 Pet. 3:10.

No matter how well modern events can be correlated with prophecy, the return of Jesus Christ will be like a thief in the night so NO ONE will know the time of His return. This is unconditional because it is independent of prophetic understanding.

Those who are *not* watchful unto salvation are likened to being naked[7]:

> REVELATION 16:15 "Behold, **I *[Jesus]* am coming as a thief**. Blessed *is* he who **watches**, and **keeps his garments**, lest he walk **naked** and they see his **shame**."

Nakedness is a metaphor for being taken by surprise (such as by a thief in the night), exposed, and vulnerable. Being naked is also shameful because it is a state of unrighteousness[8]. The naked are unworthy of the Kingdom:

> REVELATION 3:1-5 "And to the angel of the *ekklesia* in Sardis write, 'These things says He *[Jesus]* who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 "**Be watchful**, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore **if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come** upon you. 4 "You have a few names even in Sardis **who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Today, God's people are faced with the real possibility that Jesus Christ will return in our lifetimes but NO ONE can predict when He will return. Jesus was unequivocal—He said NO ONE KNOWS the "times or seasons" or the "day and hour." That pretty well covers it. That will not even change during the Day of the Lord because there is some uncertainty even with the sign of the Son of Man[9].

There is a difference between NOT KNOWING when something will happen and being SURPRISED when it does. No one knows when Jesus Christ will return but no one should be surprised when He does. Do not think of this message as a simple or uninteresting admonition only for babes in Christ. Doing so will lead to weeping and gnashing of teeth. Be watchful, be ready, and be prepared for the One who returns like a thief in the night to BRING salvation—not steal it—because even His NAME means salvation!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[7] Also Rev. 3:18.
[8] Rev. 19:8.
[9] Matt. 24:30 and Luke 21:28.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-07-27—FAITH & HEALING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Faith and healing are very personal and individual experiences that are as varied and unique as are the people of God. Most have experienced or, at the very least, heard of or witnessed dramatic healings directly by the hand of God. They are personal reminders that renew the soul when the weariness of this world weighs upon us. They are also a source of inspiration and hope for others. What greater encouragement is there than seeing evidence that God is pleased with a sinner who repents and dedicates their life to Him.

Miracles seem to abound in the early years of a Christian's new life but as the years go by, discouragement can arise when prayers seem to go unanswered. That is not to say that God abandons His people. While heavy afflictions are common to flesh and blood, Christians have a greater hope because of this promise:

> JAMES 5:14-15 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And **the prayer of faith will save the sick**, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

But where is the hope of that promise for those who suffer year after year? There are several reasons, not the least of which is that those who take up their cross[1] SHALL be subjected to trials by fire:

> 1 PETER 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the **fiery trial which is to try you**, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that **you partake of Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Another is that God tests those who are His children in order to demonstrate His strength in them:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 And He *[God]* said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that **the power of Christ may rest upon me**. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For **when I am weak, then I am strong**.

Trials and afflictions prove the hearts and minds of all who stand in the hope of eternal life. They are also life changing experiences, as in the case of Job, whereby God perfects the saints:

[1] Matt. 10:38.

> 1 PETER 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after **you have suffered** a while, **perfect**, establish, strengthen, and settle *you.*

What is the relationship between faith and healing? Many would say they are directly related—healing is according to faith. Read the story of the two blind men:

> MATTHEW 9:27-29 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" 28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith let it be to you.**"

They were healed because they *believed* Jesus was ABLE to heal them. Notice, however, that they had faith *prior* to coming to Him. Their faith also existed *before* the Holy Spirit was given so these two blind men stood out. I think that was the motivation for Jesus to heal them especially in light of this story:

> MATTHEW 13:54-58 When He *[Jesus Christ]* had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? 55 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?" 57 So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." 58 Now **He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief**.

Jesus did some works but not many because they did not have faith. It does not say He COULD not do mighty works but He DID not do them. It was a CHOICE not to do mighty works. People were healed in those days because they had faith BEFORE the Holy Spirit was given. Miraculous healings were universally recognized as proof of GOD. Jesus said, "the very works that I do bear witness of me *and* that the Father has sent me." (John 5:36). Healings validated the faith of people and proved Jesus was from God BEFORE the Holy Spirit was given.

God will not intervene *without* faith but today people have the Holy Spirit in them. So, does a lack of healing today mean a lack of faith? No! Those with the Holy Spirit ALREADY have faith:

> 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 than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as **God has dealt to each one a measure of faith**.

Faith is more than believing in God or that He can heal. It is the basis for salvation because remission of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is by FAITH! Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are by FAITH! A covenant with God for eternal life is

by FAITH! Without faith sins are not forgiven, baptism is just a bath, laying on of hands is a pat on the head, and a covenant is empty words.

Everyone with the Holy Spirit already has faith so why does God withhold healings today? Healings in the days of Jesus Immanuel was proof of God. Those with the Holy Spirit already have faith and believe in God so physical healing is not the concern—the priority is spiritual *salvation*:

> 1 PETER 1:6-10 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been **grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith**, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him,* **yet believing**, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 **receiving the end of your faith–the salvation of *your* souls**. 10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you,

There are healings today but simply having faith does not guarantee them. The other reason involves *works*. Would the two blind men have been healed if they had not sought out Jesus? No. They believed He could but they had to *ask* Him in person. That was no simple task because they were BLIND. Could you find a stranger by navigating through a town while blind? That was surely faith by works! Measuring faith by miraculous healings ignores works of faith[2]:

> JAMES 2:14-20, 24, 26 What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? 17 Thus also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead**. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and **I will show you my faith by my works**. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe–and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead**? … 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. … 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also.

James presents the case that God expects the saints to actually *supply* a brother or sister the food and clothes they require. Faith without works is dead but works are a two-way street. Those with the means and opportunity to provide for the needs of others are doing good works but that those who have needs must do their own WORKS by ACCEPTING the help that is offered.

Faith requires works AND works require faith. Who prays for God to provide their daily food but then refuses to go to the grocery store to get it? Is going to the

[2] Also 2 Thess. 1:11.

store showing a lack of faith? No! Then why would it be a lack of faith if help comes from another person—converted or NOT—rather than God Himself? After fasting 40 days and nights, Jesus was famished[3]. God did not miraculously fill His belly but rather sent angels who ministered to Him and likely brought physical food. Is there ever a case where God just miraculously filled someone's belly instead of providing *physical* food? Think of the manna, Elijah fed by ravens[4], or the Corinthians sending food to Jerusalem during the famine[5].

Asking God to intervene but refusing someone who is willing and able to help could be preventing and rejecting GOOD WORKS of faith! Why should faith be measured only by those things which God Himself does? Agape love, faith, and good works are ALL required for salvation and all come from God but they have to be RECEIVED as well. Good works are not just something done FOR others, they are also RECEIVED by others! Good works and faith are bound together and so, too, are giving AND receiving. Good works cannot exist unless a person has the means and opportunity and someone else has a need.

God made the body to HEAL itself but only to a certain extent. If someone is seriously injured, the body may not heal without a doctor who will cleanse the wound, sew it up, and bandage it. The Good Samaritan did not kneel down and pray for the injured man to be made whole. He cared and provided for him. Does God suspend the laws of the universe to move a mountain when asked by someone with faith as a mustard seed[6]? That would be like asking God to temporarily suspend gravity to get on the roof to avoid buying a ladder. Accepting help only from God might be rejecting His help altogether.

It is always God who CHOOSES if, when, and how help comes. All miracles are WORKS of God. So, too, is help from others—converted or NOT—they *begin* as works of God who inspires others to their own works. God is always involved in our works. Keeping the commandments of God are by WORKS of faith! Overcoming sin is by WORKS of faith! Becoming agape love is by WORKS of faith! Would any of these be possible without God? Jesus said, "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 9:26) "to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). Without *works* no one can keep the commandments, sin cannot be overcome, and love will not grow. Likewise, healings require WORKS of faith. Even prayer is a WORK of faith:

> ROMANS 15:30 … **strive** together with me in **prayers** to God …
>
> COLOSSIANS 4:12 … always **laboring fervently** for you in **prayers** …
>
> JAMES 5:16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and **pray for one another, that you may be healed**. The effective, **fervent prayer** of a righteous man avails much.

[3] Matt. 4:2.
[4] 1 Kgs. 17:4.
[5] 2 Cor. 9.
[6] Matt. 17:20; 21:21; 1 Cor. 13:2.

Fervent literally means energetic or full of *energy*, which is the noun form of the verb *work* (Gk. *ergon*). The absence of healing, though, does not reflect a lack of faith or works. Notice what Jesus Christ prayed:

> MARK 14:36 And He *[Jesus]* said, "Abba, Father, **all things *are* possible for You**. **Take this cup away from Me**; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*."

ALL things are possible with God and perhaps there was another way to offer salvation to mankind; however, God the Father wanted Jesus Christ alone be the name of salvation and have that glory and honor. So, Jesus had to suffer:

> HEBREWS 5:7-8 … in the days of His flesh, when He *[Jesus Christ]* had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him **who was able to save Him from death**, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, *yet* **He learned obedience *[submission]* by the things which He suffered**.

There are cases of faith without works as evident when someone refuses the help God provides through others. Hopefully, this is done out of ignorance since the alternative is dead faith. But many have faith WITH works who suffer trials and afflictions even though they are not healed. Their works are manifested in prayers and supplications, anointings, aid from doctors, taking medication for pain or other symptoms, etc. These works are amazing and incredible proof of their abundant and enduring faith with WORKS. Those with living faith are a praise to God the Father and a reflection of Jesus Christ's own sufferings:

> HEBREWS 5:9 And having been perfected, **He *[Jesus]* became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,**

In contrast to the days of Jesus Christ who physically healed those with faith but without the Holy Spirit, the issue today is spiritual salvation. Do not measure faith by healings. No one has the Holy Spirit without faith. Truly, those who suffer trials and afflictions, grow in agape love, continue in the faith of Jesus Christ, and are doing or receiving good works will be recipients of the eternal salvation authored by the Savior of mankind—whether or not they were healed in this life!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-03—ANGER, WRATH, MALICE, BLASPHEMY, FILTHY LANGUAGE, & LYING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

An epistle is a public treatise, similar to what is called an 'open letter' these days. The epistle of James was written to brethren in "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." (Jas. 1:1-2). Obviously, the location of all twelve tribes was well known. More to the point, he not only knew where they resided but James was acutely aware of how evil the Israelite nations had become. All the tribes of Israel knew the laws of Moses—they were not 'lost' upon them (remember the wise men?), but they had become like the Gentiles around them. James' epistle was intended for the Believers but also seemingly for the unconverted people of those tribes as well. It is hard to imagine that the following was a rebuke meant for the *ekklesia*:

> JAMES 4:1-10 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? 2 **You lust** and do not have. **You murder and covet** and cannot obtain. **You fight and war.** Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on **your pleasures**. 4 **Adulterers and adulteresses!** Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an **enemy of God**. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "**God resists the proud**, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore **submit to God**. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ***you* sinners**; and purify your hearts, ***you* double-minded**. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. 10 **Humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

These are scathing accusations that surely cannot describe true Christians; however, they reflected the national conditions of the "scattered" descendants of Israel then and now.

Satan's main tool for destruction of a nation begins with dividing the citizens by using anger. When one group of citizens is angry toward another, they will respond in kind. Solomon said, "a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1) and "a wrathful man stirs up strife." (Prov. 15:18). Harsh words quickly elevate both sides to hatred, or wrath as the Bible calls it in places. What is the difference? Hatred is anger that is intense and deeply rooted. The main contrast is that anger tends to fade over time whereas hatred does not. Hatred is a powerful emotion that produces a desire to do EVIL unto others. Hatred plus violence is malice.

Once groups within a nation begin hating one another, the nation is doomed. A nation only exists when the people respect major points of common law and justice. When "the leaven of malice and wickedness"[1] takes hold, it increases just as bread with leaven expands. Law and justice are the victims of unrestrained violence, which is

[1] 1 Cor. 5:8.

followed by utter chaos and destruction. Consider the nations of Africa. Most of their history is one of tortured genocide between tribes even though they are basically 'cousins'—they are not so different from each other as are the Chinese and Russians or even the American Indians and Anglo-Saxons. Neither of those nations or groups murder each other like the Africans. This is not limited to Africans either. Some of the worst genocide has occurred in the Middle East, India, and Asia.

This is the current state within the modern nations descended from Israel. There is hatred with violence—malice—among the people, aligned along so-called political lines. But politics is not the problem because ideological differences are not sufficient to cause hatred and malice. The USA has had differing political parties since its inception. While the Civil War was the result of anger and even hatred, it was a war fought pro-slavery states, who were the *cause* of the division by enslaving people. Moral justification was on the side of those who wanted to free all people from slavery, not the slave-holders who considered slaves to be inferior people unworthy of human rights.

Today, it is the opposite. Take for example the issue of abortion in the USA. In 2022 the US Supreme Court repealed the previously nationally recognized 'right' to abortion. The liberals responded with absolute vitriol. But there was no rational reason for their reaction because the outcome is that women who want an abortion can still get one. NOTHING HAS CHANGED! So why the hatred and violence? It is not from those who 'battled' it in the courts according to the laws of the land. Those who want to force the nation to accept abortion are trying to do it through nefarious and violent means. This is why they will be victorious: a nation is lost when the wicked use hate and violence instead of the legal legislative system!

The abortion issue was just one of many 'crises' used by wicked leaders to stir up anger, hatred, and malice through their primary tool—the media. ALL media, both liberal and conservative, no longer 'report' the news—they shout it will all the rage they can muster. Recently, the media aired videos of members of the US Congress who said they were disappointed that President Trump was NOT assassinated. The liberal media did not hide their approval and the conservatives called them names that were once disallowed in the media. But the response of liberals is not unusual. Of the four US presidents who were assassinated and the now three who were wounded, only one was a Democrat (John F. Kennedy, despised because he was Catholic). The liberals have been using anger and hatred for a long time but it has now become the expected delivery for conservatives as well.

Forget about the false narratives of lying broadcasters. The real issue now is malice. Lies cause deception whereas hatred is produces violence. Deception can be overcome but violence requires violence to halt it. The liberal media today NEVER condemn the violence of thefts, arsons, and murders because they WANT to destroy the country. They are all pawns of Satan. They will prosper, too, because conservatives are weak cowards who focus on their lusts for power and money. None of this is particularly unique or shocking. It existed in Paul's time:

> COLOSSIANS 3:5-7 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: **fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry**. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 **in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them**.

Paul said the nations of the earth were full of "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Believers "**once walked** [and] lived in" those ways but put them to death in the watery grave of baptism. True Christians are a new creation, walking in the fruits of the Spirit and no longer having anything to do with their old ways. However, what Paul said next is extremely disturbing:

> COLOSSIANS 3:8-9 But **now** you yourselves *[brethren]* are to **put off all these**: **anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language** out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since **you have put off the old man with his deeds**,

If those of the *ekklesia* "put off the **old** man with his **deeds**," (fornication, et al) then why does Paul then tell them "**now**"—AFTER baptism—to put away anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying?!? These are TERRIBLE and HORRIFIC accusations laid upon the *EKKLESIA*.

Sadly, they *still* exist. Who has not witnessed such evil behaviors or been the target of them by brethren or ministers? Anger, wrath, and malice in churches are rampant. And just like the world, the source is typically the leaders. How many times has a minister condemned a Believer to eternal death in the Lake of Fire or judged brethren to be 'children' of Satan? I myself have heard ministers say these things ears. Too many leaders are sowing seeds of anger that grow into hatred.

In addition to anger, hatred, and malice Paul mentions blasphemy, filthy language, and lying. Blasphemy is vilification, which is abusive slander. Filthy language is corruptive influence. There is no need to explain abusive slander (blasphemy) or lying but an example of corruptive influence is when someone says, "those of church XYZ *may* be God's people but they do not have as much truth or biblical understanding or they are not as 'converted'." Another is prohibiting brethren from different churches to gather together. Why is that corruptive influence (filthy language)? Because it casts dispersions on BRETHREN and DIVIDES what should otherwise be unified people of God!

Blasphemy (abusive slander), filthy language (corruptive influence), and lying have been around a long time but the results of them are now fast filling the hearts of Believers with anger, hatred, and even malice. Paul said "**NOW you yourselves are to put off all these**". They cause divisions among members of the ONE Body of Christ!

These problems existed long ago in almost every city where Believers resided. Paul rebuked the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians[2]; Peter rebuked brethren in Asia Minor including Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bythnia[3]; and James rebuked those of the Israelite nations[4]. As far as I can tell, only the Philippians and Thessalonians escaped reproach.

The churches seem to be a decade or so behind the culture of the country. Today, this country is beyond anger and consumed with hatred and malice. At this point, some Believers are fulfilling Scripture with their hatred:

---

[2] 1 Cor. 3:3-4; Gal. 5:9-10, 12, 15; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:11.
[3] 1 Pet. 1:1; 3:8-17.
[4] Jas. 4:1-10.

MATTHEW 24:10 "And then many *[of the saints]* will be offended, will betray one another, and **will hate one another**.

What follows hatred is malice and violence. Decades ago, brethren fellowshipped regularly in each other's homes—serving and helping each other. Then came the Big Divide. While it had to happen, the one Big Divide to escape the heresy of the time has become hundreds of smaller divides. Why? Because leaders resorted to blasphemy (abusive slander), filthy language (corruptive influence), and lying about other leaders resulting in anger and even hatred among the brethren. And they use their MEDIA to do it!

Who gets together in homes to eat a meal and fellowship on the Sabbath anymore (much less during the week)? Who has more than one or two *true* friends (not familiar acquaintances) among the brethren anymore? And the real kicker: Who has more friends than *enemies* (brethren separated by offenses) anymore? THE ANGER, WRATH, MALICE, BLASPHEMY, FILTHY LANGUAGE, AND LYING HAS GOT TO STOP!

It happened to believers in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bythnia, and the scattered Isralite tribes. For every rebuke, Paul, Peter, and James begged them to put on love. These divisions were motivation for Paul's incredible poem of love to the Corinthians. Here is a sampling of others:

GALATIANS 5:13-14 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

EPHESIANS 4:2-3 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, **bearing with one another in love**, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 Therefore, as ***the* elect of God**, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 **bearing with one another**, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.* 14 But **above all these things put on love**, which is the bond of perfection.

And it is happening today among Believers around the world. The warning of Scripture is clear and the urgency cannot be overstated. How long does it take to repent and actually put *aside* anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying? How long does it take to then put on agape love? How long will it take to reconcile all the offenses caused by anger, hatred, and malice? Above all, how much TIME is left to any Believer?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-10—HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE END TIMES

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

An upcoming highly emotional presidential election in the USA. A US president who has made the White House into the most expensive nursing home in the country. A radical woke US vice-president. A failed assassination attempt of President Trump. Rampant corruption in the US Department of Justice, FBI, CIA, NSA, FDA, CDC, etc. A never-ending war in Ukraine. The attempted genocide of Israel by Hamas. A war against Israel that threatens to engulf the Middle East. The USA declares the Palestinians and Hamas to be terrorists and yet funds and supplies them. Military shipments to its ally Israel who is at war terrorists are withheld by the USA. Continuing genocides in Africa. China and Russia aggressively push the national boundaries and militaries of the USA, Taiwan, and Japan. A global financial market crash. Muslims have taken over Europe. Islamic extremists (which are basically the majority of Muslim 'believers') control the UN, NATO, and EU. Unending inflation and high prices. Unprecedented fires in the western USA. Stolen presidential elections in the USA and Venezuela. A coup in Bangladesh. Men are declared winners in Olympic women's sports. Law enforcement is handicapped and defunded to prevent criminals from being arrested or punished. The US national debt is $35 trillion (12 zeros). Public speech platforms censor non-liberals. Mainstream media broadcasts nothing but lies. News has been replaced by morally, mentally, and emotionally bankrupt commentators. Conservative and religious opinions are hate speech. The Bible and Christianity are banned in public. Public schools teach extreme perversion. Parents are denied authority over their children. The ultra-rich run governments through corruption and cover-ups. Insurance companies control hospitals and doctors. Medical and healthcare is inaccessible. Millions and millions of illegal aliens including vast numbers of violent criminals, gangs, and terrorists brought into the USA and receive free housing, food, clothes, voting rights, etc. Hundreds of thousands of Fentanyl deaths supplied by China and Mexico. The USA funds Iran with billions (9 zeros) of dollars to build nuclear weapons. Palestinian and Hezbollah terrorists are funded, logistically supported, and legally protected by the USA, UN, NATO, and EU. Artificial Intelligence, biased by liberal ideologies, is being integrated into everything digital. Digital currency is replacing hard currency. The USA, WHO, and most nations murdered millions with harmful vaccines. Economic classes are now limited to the lower and upper class poor or the rich and ultra rich. Higher education debt impoverishes all graduates for decades. China constantly successfully steals US military and commercial technologies. All whites are racist. Major US companies are run by utterly incompetent and woke CEOs who become wealthy by destroying them. Idiotic climate change advocates tax CO2 production, put tens of thousands of farmers out of business in favor of eating insects, and want to shade the earth from the sun. Gun owners are put in prison for defending against violent criminals. Gen-X, Gen-Y, Gen-Z, and Gen-Alpha (people born the last 40-50 years) are defined by their amorality, selfishness, greed, lust, hate, and inability to deal with minor emotional or physical hurts.

I could go on and on, but this should make my point—I truly believe these are the end times. The problems above have only been around the last ten years or so. Prior to that, at least in the USA, things were fairly calm and peaceful. Problems existed, but they were not as dominant, impactful, or irrational.

The world has also run out of extreme adjectives to describe everything in a catastrophic sense. Everything is excessive, extreme, fanatical, and life-threatening. Ever notice how weather events are described that have even the slightest POTENTIAL to cause minor damage? One news channel publishes endless articles on health where every one is "vital" for personal wellbeing including suntan lotion, vitamin D, and toothpaste. Really?!? Today no one gets noticed unless they are screaming and blowing the trumpet of war. Have you noticed how the volume increases during commercials? I am tired of the constant and inane stream of attention-getting fake bombshells that make every news item worthy of a nuclear event. The world needs to calm down …

Nowadays, there are more warnings of The End Times than ever; perhaps more than prior to 1975 in WCG. Drawing dots between world events, conspiracies and theories, and the open wickedness with biblical prophecies have become the focus of many preachers and conversations among brethren.

All of this got me wondering about what God says about how *we* are to prepare for The End Times. What I found might surprise you because I could only find ONE thing that the *ekklesia* must do in *preparation* for The End Times:

> MATTHEW 6:19-20 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 "but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 6:18-19 … be rich in **good works**, ready to give, willing to share, 19 **storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come**, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

What was *more* interesting is the amount of preparation GOD is doing for The End Times. Here is a short list.

1) God is preparing a KINGDOM:

   > MATTHEW 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**:

2) God is preparing a CITY:

   > HEBREWS 11:16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **He has prepared a city** for them.

3) God is preparing a PEOPLE for Jesus Christ:

   > LUKE 1: 17 "He *[John]* will also go before Him *[Jesus Christ]* in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, **to make ready a people prepared for the Lord**."

4) Jesus Christ is preparing a PLACE in His Father's house:

   > JOHN 14:1-4 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. **I go**

to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 "And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5) God is preparing a WEDDING for His Son Jesus Christ:

MATTHEW 22:2-4 "The **kingdom of heaven** is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 "and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, **I have prepared my dinner**; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. **Come to the wedding.**"

6) God is preparing a FIRE for the wicked:

MATTHEW 25:41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, **you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels *[and the incorrigibly wicked]***:

Even the angels are preparing: "the **seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared** themselves to sound." (Rev. 8:6). I have heard claims that the Fifth Seal is upon the world so the seven angels should be finishing up shortly. Some have even positively identified the Beast, have evidence that the Temple has been built, and found evidence that the red heifer is ready. Matthew 24 and Revelation is quoted over and over especially the wars and rumors of wars, mark of the Beast (digital angel, implants, etc.), and famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. One preacher even proclaimed the abomination of desolation has occurred. If these things are true or even imminent, I must have missed Elijah who was supposed to "restore all things" (Matt. 17:10) and, perhaps, the armies surrounding Jerusalem. I also do not know of anyone who has been "delivered up to be killed" (Matt. 24:9).

Personally, I think that much of the preaching and talk about The End Times fits into "many **false prophets will rise up and deceive many**" (Matt. 24:11). Every prediction of modern events fulfilling prophecy has FAILED to come to pass. In a strict sense, every failure must then be a FALSE prophecy. That does not concern me as much as the fact that they will absolutely "deceive many" even if they did not intend to do so.

I believe I am living in the end times. Not THE End Times but MY end times. It is of little concern if I witness the fulfillment of the biblical prophetic End Times. What IS important is that I know my life will end—in a day or a year or ten. Perhaps longer. But twenty years is a blink of time. Whether or not I see The End Times has NO BEARING on what any of those who will be part of the First Harvest of mankind must be *doing* because those things must be done regardless of the era in which we live. Jesus Christ never said to prepare for *THE End Times*. In fact, He said just the opposite—Do. Not. Worry. It was not a short, off-the-cuff comment; His warning message was covered in seventeen verses:

LUKE 12:22-38 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, **do not worry about your life**, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. 23 "Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than clothing. 24 "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? 25 "And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 26 "If you then are not able to do *the* least,

why are you anxious for the rest? 27 “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 “If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He clothe* you, **O *you* of little faith**? 29 “And **do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind**. 30 “For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. 31 “But **seek the kingdom of God**, and all these things shall be added to you. 32 “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, **a treasure in the heavens** that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. 34 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 35 “Let your waist be girded and *your* lamps burning; 36 “and you yourselves be like men who **wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding**, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. 37 “**Blessed *are* those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching *[and waiting for the return of Jesus Christ]*. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down *to eat,* and will come and serve them.**

So, do not worry. God is very busy preparing things for The End Times. What exactly is He preparing?

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9 But as it is written: “**Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.**”

God would not be preparing such unimaginable things for His people if He was unable to see them through to The End—not The End Times, but THE END, which is victory over death:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24-26, 57 Then *comes* **the end**, when He *[Jesus Christ]* delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He *[Jesus Christ]* puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He *[Jesus Christ]* must reign till He has put all enemies under His *[God the Father’s]* feet. 26 The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. … 57 But **thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**.

But The End is actually The Beginning:

ISAIAH 65:17-18 “For behold, **I *[the LORD God]* create new heavens and a new earth**; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice **forever in what I create**; For behold, **I create Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing, And her people a joy**.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-17—AUTHORITY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The definition of authority is the *power to make decisions, give orders, and enforce obedience*. Authority is a right of those who are legitimately given it such as duly elected or appointed government officials. Properly wielded, authority is good for the welfare of people but it has rarely been exercised for those reasons. Authority has been so abused that the very word produces negative reactions. It has forever been exploited by the few over the majority for personal gain.

What is most interesting is that the power behind authority exists only if people *submit* to it. The peace of society is completely dependent upon allowable and prohibited behaviors (laws). Authority is means by which laws are upheld. The authority of the government, school teachers, employers, and police exist to ensure a peaceable life. When laws are ignored and authority is corrupted, destruction of society soon follows.

History has shown that people all too easily give up authority. Students give in to peer pressure and many willingly stepped onto trains to their deaths during the Holocaust. All positions of power exist because they were given that authority, whether it was through elections or by coercion.

> NOTE: A true democracy is majority rule where the rights of individuals and minorities do not exist. A constitutional republic, such as the USA, is unique because it preserves and protects the rights of an individual from the majority. For example, the US Constitution guarantees freedom of speech to the *individual*, not the majority.

It is very common for the majority, wealthy, or physically strong to steal authority by deceiving, threatening, or forcing others to submit against their will. Authority by these means produces tyranny, despotism, and oppression.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a Theocratic Monarchy; that is, God the Father is the Great King[1]. He wields all authority and gives it to others as He alone decides. After His resurrection, Jesus Christ was given all authority in heaven and on earth[2]. Obviously, God the Father is exempt[3]. All who have positions of *authority* in the Kingdom of God have the right and power to JUDGE:

> JOHN 5:26-27 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 "and has given Him *[Jesus Christ]* **authority to execute judgment** also, because He is the Son of Man.

[1] Matt. 5:35.
[2] Matt. 28:18; et al.
[3] Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25-28.

Other than God and Jesus Christ, no positions of authority IN the Kingdom of God have been filled in heaven or on the EARTH. Some have been *named* to positions such as the twelve apostles ruling over the tribes of Israel[4], but they are currently dead. The Kingdom of God is not yet on earth[5] and it is reserved only for those who are Spirit[6]. That means NO man has authority[7] for judgment in the Kingdom of God. For now, all who might have authority must prove they are worthy:

> LUKE 19:13, 16-17 "So he *[the nobleman]* called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' … 16 "Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' 17 "And he said to him, 'Well *done*, **good ~~servant~~ [slave]; because you were faithful in a very little, have *[or possess]* authority** over ten cities.'

The word *faithful* in verse 17 is an adjective; meaning it is a trait or characteristic. A faithful slave is a *trustworthy* one. Authority is given only AFTER proving they are trustworthy in the position of a SLAVE. Jesus Christ even demanded this of the *apostles* who will have great authority as kings over Israel:

> MATTHEW 20:25-28 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great **exercise authority over** them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become **great *[it does not say exercise authority]*** among you, let him be your **servant**. 27 "And whoever desires to be **first *[it does not say exercise authority]*** among you, let him be your **slave**– 28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Anyone who desires authority in the Kingdom of God must first be a trustworthy slave to others in this life. That is the complete *opposite* of authority because a slave has NO authority—NONE! A true slave will submit to everything his master requires of him including his own *death*. Simply put, one must be willing to completely submit before wielding authority.

The apostles were, however, given authority for two purposes. The first was to cast out demons and heal the sick:

> MATTHEW 10:1 And when He *[Jesus Christ]* had called His twelve disciples to *Him*, He gave them **~~power~~ [authority] *over* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease**.

Obviously, the disciples retained this authority to cast out demons and heal as apostles. That authority is one of the hallmarks of the position of an apostle (they also *witnessed* the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ). It is important to

[4] Matt. 19:28.
[5] John 18:36.
[6] John 3:5.
[7] Rom. 14:17.

recognize that no AUTHORITY over demons or healing was given to anyone that came after them. Today, someone may have a GIFT but not the authority.

The second authority given to the apostles pertained to the Gospel:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 9:18 What is my *[Paul's]* reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse **my *[as an apostle]* authority in the gospel**.

Paul is not saying his authority was *from* the Gospel but, rather, he had authority to pronounce JUDGMENTS according to the Gospel. Several times Paul received commands "from the Lord"[8] but he also had the authority to rule on matters that pertained to fulfilling the Law according to the New Covenant as well as those unique to the gentiles. For example, he gave judgments on marriage[9]:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 7:25 … **I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment** as one whom the Lord in His mercy *has made* **trustworthy *[required to receive authority]***.

There are other examples of judgments made by Paul where he used the phrase "I say"[10]. Only the apostles had "authority in the gospel" for the purpose of judgments. They were given authority by Jesus Christ ("the keys of heaven") to and bind and loose judgments on earth AND in heaven:

> MATTHEW 16:19 "And **I *[Jesus Christ]* will give you *[the disciples]* the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**."

"You" is plural and Jesus was speaking only to the disciples at that moment (Matt. 16:13). The disciples were the main students of the Teacher so they alone were given authority to expound the Law of God outside of the letter of Old Covenant and the traditions of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. One reason the NT was written was to record those *judgments*. Only the original apostles had the authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven, which also established their teachings and writings as CANONICAL. Whoever has the authority to bind and loose has the authority to pen Scripture!

There is, however, some authority given to elders. One is for *edification*:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-8 … If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he *is* Christ's, even so we *are* Christ's. 8 For even if I should boast somewhat more **about our authority, which the Lord gave us *[elders]* for edification** and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed–

[8] 1 Cor. 11:23; 14:37; 15:3; Gal. 1:12.
[9] Also 1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 12, 35.
[10] Notice the phrase "I say"—1 Cor. 1:12; 10:20; 15:50; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 3:17; 4:1.

Paul says this authority is "ours" referring to himself and Timothy who was an elder; therefore, this authority is given to elders. What authority? *Edification*, which simply and literally means *architecture* or *structure*. It is an analogy for teaching the word of God (the Gospel). Elders have the authority and responsibility to know and teach the word of God. The apostles were the first to proclaim the Gospel, as Luke said, "**those who from the beginning were** eyewitnesses and **ministers of the word**" (Luke 1:2). The apostles were first to "appoint elders in every city"[11] who were given the "authority … for edification" as "stewards of the mysteries of God"[12] and ministers of the New Covenant:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-6 Not that we are [competent] of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but **our [competency] *[as elders] is* from God, 6 who also made us [competent] as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit *[basis of New Covenant]***; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The authority of an elder today includes teaching the word of God. As ministers of the *New Covenant*, they must also have the associated authority for baptism and laying on of hands. Finally, elders have authority to anoint for healings (Jas. 5:14; Acts 19:11). Beyond these things (edification, baptism, laying on of hands, and anointing), there is no other authority—they are simply servants of the brethren. This is why they are called shepherds:

> ACTS 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves *[elders—v. 18]* and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers *[to watch over]***, to **shepherd the [*ekklesia*] of God** which He *[Jesus Christ]* purchased with His own blood.

Shepherds feed (edify) and care for (oversee the welfare) the sheep and guard against wolves. They are simply slave-shepherds to the True Shepherd:

> 1 PETER 2:21, 25 … **Christ** also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**: … 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the **Shepherd and Overseer of your souls *[not THROUGH any man]***.

There are a couple of scriptures wrongly used to claim authority over brethren:

> 1 TIMOTHY 5:17 Let the **elders who ~~rule~~ *[lead]* well** be counted worthy of double honor, especially **those who labor in the word and doctrine *[not in judgment]***.
>
> HEBREWS 13:7, 17, 24 Remember **those who ~~rule over~~ *[lead]* you**, who have spoken the word of God to you, **whose faith follow**, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. 8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. … 17 **Obey those who ~~rule over~~ *[lead]* you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account**. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that

[11] Titus 1:5.
[12] 1 Cor. 4:1.

would be unprofitable for you. … 24 Greet all **those who ~~rule over~~ *[lead]* you**, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

In all cases, the word is *lead*, not *rule over* the brethren. A shepherd leads the sheep[13], he does not DRIVE them. The sheep follow the "faith" of an elder only as he follows the *example* of Christ[14]. Notice this interesting comment from Paul:

> PHILIPPIANS 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as **you have always obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but **now much more in my absence**, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

The question is whom or what were they obeying? Paul or the word of God? Obviously, the latter given the fact they "obeyed" even more after Paul left.

Even dealing with troublemakers does not fall under the authority of an elder[15]:

> ROMANS 16:17, 19 Now I urge you, **brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them**. … 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want **you to be wise in what is good, and ~~simple~~ [innocent] concerning evil**.

Paul told the BRETHREN that THEY were to note the troublemakers and avoid them. The LAITY is responsible for naming those who cause divisions and offenses and avoiding them (there is no such word "disfellowship" in the Bible). They were to be "wise in what is good and **[innocent] concerning evil**." Paul, who was not even there at the time, told the Corinthians to deal with the man who committed fornication[16].

Authority is the right and power of judgment. Elders do not have authority OVER anyone. Their only authority is to edify, baptize, lay hands on, and anoint. These are acts of service, not control. There is only one Authority over the Body and that is its Head, Jesus Christ. Besides, what authority among men is necessary for you to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling?" (Phil. 2:12). Is there anything confusing about "**judge not** that you be not judged?" (Matt. 7:1). Instead of authority over others, ALL are to submit to each another in agape love and good works.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[13] John 10:7-16.
[14] 1 Cor. 11:1.
[15] Also 2 Thess. 3:14-15.
[16] 1 Cor. 5:1-5.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-24—DAYS OF REJOICING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles are nearly upon us. Collectively, they are called the Feast of Ingathering[1]:

> EXODUS 23:14-16 "**Three times you shall keep a feast** to Me *[the LORD]* in the year: 15 "You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); 16 "and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and **the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of* your labors from the field**.

The Feast of Harvest, aka Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of Ingathering are both harvest seasons as evident by their titles. *Harvest* is the act of reaping or cutting a mature crop whereas *ingathering* is when the crops are gathered *after* they are reaped. Both require mankind's works but the success or failure is dependent upon God. For that reason, the Feast of Ingathering and in particular, the Feast of Tabernacles, has a special emphasis:

> LEVITICUS 23:39-41 'Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month *[Feast of Tabernacles]*, **when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast *[of Tabernacles]*** of the LORD *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest,* and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest.* 40 'And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and **you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days**. 41 'You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Of all the feasts, God only *commands* His people to REJOICE during the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the year. More importantly, they are to rejoice BEFORE Him! Why is the Feast of Tabernacles a time of rejoicing? Are the first two festival seasons somber occasions? No, in fact, the ancient Israelites kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread twice when Hezekiah began to reign after succeeding the wicked King Ahaz. Notice what happened after Hezekiah cleansed the Temple and restored the Levites and priests, the Law of God, and the festivals:

> 2 CHRONICLES 30:21-23 So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the **Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness *[rejoicing]***; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, *singing* to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. 22 And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD; and **they ate throughout the**

[1] Also Exod. 34:22.

feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. 23 **Then the whole assembly agreed to keep *the feast* another seven days, and they kept it *another* seven days with gladness *[rejoicing]*.**

The ancient Israelites rejoiced when they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread because Hezekiah brought them out from under the curses they were under with wicked King Ahaz. But GOD'S *command* to rejoice is only upon the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the year:

DEUTERONOMY 16:13-15 "You shall observe the **Feast of Tabernacles seven days**, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. 14 "And **you shall rejoice in your feast**, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. 15 "Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your **God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice**.

Here you can see that the blessing of God for the ancient Israelites was upon "all your produce" and "all the work of your hands." Only if God blessed them would there be abundance at the end of the year when crops, vineyards, fruits, and olives are reaped and gathered into the storehouses. But God's blessings were dependent upon them obeying Him and the Law of the Covenant:

DEUTERONOMY 30:9-10 "**The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good.** For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, 10 "**if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes** which are written in this Book of the Law, *and* **if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul**.

Receiving such a bounty meant that the ancient Israelites COULD rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles instead of having leanness. The Feast of Tabernacles was the time that God appointed for them to partake of the abundance of His blessings:

DEUTERONOMY 14:22-26 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. 23 "And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24 "But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry *the tithe, or* if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, 25 "then you shall exchange *it* for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 26 "And you shall spend that money for **whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice**, you and your household.

It is easy to overlook the fact that the crops at the end of the summer were absolutely the deciding factor between lean and bountiful times. Without an abundant harvest and ingathering, it would be impossible to have a Feast of Tabernacles where they could have "whatever your heart desires."

Today, however, few consider the amazing abundance that literally overflows the storehouses. There is so much food that no one gives it a second thought. It is estimated that the USA alone discards 60 million tons each year. Worldwide, the number is 2,500 million TONS. That is the equivalent of 20 MILLION MILLION (20 trillion—twelve zeros) quarter pound hamburgers each year. That is enough food to supply every one of the estimated 735 *million* starving people in the world with 100 HAMBURGERS every single day of the year! And that is just from the food that is WASTED or DISCARDED!! All of this incredible abundance was because Abraham was faithful and God promised to bless his descendants:

> GENESIS 17:4-7 "As for Me *[the LORD]*, behold, **My covenant is with you *[Abraham]***, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 "**I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you**, and kings shall come from you. 7 "And **I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and your descendants after you.
>
> GENESIS 22:15-18 Then the Angel of the LORD called to **Abraham** a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "**By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD**, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*– 17 "**blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants** as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "**In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed**, because you have obeyed My voice."

Only during the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1852 and the Great Depression of 1929–1939 did anyone in the USA, Britain, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, etc. die of hunger in recent history. Even WW2 was a time of rationing, not starvation. Whether someone is wealthy or in the economic lower class, all have abundant and affordable food. There is not a single grocery store that does not have fully stocked shelves. (Empty shelves during COVID were caused by intentionally choking off the distribution of food, not a lack of it.) No one goes hungry. Too many are so used to having "whatever your heart desires" throughout the year (not just once a year) that some will think it is catastrophic when a store runs out of beer, chips (crisps), and dip during the World Cup or Superbowl. God truly did "open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing **that there will not be room enough to receive it**." (Mal. 3:10). The amount of food in the world is more than there are people to eat it (even if many still go hungry).

When the ancient Israelites were blessed with an abundant harvest and ingathering at the end of the year, they truly REJOICED because they had food for the next year. Today, that thought never even crosses our minds. Perhaps that is why the

ancient Israelites rejoiced during that Feast of Unleavened Bread when Hezekiah began his reign. During the reign of King Ahaz they were likely under the curses of God and knew that turning back to Him would once again bring blessings of abundance at the Feast of Tabernacles:

> DEUTERONOMY 28:15, 17, 38-40, 42, 47 "But it shall come to pass, **if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you** today, that **all these curses will come upon you and overtake you**: … 17 "Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. 18 "Cursed *shall be* the … produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. … 38 "You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. 39 "You shall plant vineyards and tend *them,* but you shall neither drink *of* the wine nor gather the *grapes;* for the worms shall eat them. 40 "You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint *yourself* with the oil; for your olives shall drop off. … 42 "Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land. … 47 "Because **you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything**,

Notice verse 47. The curses of Deuteronomy 28 come upon the nation that does NOT serve God with joy for the abundance of everything!

The Feast of Tabernacles coincides with the late summer harvest, a time when people will KNOW and SEE God's blessing upon them. The Feast of Tabernacles is AFTER the ingathering of the harvest at the end of the year for people to "eat there before the LORD your God, and … **rejoice**" in that abundance.

I hope that you, brethren, keep the Feast of Tabernacles being mindful of God's immeasurable blessings of abundance. Who among us can say they have ever gone hungry because of a lack of food? The continuous abundance over the last 100 years could lead some to be blind to the fact that they have "whatever your heart desires" everyday of the year! In fact, God's people today have never known anything but exceptional abundance; so much so, that there is literally not enough room to receive it all.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a time to REJOICE before God for these blessings. He wants us to partake of the abundant pleasures of this life with thanksgiving, praise, worship, and singing. All He asks is that we obey Him and come BEFORE Him at the Feast of Tabernacles, acknowledging that the exceeding abundance we have all year long is because of the works of HIS hands.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-31—DOES GOD APPOINT RULERS?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The upcoming US presidential election this year has "turned the world upside down" to steal a quote from Luke in Acts 17:6. There is an emotional fervor that has laid hold of both the Democrats and Republicans, the likes of which has never been known. At the heart of it all is a man—Donald Trump. He has been the target and recipient of vile lies and deeds by liberals and, yet, is all but worshipped by the majority of conservatives. Many consider him to be the last man who is capable of preventing the fall of the USA, so much so that many believe the recent assassination attempt was thwarted by God Himself. I will not deny that possibility; however, I wonder how much God is involved with the modern nations descended from the Ten Tribes of Israel. Those who believe God's hand is upon the USA, to whatever extent that might be, usually refer to a couple of scriptures to back their claim. The first is from one of Daniel's prayers:

> DANIEL 2:20-21 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. 21 And He changes the times and the seasons; **He removes kings and raises up kings**; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

God has surely done this. Samuel made his sons judges over Israel, but they took bribes and perverted justice. They were just plain evil. This prompted the elders of Israel to demand Samuel give them a king to replace the judges:

> 1 SAMUEL 8:6-7 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "**Give us a king to judge us.**" So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but **they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them**.

God responded by having Samuel anoint a Benjamite, Saul the son of Kish, as king. However, Saul's continual disobedience against God caused him to be rejected:

> 1 SAMUEL 15:23, 26 For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because **you *[Saul]* have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king**." … 26 But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for **you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel**."

Being the one to tell Saul that God had rejected him caused great grief for Samuel. Perhaps the elderly Samuel felt somewhat like a father to Saul whose failures just compounded those of his own sons. Whatever the reason, God had plans to anoint a replacement:

> 1 SAMUEL 16:1 Now the LORD said to Samuel, "**How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel**? Fill your horn with oil, and go; **I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons**."

To fill the void, God told Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse from the tribe of Judah:

1 SAMUEL 16:13 **Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David** from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

There is no question this is an example that God Himself "removes kings and raises up kings." King Herod is another example of God removing a king:

ACTS 12:21-23 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately **an angel of the Lord struck him**, because he did not give glory to God. And **he was eaten by worms and died**.

God also raised up the Persian King Cyrus:

ISAIAH 44:24, 28 Thus says **the LORD**, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: "I *am* the LORD, who makes all *things*, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; … 28 **Who says of Cyrus *[King of Persia], 'He is* My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure**, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

God has certainly removed kings and raised up kings both in ancient Israel and the gentile nations. But I think the Bible paints a less than optimistic view of His involvement in the modern Ten Tribes of Israel. Notice what God did to them after the reign of Solomon, David's son:

2 KINGS 17:18, 20-23 Therefore **the LORD was very angry with *[the northern tribes of]* Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left** but the tribe of Judah alone. … 20 And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until **He had cast them from His sight**. 21 For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam **drove Israel from following the LORD**, and made them commit a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, 23 until **the LORD removed Israel out of His sight**, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So **Israel was carried away from their own land** to Assyria, *as it is* to this day.

God did not just cast the Ten Tribes of Israel away, He also DIVORCED them:

JEREMIAH 3:8 "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding **Israel** had committed adultery, **I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce**; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

When a woman is divorced, the Law requires she be sent out of the husband's house:

DEUTERONOMY 24:1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and **he writes her a certificate of divorce**, puts *it* in her hand, **and sends her out of his house**,

The statute does not allow a divorced woman to remain any longer in the same house as the husband for obvious reasons. When God divorced the Ten Tribes of Israel, He sent them away to Assyria. In other words, He cast them out of the "house of Israel," which means they are no longer under the care of her Husband (God). Even though God certainly blessed the modern Ten Tribes of Israel according to the promises to Abraham, they are otherwise truly rejected:

> HOSEA 4:6-7 **My people *[v. 1—Israel]* are destroyed** for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, **I also will reject you** from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, **I also will forget your children**. 7 "**The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me**; I will change their glory into shame.

Obviously, the prophets foretold of a time when God will redeem the Ten Tribes of Israel and join them together with Judah (Ezek. 37:16-27), but that has not yet occurred. Given all this, is God involved in US presidential elections? Is His hand upon Donald Trump? I have serious doubts, mainly due to the word of Hosea:

> HOSEA 8:2-4 **Israel** will cry to Me, 'My God, we know You!' 3 Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him. 4 "**They *[Israel]* set up kings, but not by Me; They made princes, but I did not acknowledge *them*.** From their silver and gold they made idols for themselves– that they might be cut off.

God said this specifically about the modern Ten Tribes of Israel. Also consider this:

> HOSEA 8:8-10 **Israel** is swallowed up; now **they are among the Gentiles** like a vessel in which *is* no pleasure. 9 For they have gone up to Assyria, *like* a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers. 10 Yes, though **they have [sold themselves] among the nations**, now I will gather them; and **they shall sorrow a little [while under the burden of kings and princes] *[—Darby]***.

So does God setup and remove every ruler? What about the kings of Israel? Nothing in the Bible suggests that is the case. God certainly has the authority and power to do it but most of the time it seems He withholds his hand from doing so. Remember all the kings of the northern Ten Tribes? Starting with Jeroboam (the first), there were 19 kings in succession before they were captured by Assyria and every single one of them "did evil in the sight of the LORD." A number of times the throne was usurped through assassination. The throne of the northern Ten Tribes was one of continual conflict that is very similar to the office of the US presidency since the time of John Adam. Did God raise up evil kings for the northern Ten Tribes? There is no biblical evidence He did. Did God raise up evil presidents for the modern Ten Tribes? I doubt it. But there is one other scripture that is used to suggest that God establishes *all* rulers:

> ROMANS 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For **there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God**.

What is authority? It is the *power to make decisions, give orders, and enforce obedience*. What is the purpose of authority in human hands?

> ROMANS 13:2-4 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For **rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil**. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For **he is God's minister to you for good.** But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for **he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil**.

Verse 1 says that "all authorities that exist are appointed by God" but the discussion turns to "rulers" in verse 2. Rulers exist to do good and punish evildoers:

> 1 PETER 2:13-14 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by Him **for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good**.

The key to this is understanding that God appoints all 'POSITIONS' of authority but not all rulers. NO ruler is "**God's minister**" if he is wicked, although God obviously ALLOWS wicked rulers to continue in power.

It seems that nations that reject God are allowed to CHOOSE their rulers. This is undoubtedly the case with the modern Ten Tribes of Israel because He plainly said so: "**They *[Israel]* set up kings, but not by Me; They made princes, but I did not acknowledge *them*.**" A nation that is humble and obedient to God is blessed WHEN God chooses their rulers as was the case with King David.

All the Ten Tribes of Israel have been divorced by God so they are rejected by Him and cast away from His presence. Hosea said they are "swallowed up" by the gentiles and his prophecy is being fulfilled before our very eyes. That alone is reason enough that they select rulers whom God says He did not choose or acknowledge.

I have reservations about God being involved in the US presidential elections. That means we might have to choose to disobey some rulers because we "ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). At the same time, we are greatly comforted knowing that God has set up His Son as the righteous King who will see to the punishment of evildoers and praise those who do good works. After Jesus Christ is finished, the Most High God will sit upon His throne as the Great King[1]:

> ZECHARIAH 14:9 And **the LORD shall be King over all the earth**. In that day it shall be– **"The LORD *is* one," and His name one**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[1] Matt. 5:35.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-09-07—AFFLICTIONS OF OFFENSES

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When Saul, who was renamed Paul, was being called God used the disciple Ananias of Damascus (a city in Syria) to anoint him[1]. Being suspicious of Saul's motives and mission, Ananias questioned God and was told that he was to be a "chosen vessel" to the gentiles. But Saul's service to God came with a heavy price:

> ACTS 9:16 "For I *[God]* will show him *[Paul]* **how many things he must suffer** for My name's sake."

The fulfillment of his suffering was truly something that most cannot imagine:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-28 … I *[Paul] am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in **deaths often**. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, ***in* perils among false brethren**; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness– 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the *ekklesia*.

It is telling that Paul was killed at *least* four times before he his final death! Paul experienced more afflictions than any of the other apostles so he understood the cost of being a disciple. Even *before* many of these afflictions actually occurred, Paul said that ALL who would be disciples of Christ must suffer afflictions:

> ACTS 14:22 *[Paul and Barnabas were]* strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.**"

Tribulation means affliction, anguish, persecution, trouble, or burdens. It is, perhaps, the one word in English that can describe and encompass all the various sufferings that come upon the children of God. But there is one affliction that stands above all others, especially as the end of the age approaches, and Paul experienced it himself. Among other dangers, he was "*in* perils among **false brethren**" (1 Cor. 15:26). The greatest threat to eternal life will always been from within the *ekklesia* and things are about to get worse—much worse. Describing the signs of the End of the Age to the disciples, Jesus began by listing some of the world events during the Time of Sorrows:

> MATTHEW 24:4-8 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not

[1] Acts 9:1-19.

troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but **the end is not yet**. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 "All these *are* **the beginning of sorrows**.

The Time of Sorrows happens before the Abomination of Desolation (Matt. 24:15) and the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). Why is it called a Time of Sorrows? Perhaps because it is a time of many AFFLICTIONS upon the *ekklesia*:

MATTHEW 24:9-10, 12 "Then they will deliver you up to **tribulation** and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 "And then **many *[of "you," referring to the saints]* will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another**. … 12 "And **because lawlessness will abound, the love of many *[saints]* will grow cold**.

Not only will the *ekklesia* be afflicted by all *nations* but certain so-called brethren will cause many offenses and betray other brethren (the worst of all offenses). Offenses are the RESULT of not having agape love. Surely there can be no greater sorrow than for saints to afflict one another. How does someone handle the afflictions of offenses when they arise from others within the Body of Christ?

1 PETER 2:20-22 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But **when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God**. 21 For to this you were called, because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example**, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

Peter admonishes the saints to endure the sufferings afflicted upon them just as Jesus Christ. What exactly was the example of Christ the saints are to copy?

ISAIAH 53:7 He *[Jesus Christ]* was oppressed and **He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth**; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so **He opened not His mouth.**

1 PETER 2:-23 … **when He *[Jesus Christ]* was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously**;

Jesus Christ did not respond in kind when He was afflicted. Who can claim they suffered greater afflictions of offenses than what Christ endured from those He for whom He died? Afflictions of offenses from within the *ekklesia* are hard to bear and cause hurt, anger, hatred, malice, grief, and sadness. Consider for a moment the afflictions of OUR offenses upon our Savior:

ISAIAH 53:3-5 **He *[Jesus Christ]* is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.** And **we hid**, as it were, *our* faces from Him; **He was despised**, and **we did not esteem Him**. 4 Surely **He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken**, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But **He *was* wounded for our transgressions**, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; **the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him**, and by His stripes we are healed.

Read this as if it were the first time. Jesus Christ was utterly rejected by those He came to save. None pitied or consoled Him when He was afflicted. He bore our sins through physical afflictions no one can imagine. In spite of that, He bore OUR grief and OUR sorrow. He was afflicted by OUR offenses. He was 'chastised' so WE can have His peace. What did He say just PRIOR to all our afflictions coming upon Him? "**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.**" (John 14:27). His peace truly makes the suffering of afflictions much more bearable especially when we put our own sufferings into *this* perspective:

> ROMANS 5:15-16, 20-21 But the free gift *[of grace] is* not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. 16 And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but **the free gift *[of grace] which came* from many offenses** *resulted* in justification. … 20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, 21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so **grace might reign *[instead of death]*** through righteousness **to eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The "**many** offenses" against Jesus Christ number in the BILLIONS. How many times can you say that others have offended you? A few dozen? Not only did all these offenses come upon Him, they were all at once and while He was physically suffering on the cross—and then God left Him. Through all that, He is able to give us a peace that surpasses all understanding[2]. I am not making light of the pain of offenses of brethren, but who has been afflicted and suffered alone like Jesus Christ? Perhaps this is Paul's thought when he said ours are "**light**" afflictions:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet **the inward *man* is being renewed day by day**. 17 For **our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory**, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Offenses can fill the heart with the rocks of anger, hatred, and malice. Enough 'rocks' and nothing good can take root:

> MATTHEW 13:20-21 "But **he who received the seed on stony places *[of his heart]***, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 "yet he has no root in himself, but **endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises** because of the word, **[he is immediately offended]**.

While there is a time to attempt to reconcile ALL offenses, suffering the afflictions of offenses from other brethren in silence and without reviling or threatening fulfills the most difficult commandment given to the saints—"love your enemies":

[2] Phil. 4:6-7.

MATTHEW 5:44 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **love your enemies**, **bless** those who curse you, **do good** to those who hate you, and **pray for** those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

1 PETER 3:8-9 Finally, all *of you [saints] be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; 9 **not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing**, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Not doing or saying harmful things is the way to bless our enemies and do good for them. Praying FOR an enemy is repaid by God with the abundant peace that Jesus Christ has to give. This leads to the greatest reward:

HEBREWS 10:32-33, 35-36 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated *[called]*, **you endured a great struggle with sufferings**: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and **tribulations *[afflictions]***, and partly while **you became companions of those who were so treated**; … 35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For **you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise *[of eternal life]***

The purpose of keeping the Law is to BE like God and become "*[agape]* love out of a pure heart." (1 Tim. 1:5). Can anyone learn to love an enemy WITHOUT experiencing the afflictions of offenses, especially those from brethren? Perhaps this is exactly what the Psalmist was thinking when he wrote:

PSALMS 119:69-71 The proud have forged a lie against me *[which is an offense]*, *but* I will keep Your precepts with *my* whole heart. 70 Their heart is as fat as grease, *but* I delight in Your law. 71 ***It is* good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.**

The afflictions of offenses from brethren cause many tears. But it is better to shed tears out of love for an enemy than to end up "weeping" in the Lake of Fire because God promises to take care of tears of love:

ISAIAH 25:8-9 He *[the Lord GOD]* will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will **wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke *[shame, reproach, rebuke]* of His people He will take away** from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. 9 And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this *is* our God; **we have waited for Him**, and He will save us. This *is* the LORD; **we have waited for Him**; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-09-14—VICTORY THROUGH PRAYER

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

On March 30, 2023, NY District Attorney Alvin Bragg charged Donald Trump with 34 counts of falsifying business records. Bragg claimed Michael Cohen made payments of $130,000, supposedly on Trump's behalf, to the prostitute Stormy Daniels as 'hush-money' for her affair with Trump in 2006. The alleged crime occurred on October 27, 2016 but the charges were not brought until March 30, 2023, 1-1/2 years after five-year statute of limitations had expired. Regardless of whether or not Trump is guilty, the NY judicial system illegally charged him so the trial is entirely illegitimate. Even the judge has conflicted interests. It was an obvious attempt to eliminate a political opponent who is a substantial threat to the entrenched oligarchy of the Democrats. Still, Bragg got his illegal conviction on May 30, 2024. The maximum penalty is four years in prison for *each* count, although Merchan could order him to serve them concurrently (four years total).

In a few days on September 18, 2024, Judge Merchan will formally sentence President Donald Trump. I am writing this article 2-1/2 weeks before it is posted and already there is increasing speculation that Trump will be locked up, causing growing concern. According to investigative journalist Laura Loomer on X:

> "A Federal law enforcement agent has just told me that the New York State National Guard has started staging guardsmen in hotels around the NYC courthouse where President Trump is going to be sentenced on September 18th, as they are expecting that Trump will be taken in to custody and sent directly to Rikers Island by Judge Juan Merchan.
>
> "Source says the National Guard is being staged there because the Mayor of NYC Eric Adams and the Governor of New York Kathy Hochul both believe the police unions are preparing to stage a mass "out sick" day in support of President Trump on September 18th because none of the officers want to be involved in the persecution of Donald Trump."

Let me say that I try to avoid discussing news of this world, especially anything geopolitical. It is nothing more than a diversion from the One who rules in the heavens above. I am making an exception since this could well be a catalyst for major upheavals in the USA and even around the world. Convicting a former President of the United States and candidate nominee for this year's election is an historical first but putting him in prison will be shocking and possibly dangerous. But that is not the REASON I mention it.

Many are acutely aware of End-Time prophecies, at least in the general sense of the terrible events during Jacob's Trouble and the subsequent Great Tribulation. As is the case more often than not, those things that cause the greatest upheavals usually happen shortly before the Feast of Ingathering, the harvest festival that includes the Day of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. While the sentencing of Donald Trump is imaginably one of the worst, it should NOT be a concern of the people of God during this season of His holy convocations.

The Day of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles portray very diverse prophecies—everything from the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD to the rescue of captives and a 1,000 years of peace. But they also represent only a brief moment in time—presumably 2-1/2 years excluding the Day of the LORD (during which time the saints are resurrected).

Even at its worst, what does the coming tribulation mean for the saints? It has, and always will be, a time for fervent PRAYER! During the worst hardship of my life, I prayed as I have never done before or since—literally night and day at one point. Through most of that year, I found myself praying at work and home. My grief was overwhelming and there were many times my "soul abhorred all manner of food" (Ps. 107:18). I prayed because I was completely helpless—I could of my own self do nothing. A few friends tried offered consolations but it was obvious that no one knew how to help. I was truly alone in my suffering.

I tell you this story not for sympathy or recognition but so that you can believe me when I tell you that THE GREATEST TRIUMPH OVER TRIBULATION COMES ONLY THROUGH FERVENT PRAYER. I survived that year, including a miraculous escape from death, with prayer, and God greatly prospered me afterwards. It was through prayer that I came to understand that there is nothing in this world that matters more than our relationship with God. There is nothing in this world that is beyond the power of our "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). It is important to me that you believe these things given the times in which we live.

Even if civil war erupts when Judge Merchan pronounces his sentence or even if Kamala Harris is elected president, do not let fear take hold. Many think that electing Trump will bring temporary prosperity or possibly delay or postpone the inevitable destruction. In essence, that is believing that one man, who does not himself even *know* the Law of God, will change the times that God has reserved to Himself[1]. Great tribulation is coming upon the entire world, including the saints, but Donald Trump is NOT going to change the hearts of the people of this nation, much less this world.

Over the years, many have preached that God withholds from punishing a nation if it repents and turns back to Him. However, that is NOT in the Scriptures. Read Leviticus 26:14-45, which lists the punishments God would put upon Israel if they reject Him. Take note of the fact that God says "I **will** punish you … for your sins" (Lev. 26: 18, 21, 24, 28). Israel's sins *always* brought punishments. Sometimes punishment was mitigated by the prayer of a righteous man such as Moses, but Israel was ALWAYS punished when they sinned:

> JEREMIAH 30:11 For I *am* with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But **I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished**.'
>
> JEREMIAH 46:28 Do not fear, O Jacob My servant," says the LORD, "For I *am* with you; for I will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but I will not make a complete end of you. **I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished.**"

The only nation that comes to mind that repented of their sins and then God withheld His punishment was Nineveh—a *Gentile* nation who were not given the laws of God. The promise of God to the nation of Israel if they repented and turned back to Him was to DELIVER them from their punishment, not withhold it[2]:

[1] Acts 1:7.
[2] Also Deut. 30:1-3.

PSALMS 106:43-45 Many times **He delivered them**; but they rebelled in their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. 44 Nevertheless **He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry**; 45 and for their sake He remembered His covenant, and **relented** *[ease their suffering, not prevent]* according to the multitude of His mercies.

DEUTERONOMY 4:23, 27, 29-31 "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. … 27 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. … 29 "But **from there *[where they were captives]* 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. 30 "**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 31 "(for the LORD your God *is* a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.

God said that He would restore them FROM their punishment if they would turn back to Him while they are being punished. In fact, Israel had to ACCEPT their punishment and acknowledge their sins as a condition of being restored by God:

LEVITICUS 26:40-43 '*But* **if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers**, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, 41 and *that* I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; **if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt *[KJV— accept of the punishment of their iniquity]*** 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. 43 The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; **they will accept their guilt *[KJV— accept of the punishment of their iniquity]***, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes.

The descendants of Jacob have committed egregious sins and will be punished by God. Can anyone honestly believe that electing Donald Trump will delay or postpone it? The sins of the nations in general, may be the main factor in God's timing if their "iniquity *[depravity] is* not yet full" (Gen. 15:14). In other words, they will become much worse as hard as it may be to believe.

Brethren, I urge you to not allow fear of these times affect the holydays, which are to be a time of rejoicing[3]. Whether or not Donald Trump is put in prison and regardless of who is elected president of the USA[4,5] the end will come, bringing hardships upon everyone. But remember what I said about tribulation[6] and afflictions—prayer is our only means of victory over them through God.

With the potential for things to get out of control in a few days, read what could be called the Comfort Chapter. Chapter 14 of John is traditionally read during Passover but

[3] See the Sabbath Thought 2024-08-24 – Days of Rejoicing.
[4] See the Sabbath Thought 2024-08-17 – Authority.
[5] See the Sabbath Thought 2024-08-31 – Does God Appoint Rulers?.
[6] See the Sabbath Thought 2024-08-10 – How to Prepare for The End Times.

it is there anytime we need to be comforted. Let these words be forever in your hearts and minds:

> JOHN 14:1-3, 13-14, 27-28 "**Let not your heart be troubled**; you believe in God, believe also in Me *[Jesus Christ]*. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself**; that where I am, *there* you may be also. … 13 "And **whatever you ask in My name, that I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 "**If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it.*** … 27 "**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you**; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.** 28 "You have heard Me say to you, '**I am going away and coming *back* to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice** because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.

Twice Jesus said not to let your heart be troubled. Twice He promised He is coming back for you. And twice He promised He will do whatsoever you ask of Him. He said these things because God wants to give you the Kingdom:

> LUKE 12:22, 26, 29-32 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, **do not worry about your life**, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. 23 "Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than clothing. … 26 "If you then are not able to do *the* least, why are you anxious for the rest? … 29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. 30 "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and **your Father knows that you need these things**. 31 "But **seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added** to you. 32 "Do not fear, little flock, for **it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom**.

You may have not noticed before, but the word for "good pleasure" is the same word used when God said of Jesus Christ, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am **well pleased**."[7] The English translation is an absolute understatement. Who can imagine the "width and length and depth and height"[8] of God's love for Jesus Christ? God;s desire to give the Kingdom to His saints is nothing less than His love for His own Son. Whatever happens, now or in the future, always remember that God "**gives us the victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ."[9] That is why the greatest triumph over any tribulation comes through fervent prayer!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[7] Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22.
[8] Eph. 3:18.
[9] 1 Cor. 15:57.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-09-21—OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

One of the most widely recognized scriptures in the Bible is puzzling. It describes the time when children were brought to Jesus, likely by their parents, for Him to bless:

> MARK 10:13-16 Then they brought little children to Him *[Jesus Christ]*, that He might touch them; but **the disciples rebuked those who brought *them***. 14 But when Jesus saw *it*, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

What is bothersome is that some or all of the twelve disciples tried to keep the children from coming to Jesus. Why in the world would they do that? It is not as if Jesus had ever given them any indication that He had ever refused to see anyone before. In fact, He dedicated His life and ministry to the people by feeding, teaching, and healing them. He did it almost to exhaustion because there were times He needed to be alone with His Father[1] to be rejuvenated.

What were the disciples thinking that they would deny the parents access to Jesus? Did they consider children to be a waste of Jesus' time because of their age? Were they so ingrained with the ways of the priests and scribes who thought they were more important than the common people that they tried to shut them out of the Kingdom[2]? Regardless, Jesus was "greatly displeased" with the disciples. Their true motives at the time may never be known but their behavior is still baffling.

The parents wanted Jesus to "touch" their children. The word in the Greek implies a very intimate and caring love. It means to attach oneself to or take hold of in the sense of a deep relationship similar to that with a spouse. Jesus was not a stranger to the parents. They obviously followed Him, listened to Him, and believed He is the Messiah. They wanted their children to be blessed by the Son of God. Perhaps they were moved by the words of Jesus when He said:

> MATTHEW 18:3-5 and said, "Assuredly, I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "**Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.**"

[1] Matt. 14:23; Luke 9:18.
[2] Matt. 23:13.

The main point of this story is that Jesus said "of such *[little children]* **is** the kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God will consist of innocent, meek, loving, and obedient children. This is exactly what is described in the Beatitudes: the eternal Kingdom of God will be filled with children who are humble, meek, righteous, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers:

> MATTHEW 5: 3-9 "Blessed *are* the **poor *[humble]* in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven**. 4 Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed *are* the **meek, for they shall inherit the earth**. 6 Blessed *are* those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled**. 7 Blessed *are* the **merciful, for they shall obtain mercy**. 8 Blessed *are* the **pure in heart, for they shall see God**. 9 Blessed *are* the **peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God**.

The Kingdom of God is captured in a vision of the New Heavens and New Earth where the city of New Jerusalem descends out of heaven "having the **glory of God**!"[3] If flesh and blood cannot look upon the glory of the face of God without perishing[4], that is a glory that cannot be imagined. The city and the streets are made entirely of transparent gold. There is a great high wall around it made of jasper with twelve gates, each made of a single pearl, and an angel beside each one. The wall sits on twelve foundations made of twelve precious stones[5].

Is this your vision of the Kingdom of God? I hope so. You should dwell upon this amazing eternity where all will "rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). It will be a time when "**the increase of *His* [empire] and peace *there will be* no end**, upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to order it and **establish it with judgment and with justice** from that time forward, even **forever**." (Isa. 9:7).

But how will this be possible? That might sound like an odd question, but consider how it can be possible for rejoicing, joy unspeakable, peace, and justice to *increase* for all eternity? Simplistically, one could say it will just happen because New Jerusalem "is the city of the **Great King**"[6]. God the Father possesses all power, might, majesty, glory, and honor so He will just cause it to happen. That is not very satisfying because the answer is foundational to what the Kingdom IS. *What* the Kingdom will be in all its glory is described in Revelation 21. But *how* this eternally increases is dependent upon the character of those who *reside* in it.

Think of it this way. Few people buy a house they personally designed and built. A husband usually evaluates the construction and practical aspects of a house; however, it is the wife who personalizes it. The furniture, colors, artwork, family photos, etc. reflects the uniqueness, taste, and character of the woman. These things make a house into a home, more than the design and construction. Visitors see the personality of the woman mirrored in those things.

---

[3] Rev. 21:10.
[4] Exod. 33:20.
[5] Rev. 21:11-21.
[6] Matthew 5:35.

The same is true in the Kingdom. In all its glory, the city of New Jerusalem will be so much more than anyone can dream or imagine. But, just like a house, the city of New Jerusalem will reflect the character of those who inhabit it—in this case it is the Wife of the Son of God! New Jerusalem is a city "**prepared as a Bride** adorned for her Husband" (Rev. 21:2)! How is the Bride of Christ prepared? In every way that will be pleasing to her Husband! Everything about her will be PERFECTION—her heart, beauty, humility, conduct, service, smile, joy, and conversation. She will be the perfect Bride whose Husband presents her to His Father in a glorious ceremony. Her home will reflect that perfection as well. The city of New Jerusalem is like a home prepared and adorned by the Bride for her Husband and it mirrors her perfection.

Someone entering into New Jerusalem through one of the twelve gates will know that the Wife of Jesus Christ lives there because it will reflect her humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, pure heart, and peace.

> REVELATION 21:24-25 And **the nations of those who are saved** shall walk in its *[New Jerusalem]* light, and **the kings of the earth** bring their glory and honor into it *[New Jerusalem]*. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

The New Jerusalem is the city of the Great King, His Son, and the Son's Bride. Those who would live in the city of New Jerusalem must PREPARE *before* they take up residence there and it all comes down to BECOMING agape love as God is and DOING good works.

I speak about those two topics often because they define the perfect character of God the Father and Jesus Christ!! Anyone who is *not* becoming agape love and dedicating their lives to serving others will NOT be a part of it. That is the parable of the sheep and goats:

THE SHEEP:

> MATTHEW 25:34-36 "Then the King *[Jesus Christ]* will say to those *[the sheep]* on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'**

THE GOATS:

> MATTHEW 25:41-43 "Then He *[Jesus Christ]* will also say to those *[the goats]* on the left hand, '**Depart from Me, you cursed**, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: **42 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'**

Those who fail to grow in agape love and do good works in this life are also likened to the five foolish virgins who are found lacking (Matt. 25:1-12). They will be shut out of the wedding and Jesus Christ will say, "I do not know you". Those who fail to grow their "talents" will end up weeping and gnashing their teeth (Matt. 25:14-30) when they are denied entry "into the joy of [the] Lord" and "cast … into outer darkness."

All these parables portray the only two outcomes for everyone called and chosen by God. The children of God either become agape love and do good works … or not. Those who want to live in the city of New Jerusalem are zealously doing these things NOW, in this life. The city of New Jerusalem will be overwhelmingly inviting, secure, beautiful, comfortable, peaceful, generous, calm, and loving—a place where everyone desires to be and where all are welcome. Entering into that home will be an unimaginable experience of perfect agape love where all are served.

The Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost are Covenant Days. Passover is the blood of the New Covenant, Days of Unleavened Bread are liberty from sin into the righteousness of God, and Pentecost is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. These days are pieces of our covenant with God.

The Feast of Ingathering (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles) are Kingdom Days. They portray the destruction of the wicked, liberation of the world from sin, and the offering of eternal life to mankind. When all is finished, God will "make all things new"[7]—a New Heavens and a New Earth—and the city of New Jerusalem in all its glory will descend to the New Earth. This is the realization of the eternal Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Ingathering portrays the final destruction of evil and a universal transformation into righteousness and agape love that completes the Plan of Salvation of God the Father and His Son. A true vision of the Kingdom is more than a mind's eye picture of new stars and planets or a glorious city of gold. It includes the CHARACTER of the inhabitants perfected in agape love, service, peace, and joy. The Kingdom of God is a place where "God may be **all in all**"[8] for *eternity*! This is *how* "**the increase of *His* [empire] and peace *there will be* no end**"—it happens because the character of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Bride is perfect agape love!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[7] Rev. 21:5.
[8] 1 Cor. 15:18; Eph 1:23.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-09-28—PURPOSE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The holyday known as Trumpets is one that is filled with contradictions of dread and hope. Revelation provides the most detailed description of the End Time events, which consist of Seven Seals that can only be opened by the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ. These seals encompass the Tribulation and Day of the LORD but the vengeance of God is covered in the seven trumpets of the Seventh Seal:

> JEREMIAH 46:10 For this *is* **the day of the Lord** GOD of hosts, **a day of vengeance**, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; it shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates.

> DEUTERONOMY 32:35, 41 **Vengeance is Mine *[the LORD's],* and recompense**; their foot shall slip in *due* time; for **the day of their calamity** *is* at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them.' … 41 If I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, **I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me**.

Even though Trumpets is called a *day*, the Wrath of God will span an entire year:

> ISAIAH 61:2 To proclaim **the acceptable year** of the LORD, and **the day of vengeance of our God**; To comfort all who mourn,

> ISAIAH 34:8 For *it is* **the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense** for the cause of Zion.

> ISAIAH 63:4 For **the day of vengeance** *is* in My heart, and **the year** of My redeemed has come.

The first six seals are destructions unleashed upon the descendants of Jacob by the Beast, who is the ruler of the last manifestation of the ancient Babylonian system. Once the first six seals are finished, things then change and the punisher (Babylon) of Israel becomes the target of God's wrath. This is the purpose of the Day of Trumpets—the year of His vengeance upon Babylon:

> JEREMIAH 51:6-8, 11 Flee from the midst of **Babylon**, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for **this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance**; He shall recompense her. 7 Babylon *was* a golden cup in the LORD's hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations are deranged. 8 **Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.** Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. … 11 Make the arrows bright! Gather the shields! The LORD has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes. For **His plan *is* against Babylon to destroy it, because it *is* the vengeance of the LORD**, the vengeance for His temple.

The sequence of the Seven Trumpets is contained within the Seventh Seal:

REVELATION 8:1-2, 4-6 When He *[the Lamb]* opened **the seventh seal**, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw **the seven angels** who stand before God, and **to them were given seven trumpets**. … 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. 6 So **the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound**.

The Seventh Seal is unique from the first six. When it is opened, it begins with a half-hour of silence in heaven (Rev. 8:1). Perhaps this is similar to a "*selah*" used in the Psalms where this pause emphasizes and distinguishes the works of God during the Seventh Seal from the works of the Beast during the first six seals. Just as the first six seals are unique from the seventh, the first six trumpets of the Seventh Seal are unique from the Seventh Trumpet:

- Trumpet #1: Hail and fire mixed with blood cast to the earth—1/3 of trees and all grass burned up (Rev. 8:7).
- Trumpet #2: Mountain of fire cast into the sea—1/3 of the sea becomes blood, 1/3 of sea life dies, and 1/3 of ships are destroyed (Rev. 8:8-9).
- Trumpet #3: Burning star called Wormwood falls from heaven on 1/3 of rivers and springs—1/3 of rivers and springs are poisoned and "many" die (Rev. 8:10-11).
- Trumpet #4: 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars darkened for 1/3 of the day and 1/3 of the night (Rev. 8:12). Three angels proclaim the three Woes (Rev. 8:13).
- Trumpet #5 (WOE #1): The "Destroyer" (Abaddon, Apollyon) king and his "locusts" released from the bottomless pit to torment those who are not sealed by God for 5 months (Rev. 9:1-12).
- Trumpet #6 (WOE #2): Four angels (demons) with an army of 200 million released to kill 1/3 of mankind (Rev. 9:13-21). The following events are included with the sixth trumpet (Rev. 11:14):
  - The Seven Thunders are spoken but not recorded and the apostle John eats the Little Book and prophesies (Rev. 10:1-11).
  - The Jerusalem and the Temple outer court are trampled by Gentiles 42 months (Rev. 11:1-2).
  - Two Witnesses testify 1,260 days against the world, are killed by the "Destroyer" (Abaddon, Apollyon), and are resurrected after 3-1/2 days (Rev. 11:3-12).
  - A Great Earthquake destroys 1/10 of Jerusalem and kills 7,000 residents (Rev. 11:13).

Trumpet #1-6 are destructions directed mostly at the environment of the earth, which will make it extremely difficult for human life to exist under any economic system. Even though more than 1/3 of mankind dies during these six trumpets, the worst is yet to come.

- Trumpet #7 (Prelude to the Vial Plagues):

- God & Jesus Christ take over and reign over the kingdoms of this world. (Rev. 11:15.)
- The 24 Elders praise God and declare the coming Wrath of God and the reward of the saints (Rev. 11:16-18).
- Declarations of the three angels (Rev. 14:6-11).
- Jesus Christ "reaps" the "harvest" of the earth—Presumably the saints (Rev. 14:12-16).

NOTES ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS:

The "year of *[i.e.,* for*]* my redeemed" indicates the saints are resurrected when the Seventh Trumpet is sounded to announce the year of the Wrath of God:

> ISAIAH 63:4 For the day of vengeance *is* in Mine heart, and **the year of My redeemed** is come.

This fulfills the promise that the saints will witness the vengeance of God upon the earth, which lasts a year:

> PSALM 58:10 **The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance**; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked,

- An angel "reaps" the earth into the Great Winepress of the Wrath of God—Blood reaches to the horse bridles for 1,600 furlongs (200 miles) (Rev. 14:17-20; Joel 3:9-15).

The Seventh Trumpet is then divided into seven Vial Plagues that target Babylon. Just as the first six trumpets differed from the seventh, the first six Vial Plagues also differ from the seventh. All seven Vial Plagues are directed against the Beast, the False Prophet, and Babylon. The first five cause great suffering for those who worship the Beast and the sixth is when the armies of the Beast and False Prophet prepare to battle against God Almighty. The seventh is the total destruction of Babylon. There are seven angels who bring the seven vials containing the vengeance of God (Rev. 15:1-8; 16:1).

- **Trumpet #7 (cont.)—Woe #3 = Vial Plagues:**
  - Vial Plague #1: Poured upon the earth causing grievous sores upon those with the Mark of the Beast or who worship his image (Rev. 16:2).
  - Vial Plague #2: Poured upon the sea turning it to blood and killing all sea life (Rev. 16:3).
  - Vial Plague #3: Poured upon rivers and springs turning them to blood (Rev. 16:4).
  - Vial Plague #4: Poured upon the sun to scorch men with fire and heat (Rev. 16:8-9).
  - Vial Plague #5: Poured upon the kingdom of the Beast causing darkness (blindness), anguish, and ulcers (Rev. 16:10-11).
  - Vial Plague #6: Poured upon the Euphrates River to dry it up and allow the armies of the Kings of the East to cross and three demons come out of the

dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet to gather the nations to the battle of Armageddon against Jesus Christ (Rev. 16:12-16).

- Vial Plague #7: Poured into the air causing an earthquake that divides Babylon into three parts, destroys the cities of the nations, causes islands and mountains to disappear, and brings 14" hail weighing 50 pounds upon all mankind (Rev. 16:17-21). Jesus Christ returns, accompanied by the armies of heaven, and casts the Beast and False Prophet into the Lake of Fire and slays their armies (Rev. 19:11-21). After this Satan is imprisoned in the abyss (Rev. 20:1-3).

The seven Vial Plagues are so destructive that perhaps only a TENTH of the world's population survives:

> ISAIAH 6:11-13 Then I *[Isaiah]* said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "**Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate *[the result of the destruction throughout the seventh Trumpet]***, 12 The LORD has removed men far away, and the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land. 13 But yet **a tenth *will be* in it, and will return** and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, **whose stump *remains*** when it is cut down. So **the holy seed *shall be* its stump**."

The Day of Trumpets is a time of unimaginable terrors and death against the wicked. But it is also the realization of the great hope of all the captives who will turn back to God. The world is scorched and dead but the remaining survivors will be liberated from captivity (pictured by Atonement). The vengeance of God is led by Jesus Christ, who is the King Immanuel prophesied to return restore the earth:

> MALACHI 4:1-3 "For behold, **the day is coming**, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But **to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness *[Jesus Christ]* shall arise with healing in His wings**; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*," Says the LORD of hosts.

Our Saviors, God the Father[1] and Jesus Christ, will bring healing and peace to the world for the first time. Ultimately, that is the purpose of the Day of Trumpets—to prepare a world for 1,000 years of peace. It is much more than destruction and suffering—it brings about a New Beginning for US and the WORLD!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[1] Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 1:25.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-10-05—WHAT WILL REMAIN WHEN WHAT YOU KNOW VANISHES?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

These well-known verses have been rightly expounded for decades—Jesus never kept or eliminated the Law of God for anyone:

> MATTHEW 5:17-18 "Do not think that I *[Jesus Christ]* came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but **to fulfill**. 18 "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is **fulfilled**.

Protestants seem to gloss over what Jesus meant by coming to "fulfill" (verse 17) the Law of God. The word simply means He added a key element that was missing. If asked what that is, some might say the missing element is the Holy Spirit and they would be right to a certain extent. The real missing key element, however, is agape love. That might sound trivial but it is vitally important to distinguish between fulfilling the Law of God in a spiritual sense versus with agape love. True, the Law of God cannot be understood much less fulfilled without the Holy Spirit:

> EZEKIEL 36:26-27 "I *[the Lord GOD]* will give you a new heart and put **a new spirit** within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "**I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes**, and you will keep My judgments and do *them.*

Does strictly keeping the God's statutes guarantee salvation? No, because it is impossible to truly *fulfill* the Law of God without agape love:

> MATTHEW 5:19-20 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments *[NONE perfectly keep the 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. 20 "For I say to you, that **unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven**.

Righteousness is perfectly keeping the Law of God[1]. Can anyone today claim they know and understand the laws, statutes, precepts, and testimonies better than the scribes and Pharisees? It was their culture, language, history, and education for generations. They understood and kept the Law of God better than most today. But for them, fulfilling the Law of God meant adding more of their own laws on top of it in an effort to force people to keep the Law. Obviously, they did not understand the PURPOSE of the Law of God:

> 1 TIMOTHY 1:5 Now **the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure *[agape]* heart**, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith,

What did Jesus mean when He said that nothing will pass from the Law until all is fulfilled?

[1] Ps. 119:172.

MATTHEW 5:18 "For assuredly, I say to you, **till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled *[comes into being]***.

It seems obvious that when "all is fulfilled" (literally, *come into being*) and the First Heaven and First Earth pass away, then some parts of the Law of God will disappear while others will remain. What will 'come into being' (be fulfilled)? What will NEVER pass away?

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8 ***[Agape]* love never fails *[lit., drop away].*** …

This is profoundly important. First Corinthians chapter 13 is referred to as the Love Chapter and it has to be one of the most read in the Bible. However, there are signs that too many do not truly understand it. Agape love fulfills the Law of God AND agape love covers all sins[2]. It is one thing that will *never* pass away! This was not addressed to pagans or the unconverted—Paul was writing to those with the Holy Spirit in Corinth. Obviously, not all had agape love when he said:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 Though I *[Paul]* speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but **have not *[agape]* love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal**. 2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but **have not *[agape]* love, I am nothing.** 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor,* and though I give my body to be burned, **but have not *[agape]* love, it profits me nothing**.

Having the Holy Spirit does *not* guarantee a person is growing in agape love. Having biblical knowledge or understanding of prophecies are not substitutes for agape love. Having an in-depth grasp of Hebrew or Greek is not a substitute for agape love. Memorizing dozens of scriptures is not a substitute for agape love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-10, 12-13 … **But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.** 9 For we know **in part** and we prophesy **in part**. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then **that which is in part will be done away *[lit. rendered idle]***. … 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I **know in part**, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 13 And now abide faith, hope, *[agape]* love, these three; but **the greatest of these *is* *[agape]* love**.

Trumpets is the beginning of the end of this age when the "part" of prophecies and knowledge that is understood by anyone will be "**done away.**" The events portrayed by the Feast of Ingathering are finishied when "all is fulfilled" and the First Heaven and First Earth are dissolved[3]:

2 PETER 3:10-12 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which **the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up**. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat**?

[2] Prov. 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8.
[3] Also Ps. 75:2-3; Isa. 34:4; 51:6.

Let that sink in. Everything you and I understand about biblical prophecies and knowledge will be "done away." Elsewhere in the Bible this same word is translated make void, without effect, destroyed, abolished, cease, released, delivered from, come to nothing, fail, vanish, put down, etc. Get the picture? Peter said that everything will vanish and asks, "What manner *of persons* **ought you to be** in holy conduct and godliness?" (v. 11). What is godliness? A state or quality of being like God! What is the most defining characteristic of God? "**God is *[agape]* love.**"[4] Having biblical knowledge, understanding prophecies, and keeping the Law of God serve no purpose unless they are part of a journey to perfection of agape love. Knowledge is part of that path but it is misplaced at best unless the result is agape love:

> 2 PETER 1:5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your **faith** virtue, to **virtue** knowledge, 6 to **knowledge** self-control, to **self-control** perseverance, to **perseverance** godliness, 7 to **godliness** brotherly kindness, and to **brotherly kindness *[agape]* love**.

Of the eight stages to agape love, knowledge is only the third one. There are FIVE stages of growth that follow. Growth ends with agape love because the result is a BOND between people and God:

> COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.* 14 **But above all these things put on *[agape]* love, which is the bond of perfection.**

Bond is from a word that refers to the ligament that connects two parts of a joint. Agape love creates a perfect bond. It is the only thing that establishes peace. It is the only thing that binds us with God the Father and Jesus Christ[5]:

> JOHN 17:23 "I *[Jesus Christ]* in them, and You *[God the Father]* in Me; that **they *[the saints]* may be made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

NOWHERE in the Bible does it say that biblical knowledge or understanding prophecies perfect us and bind us to God. Only agape love. Those who fail to grasp this could wind up in this sad state:

> 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5, 7 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! … 7 *[these people are]* **always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**.

How do I know they do not grasp their condition? Because conversations abound that focus on prophecies and knowledge. It is evident by how some respond to those who disagree with them. It is particularly obvious when my articles on agape love have the

[4] 1 John 4:8, 16.
[5] Also 1 John 4:16-17.

least number of views and very few, if any, comments. What topics have the most? Prophecies and knowledge—those things that will vanish. The conclusion seems obvious …

On the other hand, some do not comment because they fear they will be castigated or criticized (by me or someone else). Let me assure you that I will *never* do that nor will I allow it from others. The fact that this fear exists at all is a very sad indictment of the *ekklesia*. Knowledge and understanding are things to seek after, but without agape love, they are NOTHING:

> COLOSSIANS 2:2-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, being **knit together in *[agape]* love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God**, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**.

No one will ever have anything except a small part of the knowledge and understanding of God or the Bible. In fact, much of it is hidden from us. However, these are things to be shared in agape love for the purpose of edifying (building up) the Body of Christ INTO agape love:

> EPHESIANS 4:11-16 And He *[Jesus Christ]* Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, **speaking the truth in *[agape]* love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head–Christ– 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in *[agape]* love**.

Every individual has a part in supplying the needs of the Body of Christ. Every individual has a responsibility to edify and build up the Body of Christ. But if it is not done in agape love, the result is destructive. "Speaking the truth in ***[agape]* love**" is a commandment, not a request because this is how the whole Body grows up into Christ, the Head of the Body.

Knowledge and understanding without agape love are NOTHING. They are not even fruits of the Spirit! Those who are becoming agape love are well-pleasing to God because the Kingdom of God will be filled with "little children"[6] whose greatest attribute is agape love. So, what will remain when your knowledge and understanding vanishes?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[6] Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-10-12—CRY OUT TO GOD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Atonement, like other holydays, begins with the sound of a trumpet. But this is a special and unique declaration when this trumpet is blown:

> LEVITICUS 25:9 'Then you shall cause **the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement** you shall **make the trumpet to sound** throughout all your land.

This trumpet announces the start of the Jubilee year which is a year of 'returning':

> LEVITICUS 25:10 'And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of **you shall return *[H7725* = shuwb*]* to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family**.

The Jubilee is a year when debts are forgiven and bondservants are released to return to their homes, lands, and families. Someone who could only repay a debt by indenturing himself as a bondservant must have looked forward to Atonement and the Jubilee as one of the most joyous events in their life. Oh, to be liberated from debt and servitude!

But there is coming the greatest Jubilee yet—the rescue and return of the captives out of the Tribulation and Day of the Lord:

> EZEKIEL 20:33-34 "*As* I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. 34 "**I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered**, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out.
>
> ISAIAH 61:1-2 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, **to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; 2 to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD *[the Atonement Jubilee]***, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,

Having endured the most devastating conditions since the creation of mankind, the people that survive are crushed mentally, emotionally, and spiritually:

> PSALMS 107: 2-7, 10-14, 16-20, 23-28 Let **the redeemed *[rescued captives]* of the LORD** say *so,* whom **He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy**, 3 and **gathered out of the lands**, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. 4 **They wandered in the wilderness** in a desolate way *[desert]*; they found no city to dwell in. 5 **Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted** in them. 6 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *and* He delivered them** out of their

distresses. 7 And **He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city *[Jerusalem]*** for a dwelling place. … 10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons– 11 because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High, 12 therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. 13 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *and* He saved them** out of their distresses. 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces. … 16 For He has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two. 17 Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. 18 Their soul abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. 19 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *and* He saved them** out of their distresses. 20 He sent His word and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. … 23 Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, 24 They see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. 25 For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. 26 They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. 27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. 28 Then **they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses**.

Even their will to live is gone (v. 18). So is it any wonder that they CRY OUT to God? In this state, God encourages them to turn back to Him:

JOEL 2:12-13 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "**Turn *[H7725* = shuwb*]* to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning**." 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; **return *[H7725* = shuwb*]* to the LORD** your God, for He *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

The Hebrew word translated *turn* literally means to *turn back* or *return*. It is also used in Leviticus 25:10 (mentioned earlier) that describes the Jubilee of the Day of Atonement as a time when all return "**to his possession, and … to his family**". So, Atonement and the Jubilee is when Jesus Christ rescues the remnant of the earth from death who are captives during the Tribulation and Day of the Lord's vengeance. These people are so distraught that they cry out to God and are WEEPING, FASTING, and MOURNING! But God will hear them and save them:

ISAIAH 49:7-9 Thus says the LORD *[God the Father]*, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One *[Jesus Christ]*, to Him *[Jesus Christ]* whom man despises, to Him *[Jesus Christ]* whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He *[God the Father]* has chosen You *[Jesus Christ]*." 8 Thus says the LORD: "**In an acceptable time I *[God the Father]* have heard You *[Jesus Christ],* and in the day of salvation I *[God the Father]* have helped You *[Jesus Christ]*; I *[God the Father]* will preserve You *[Jesus Christ]*** and give You *[Jesus Christ]* As a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate

heritages; 9 that **You *[Jesus Christ]* may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,' *[out of captivity]*** to those who *are* in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' "They *[the captives]* shall feed along the roads, and their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights.

All those rescued by Jesus Christ are then brought to Jerusalem:

ISAIAH 27:13 So it shall be in that day: **the great trumpet *[of the Jubilee]* will be blown; they *[the captives]* will come, who are about to perish in** the land of Assyria, and **they who are outcasts** in the land of Egypt, and **shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem**.

These people are the 'seed' of the Millennium. The 1,000 year rule of Christ begins with these surviving captives. One can barely imagine the devastation, hurt, distress, and grief of these people. They are saved because they CRY OUT to God for deliverance because they are starving of hunger, have tears running down their faces, and grieve for all their family and friends who died. The end of the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord truly is with a people who are fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Atonement and the Jubilee can be hard to understand since the fulfillment of it is still something in the future. For most, life is still very peaceful even though we personally suffer all manner of afflictions. The majority of God's children are not captives who are tormented and tortured by wicked men. So what does this day signify for us?

I believe Atonement can only truly be understood in terms of "CRYING OUT to God" whenever we are troubled by afflictions, persecutions, poverty, illness, and grief. Whether we of the Body of Christ have endured terrible sorrow or suffering or witnessed it in others, we can understand the depths of grief and sorrow that bring about an attitude of fasting, weeping, and mourning. If we are truly children of God, we certainly cry out to Him during these times. It is not something we can withhold from doing. It is a natural response because Jesus Christ truly knows our sorrows and sufferings—"He is despised and rejected by men, **a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**." (Isa. 53:3).

The Psalms reflect this more than any other books of the Bible. There are almost twice as many mentions of the Psalmists "CRYING OUT to God" including in Psalm 107 (above) where the captives cry out to God four times. Here are a few others:

PSALM 18:6 **In my distress** I called upon the LORD, and **cried out to my God**; He heard my voice from His temple, and **my cry came before Him**, *even* into His ears.

PSALMS 22:5, 24 **They cried to You**, and **were delivered**; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed. … 24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but **when He cried to Him, He heard**.

PSALMS 30:2, 8 O LORD my God, **I cried out to You**, and **You healed me**. … 8 **I cried out to You**, O LORD; and to the LORD I made supplication:

PSALMS 34:6, 15, 17 This poor man **cried out**, and the LORD heard *him*, and **saved him** out of all his troubles. … 15 The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, and **His ears *are open* to their cry**. … 17 ***The righteous* cry out**, and the LORD hears, and **delivers them** out of all their troubles.

PSALMS 61:1-2 **Hear my cry**, O God; attend to my prayer. 2 From the end of the earth **I will cry to You**, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the Rock *[Jesus Christ]* that is higher than I.

PSALMS 88:1-2, 13 O LORD, God of my salvation, **I have cried out** day and night before You. 2 Let my prayer come before You; **incline Your ear to my cry**. … 13 But **to You I have cried out**, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.

PSALM 145:19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will **hear their cry and save them**.

This life is sure to bring upon us times of great distress and grief. Those who survive the Tribulation and Day of the Lord will experience this to the core of their being. Crying out to God in the depths of fasting, weeping, and mourning absolutely gains the attention of our Father who promises to hear our prayers and attend to our needs. But sorrow, affliction, and grief will not continue forever because we can hold on to this promise:

REVELATION 21:4 "And **God will wipe away every tear** from their eyes; **there shall be no more** death, nor sorrow, nor **crying**. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Jesus Christ is called the Rock because He is an anchor for us to hold on to in the worst of life's storms. But Jesus also makes a promise that will make it all worthwhile:

JOHN 16:20, 22 "Most assuredly, I say to you that **you will weep and lament**, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, **but your sorrow will be turned into joy**. … 22 "Therefore you now have sorrow; but **I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-11-02—WHO WILL BE ELECTED?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The 2024 presidential election is a few days away and the entire world seems to be completely engulfed with feelings that this is either the beginning of the end or a possible reprieve for all of mankind. This is, perhaps, the most divided election in the history of this country.

Conservatives spend their time railing against the rampant lies on liberal media and beating the drum of God, family, and patriotism that long ago lost the audience of the younger generations that followed the Baby Boomers. The liberals' irrational hatred of Donald Trump is as intense as is their promotion of racism, perversion, hatred, injustice, and violence. They do not even try to hide their glee when attempts are made to assassinate the former president. Conservatives are frustrated because, regardless of how loudly they yell, liberals pay them no heed. Liberals have a captive audience who is only interested in anything that fuels their so-called righteous anger against Donald Trump.

The fact is that none of the voices are going to change the mind of any liberal or conservative. Each partisan group made their choice years ago. Only the few who wear the label of Independent are still trying to make up their minds. But they can never garner enough support for their own candidate and do not like either of the other two. A Democrat candidate is too liberal and the Republican candidate is too compromising. For independents, it is all or nothing. Either the candidate absolutely represents their cause du jour or not. They will even vote *against* the one that more closely represents their interests out of spite (or ignorance). Independents foolishly believe they have much of a voice. They think they can refuse to compromise on anything in politics and win. Most times they just make it harder for Republicans.

In many regards, the outcome of the election will be dull. If the Democrat wins, then the economy and society will continue to sink into the morass of economic, judicial, and geopolitical catastrophes. If the Republican is elected, there might be somewhat of an economic recovery and a slight reduction in the level of the political swamp but the abyss of government and non-government agencies, wealthy liberal elite, and permanent insiders is one that likely has no discoverable bottom.

There is no doubt that pure evil has infected a large portion of the population. Schools teach reverse discrimination and call it Critical Race Theory; corporations are run by the greedy woke idiots; perverted pro-transgender adherents indoctrinate and mutilate children; multi-trillion dollar government appropriations fund absurd programs and increase the unrepayable debt; conservatives are unjustly and viciously persecuted in courts while judges hold no one accountable and let criminals go free; weak US diplomats are confused about who are enemies; foreign policy actually funds the weaponry of our worst foes while our ally Israel is militarily hogtied by the government and persecuted under anti-Semitism; illegal aliens devastate the economies of cities where they rule the streets robbing and murdering; law enforcement officials are defunded, disparaged, and criminally

prosecuted for upholding the law; military leaders are inept cowards; etc. The list goes on and on and on. The outrage is real and justified.

However, it is too late for outrage. The problem is not the behaviors that result in so much madness, but the thinking behind it all. This had its beginnings at the start of the 20th century if not before. Up until now, the proponents of Marxism and Socialism over the years were a handful of mostly ignored authors and few of their followers. They conceived and debated their ideas in the darkness of backrooms filled with marijuana smoke. Today, however, a critical mass has been achieved in the numbers of people who are convinced that through chaos and lawlessness they can have power and wealth. Who can blame them? Those seeking power promote socialism to attract voters with free handouts. Those seeking wealth promote more government spending as the means to fund their personal bank accounts. These temptations have always been around but now they are mainstream practices. As the Bible says, "the love of money is a root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10).

Now that enough of the population has enjoined themselves to this wickedness—the practice of evil—everything that was established under rules of good and decent behavior is now at risk. The corruption behind elections is a prime example where a few people altered the outcome of entire federal elections. Wealthy elites install puppets who count the votes and judges to quash any complaints. Corruption is rampant in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government. So, what is the solution according to conservatives? To reelect Trump and flood Congress with more Republicans who, by the way, never get along with each other so they are rarely a majority. If successful, they naively think they can restore the country by enacting more laws to prevent future illicit behaviors.

But what will that change? Seriously. Does anyone believe that trying to elect a Republican government every two to four years is effective or, for that matter, even possible? Why does anyone believe that legislating against Marxist or Socialist agendas is a solution? Those who scheme against conservative values have already demonstrated that they cannot be stopped by any of the millions of existing laws. Liberals in the justice system protect the criminals and traitors who, in turn, keep them in power by any means necessary. And greed keeps their numbers growing.

The problem is not criminal behaviors, it is wicked THINKING! With a critical mass of people who simply ignore the laws and are protected from punishment, laws are useless. It does not matter if the majority of the nation wants a return to a system founded upon "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all." Those who reject the notion of societal laws, even if they are forced to abide by them, continue their rebellion in their *minds*. At their core, "every imagination of the thoughts of *their* hearts *is* only **evil continually**" (Gen 6:5). They will never stop THINKING evil and they will never stop TEACHING their children to think evil. It does not require a majority of the population to be wicked to destroy a nation. Only enough to control the media, use violence, lie, cheat, steal, etc. and conservatives will be rendered helpless because they have no weapons to fight such evil. They still believe there is power in the rule of law. One side thinks that this fight has rules while the other ignores them completely. Eventually, liberals will win and establish laws that

support their evil ways. When that happens, the entire conservative population will be isolated in a mental prison of fear and impotence even though they might be the majority.

If the problem is a growing population of evil-thinkers, what can be done about it? Nothing. This nation legally removed the one deterrent to evil thinking back in 1962 and 1963 when prayer, and then the Bible, were banned in public schools. Without the Bible and a relationship with God, there is no way to instill right-thinking, much less RIGHTEOUS-thinking, in a nation. But well before the early 60s the mind and hearts of many were already rebelling against God. Once this nation eliminated God from everything, wickedness stepped in to replace Him. Parents long ago abdicated teaching their children to the government. The same thing happened to Adam and Eve—Satan successfully convinced Adam and Eve to change HOW they think. What was the solution? God eventually had to kill every single person on the earth except for righteous Noah and his family.

In this age of mankind, once a person begins to think evil, it seems there is no solution except to wipe them out. The alternative for mainstream Christians is a false hope that these people can be turned back to obey God and His Word with a fifteen minute sermon telling them "God loves you." Does that sound like a possibility in today's world? Absolutely not. "Many are called, but **few** are chosen" (Mat 20:16). Only those who follow the insatiable desire of God's call to repent will change their hearts and minds. For this reason, there is coming a Day of the LORD—the vengeance of God—on a corrupt and evil-thinking world.

So, do not expect the elections this year to make a difference—or future elections. Do not look to Trump or any other person for change. Do not expect conservative masses to rise up and restore this nation to lawful obedience. As God says:

> JEREMIAH 17:5 Thus says the LORD: "**Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man** and makes flesh his strength, **whose heart departs from the LORD**.

The full list of those "curses" is in Deuteronomy 27-28. It is hard to read. There are twelve curses in chapter 27 and dozens more in chapter 28. Then there are the four groups of curses in Leviticus 26 where each curse is seven times more than the previous one. The last one promises cannibalism of children, death, and enslavement. Even all these are not enough to prevent the heart of mind of BOTH liberals as well as conservatives from rejecting God:

> JEREMIAH 17:9 "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things,* and desperately wicked; who can know it?

Do not expect this country to change for the better. Too many evil-thinkers abound and they are teaching their ways to the last few generations, the next generation, and every generation after that. No one can stop the rise of those that "draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin with cart ropes" (Isa 5:18). The end of all this is set. Change can now only come through their destruction by the vengeance of God, who

will start a new age with the few remaining people who have "a poor and contrite spirit and who tremble at My Word" (Isa 66:2).

The course of the wicked is plotted and their ship has sailed, but God will not let them reach their destination. God has planned from before the foundation of the world to create a family of righteous-thinking and love-filled children. God sacrificed His very own Son for that purpose and no one will prevent His victory! That is our hope … our vision … our salvation.

This election, whatever the outcome, will not change the fact that this country will fall. It cannot be saved. No president of the USA can stop the inevitable outcome. But that is actually the good news. The inevitable outcome of humans is a catastrophe but the inevitable outcome of God is salvation, eternity, peace, and joy. The end IS assured. Be "not doubting at all because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven by the wind and tossed to and fro" (Jas 1:6). Do not build your house upon the sand, but upon the rock who is Christ. Wait "for the city with the foundations of which God is the Architect and Builder" (Heb 11:10). God's people just need to remember WHO is the source of their salvation and it is not a man:

> PSALMS 121:1-2, 7 I will lift up my eyes to the hills– from whence comes my help?
> 2 My help *comes* from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. … 7 **The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.**

Victory does not come through any person elected by people, but to those who are elected of God. Who will win the election are all those who are doing a:

> 1 THESSALONIANS 1:3-4 … work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, **your election by God**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-11-09—RECEIVING THE GOSPEL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euaggelion* (*evangelion* in English), which simply means *good message*. *Gospel* combines the Old English words 'God's spel', or 'God's Story' in modern terms. The gospel is simply:

The GOSPEL is a *message* of salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to life in an eternal Kingdom of love, peace, and joy ruled by the God Most High!

I wrote other Sabbath Thought articles[1] about the gospel. The key points of it are being saved from a physical life of death to an eternal life in a Kingdom ruled by the Most High God. What is so desirable about such a life? An indescribable[2] perfect love, peace, and joy. It is hard to substantially envision those things at the beginning of our spiritual conversion but they certainly take on greater meaning as the afflictions and sufferings of this life abound more and more.

There are none who have felt anything close to what Peter called "indescribable" love, peace, and joy. I have talked to a few who experienced a brief taste of it but it was always during a time of affliction or suffering. Even WITHOUT trials I doubt that those feelings are even more than a shadow of what God has promised.

Someone recently asked me to explain the love, peace, and joy promised in the Bible; however, it is not possible to describe the indescribable. I can only say with certainty that love, peace, and joy are the true gifts of the gospel message:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 Thanks *be* to God for His **indescribable gift**!

Experiencing the fullness of God's perfect love, peace, and joy in this physical life is impossible. I would guess that the evil of this age even impacts God's own peace since He is holding tremendous anger that will be unleashed against the wicked. But there is coming a time when God will forever put aside His anger:

> PSALMS 30:4-5 Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. 5 For **His anger *is but for* a moment**, His favor *is for* life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy *comes* in the morning.

> PSALMS 103:8-9 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive *with us,* **nor will He keep *His anger* forever**.

While intellectual and physical pursuits give life meaning, it is love, peace, and joy that make life desirable *and* livable. What makes the gospel unique above all other messages is that it must not only be preached and heard, it must be RECEIVED:

> MATTHEW 13:19-23 "When anyone **hears the word of the kingdom**, and does not understand *it,* then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his

[1] 2024-05-18 - Believe the Gospel, 2024-06-01 - Commission of Light, and 2024-06-29 - Preaching the Gospel.
[2] 1 Pet. 1:8.

heart. This is he who **<u>received seed</u>** by the wayside. 20 "But he who **<u>received the seed</u>** on stony places, this is he who **<u>hears the word</u>** and immediately **<u>receives it</u>** with joy; 21 "yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 "Now he who **<u>received seed</u>** among the thorns is he who **<u>hears the word</u>**, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 "But he who **<u>received seed</u>** on the good ground is he who **<u>hears the word</u>** and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Jesus Christ describes the message of the gospel as seed that is first RECEIVED and then GROWS. The gospel is nothing like a history lesson heard by students who retain it as intellectual knowledge. Uniquely, the gospel is a message that must be RECEIVED INSIDE a person and then nurtured and grown. Seed is a not a *simile* for the gospel but rather a *metaphor* for it. In other words, the gospel is not *like* a seed but rather the gospel IS a seed. Why? Because the gospel is more than an intellectual pursuit—it must become a part of someone in which it continuously grows. The parable of the sower is not simply an interesting tale but describes the gospel as a real seed that produces spiritual CHANGE inside flesh and blood. This important distinction of can be easily overlooked even though Scripture is clear:

ACTS 2:41 Then those who gladly **<u>received *[G0588]* his *[Peter's]* word</u>** were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them.*

ACTS 7:38 "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one *[Moses]* who **<u>received *[G1209]* the living oracles</u>** to give to us,

ACTS 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had **<u>received *[G1209]* the word of God</u>**, they sent Peter and John to them,

ACTS 11:1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also **<u>received *[G1209]* the word of God</u>**.

ACTS 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they **<u>received *[G1209]* the word</u>** with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I *[Paul]* also **<u>received *[G3880]*</u>**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

GALATIANS 1:9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other **<u>gospel</u>** to you than what you have **<u>received *[G3880]*</u>**, let him be accursed.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having **<u>received *[G1209]* the word</u>** in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you **<u>received *[G3880]* the word of God</u>** which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

2 JOHN 1:4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we **received *[G2983]* commandment** from the Father.

The Greek translated *received* in these scriptures variously mean to receive fully, to welcome, to accept, to take, to take hold of, to learn, and *to associate with oneself*. That the gospel must be "**received**" is what differentiates it from all other teachings and knowledge, biblical or otherwise. Receiving the gospel is not just elegant prose in the Bible. The gospel cannot be understood or realized if it is not actually INSIDE a person:

JAMES 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and **receive** with meekness **the implanted *[KJV,* engrafted*]* word**, which is able to save your souls.

Jesus said, "**The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.**" (John 6:63). This is the point of the parable of the sower. The gospel is a message of *WORDS* THAT ARE LIFE. The seed of the gospel inside a person grows in the fertile ground of the heart of those who are "holding fast **the word of life**." (Phil. 2:16).

What exactly are the words of life of the gospel? Agape love, peace, and joy from God the Father through the 'implanting' of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is the result of RECEIVING the gospel whereby agape love is implanted *inside* them. Every seed produces a specific plant and the Holy Spirit is the seed planted by God:

MATTHEW 15:13 But He *[Jesus]* answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted *[inferring God also plants seed]*.

The Holy Spirit is a SEED that grows into *agape love*. The words of life literally die unless they are *received* in the ground of a fertile heart and nurtured. Without it, the words of life become nothing more than intellectual knowledge that pass away when the 'host' person dies. The seed implanted when the gospel is received inside a person must *grow* until the recipient BECOMES agape love:

EPHESIANS 4:11-16 And He *[Jesus]* Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for **the edifying *[building up, growth]*** of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, **may grow up in all things** into Him who is the head– Christ– 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, **causes growth** of the body for the **edifying *[building up, growth]*** of itself **in LOVE**.

Experiencing perfect love, peace, and joy is not possible in this physical life because we are burdened by afflictions and sufferings. These are the only conditions from which anyone can understand and value love, peace, and joy:

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, **having received the word *[of life]* in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit**.

But fiery trials only make the gospel message more desirable and that is why faith is required. Faith is believing that the realization of love, peace, and joy in a spiritual body is literally INDESCRIBABLE:

> MATTHEW 25:23 "His lord said to him, 'Well *done,* good and **faithful servant**; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. **Enter into the JOY of your lord.**'

Paul calls it the "joy of faith." (Phil 1:25). In fact, the agape love, peace, and joy manifested in an eternal spirit body is such a "pearl of great price *[lit., extreme value]*" (Matt. 13:45-46) that Jesus *willingly* endured the cross:

> HEBREWS 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* **faith**, who for the **JOY that was set before Him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The word translated *before* literally means "to lie before the view." Jesus lived that 'indescribable' agape love, peace, and joy before He became flesh and it was always His vision and desire to return to that state of existence. But He put it aside momentarily so that God could bring many children[3] into that same perfection of agape love, peace, and joy:

> 1 PETER 1:3-10 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through **faith** for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your **faith**, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is **tested by fire**, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the **revelation of Jesus Christ**, 8 whom having not seen **you love**. Though now you do not see *Him,* yet **believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable** and full of glory, 9 **receiving the end of your faith–the salvation of *your* souls.**

That is why the gospel is so desireable. We can become one with God the Father and Jesus Christ in the perfection of Their indescribable love, peace, and joy[4]:

> JOHN 17:23 "**I *[Jesus]* in them *[the saints],* and You *[God the Father]* in Me; that they may be made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have **loved them as You have loved Me**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[3] Heb. 2:10.
[4] Also Col. 3:14.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-11-16—ANOINTINGS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Anointings are very much a part of a believer's life. I imagine most everyone has been anointed by an elder for a physical disease or illness at one time or another. The elder will, upon request, lay hands on the person and anoint them with oil while praying for God to intervene and heal them. The oil represents the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God, coming upon the person. Oil is an integral part of this because to *anoint* literally means to 'smear or rub with oil.'

Interestingly, anointings have been around from the beginning of recorded history and have been used for many purposes aside from healing. After awakening from his dream of a ladder extending to the heavenly throne of God, Jacob made a memorial pillar out of the stone he used for a pillow and poured oil upon it. He did this to consecrate the place where he had his dream because God's presence was there (Gen. 28:16-19). In fact, he called it the Gate of Heaven. Jacob repeated this another time when he was at Bethel. There, God spoke to him and confirmed the covenant of Abraham would continue with him (Gen. 35:9-15). These anointings sanctified, or set apart, places where he had contact with God.

We also find that anointings were used to sanctify someone for service to God. Aaron was anointed as the high priest by Moses (Exo. 28:41). This was a critically important role that God established to ensure the ancient Israelites maintained a proper worship of God by the people through sacrifices, offerings, and care of the tabernacle. God even commanded Moses to prepare special oil to be used for anointing Aaron and the fixtures of the tabernacle (Exo. 30:23-30).

God also instituted anointing for the purpose of healing and cleansing (as in the case of a leper—Lev. 14:18). What is most interesting is that the Bible says that the leper was *cleansed*, not healed. In the Hebrew, *taher* means to *make holy* or *purify*. While leprosy was certainly a physical disease, God does not see the healing as a purely physical issue. Have you ever wondered why?

It all began with Adam and Eve. Before they sinned, they never knew pain, suffering, or disease. It was only after they sinned that they became subject to the afflictions that can come upon a physical body. Sin brought about all of them. Just look at the promise of God to the ancient Israelites: "**If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the LORD who heals you.** …" (Exo. 15:26). Obedience to God means He protects AND heals those who obey Him.

If we have this promise from God, then why is any believer afflicted with disease or illness? Does this mean he or she sinned? Not necessarily. There are three possible cases: first, we ourselves sinned; second, someone else sinned; and third, no one sinned.

The first one is obvious. Eating unclean foods can lead to sickness or being injured while performing a dangerous task because we failed to implement proper safety measures are both situations that could have been avoided. The fault lies with us. In the second case, perhaps it was someone else who sinned when they spread a disease to others. This is not our fault.

Finally, we can be afflicted even if no one sinned because believers are subject to trials whereby God tests our faith and obedience under duress[1]. This is, again, not our fault, but we must suffer at times for the sake of the kingdom of God and as a witness to the world. One example of this is the man who was born blind discussed in John 9. After healing him, Jesus tested him by asking if he believed in the "Son of God" (v35-39). But Jesus also used this healing to testify against the Pharisees (v40-41). What is so astounding is that the Pharisees never knew of anyone who was born blind and later healed by God (v32); still, they did not believe.

So, except in the case where someone is being tested or used by God as a witness to others, healing involves dealing with sin—of the world, of others, or of ourselves. If sin did not exist in the world, neither would disease or illness. When we are sick or ill, SOMEONE sinned. This is the reason that Jesus Christ said He forgave the sins of the paralytic instead of telling him that he was healed (Mat. 9:2-7).

That brings me to another point. There is a difference between disease and illness. A disease is something that causes sickness. Examples of disease include heart disease, cancer, viruses, infections, etc. Illness, on the other hand, is a more general condition or ailment that may or may not stem from a disease. For example, chronic pain can occur without any specific diagnosis; in other words, there is no known cause for it.

Whether it is disease or illness, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was for the SUFFERING of the world. In fact, Jesus did not just HEAL those who were sick but also those who were tormented, possessed, mentally ill, and paralyzed:

> MATTHEW 4:23-24 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. 24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him **all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them**.

While we all understand disease and illness affect our physical wellbeing, anointings are also something to consider when there are, what I might call, spiritual weaknesses or afflictions. In other words, they are something that affects the heart, mind, and soul spiritually. These are what the Bible calls *infirmities*:

[1] 1 Pet. 2:21-24; 5:9-10.

> MATTHEW 8:16-17 When evening had come, they brought to Him *[Jesus Christ]* many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "**He Himself took our infirmities** and bore *our* sicknesses."

How did Jesus take upon Himself our infirmities and diseases? Through the terrible beatings before His crucifixion. Matthew was quoting Isaiah:

> ISAIAH 53:4-5 Surely **He *[Jesus Christ]* has borne our griefs *[infirmities]*** and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But **He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities**; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and **by His stripes we are healed**.

Now we have come full circle. Anointings are the means by which we call upon God who, through the stripes and beatings laid upon Jesus Christ, heals us. It is in the book of James that we find the ordinance of anointing for healing:

> JAMES 5:14-15 Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.** 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

But what if an elder is too far away? Apparently, this apparently happened often enough to Paul who was limited in how far he could walk in a day. His solution was to send anointed cloths to those who asked for healing:

> ACTS 19:11-12 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even **handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them**.

Notice, in particular, that Paul also healed those who were possessed—a spiritual affliction. Again, anointings and healings are not just for disease. They can be for all manner of infirmities or illnesses. While it was common in the days of the apostles to deal with afflictions other than disease, that is not the case today. Many request anointings for disease (as they should); however, requests of anointing for spiritual afflictions are rare (but should not be).

Now I come to the heart of the matter. Even though we acknowledge that disease is usually the result of sin, do we assume it is always the sin of someone else? No one is ashamed if they suffer because someone else sinned, so asking to be anointed carries no shame. However, we live in a culture where we are ashamed to admit sin—sometimes even to ourselves. So, do we withhold asking for anointing because we fear others will judge us?

It is important to understand that confessing to sin is NOT required for an anointing. When someone asks to be anointed, the elder will anoint the person without regard to the cause of it. In other words, the elder is not concerned with whether or not there was sin involved or who committed it. He understands that

judgment belongs solely to God, which, by the way, includes forgiveness. John said, "If we confess our sins, He *[God]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). No one should ever withhold asking for an anointing when they need it regardless of whether it is for a physical disease or spiritual condition. Both circumstances can be difficult matters for a believer; but, sometimes a spiritual weakness or inadequacy is a more important concern because it can affect our eternal lives. Getting anointed for spiritual conditions may be just what is required.

If we are reluctant to request an anointing for spiritual afflictions because sin may be involved, we should rethink our perspective because EVERYONE sins. I do and so do you—even if it is a fleeting thought, misspoken word, an offense, or something worse. Our lives belong to God and He knows our hearts and minds[2]. If Jesus Christ lives in us[3], we are continually striving to overcome sin through His sacrifice and God's forgiveness. Being willing to admit our sins is the only way to receive forgiveness; however, confessing our sins is something each of us does PRIVATELY to God our Father.

> NOTE: James 5:16 says "**Confess *your* faults *[or* trespasses*]* to one another**, so that you are healed." This is not a matter of disease, illness, or spiritual afflictions. James is referring to reconciling offenses. Refer to the booklet "Offenses—Ordinance of God."

Sin is not something anyone needs to discuss with the elder when asking for an anointing. It can be helpful to do so because elders can also offer spiritual encouragement. Every anointing is special and "the **prayer of faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:15). The oil invokes God's merciful power through His Holy Spirit to CLEANSE, FORGIVE, and HEAL. It is a special ceremony that formally petitions God to apply the stripes borne of Jesus Christ to heal disease or illness and forgive any sin. An elder will never assume guilt nor will he ever ask any questions unless the petitioner wants to discuss something more deeply. Simply speaking, anointings are a powerful spiritual connection to God the Father and Jesus Christ to overcome the world!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[2] 1 Kings 8:39.
[3] Gal. 2:20.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-11-23—DECEPTION

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Deceit is believing something that is not true. It is, perhaps, the most effective tool of Satan for the destruction of mankind. For thousands of years, the world at large recognized the existence of gods, albeit pagan ones. Whether they worshipped gods out of some sense of good intentions or for the practice of wickedness, the fact that spirit beings existed was never in doubt. The same is true today. Regardless of the religion, most people (I would like to hope) have good intentions in the gods they worship. But they are, sadly, deceived.

It is Satan "who deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). Why? He is intent upon keeping them from eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Destroying people physically would accomplish nothing. Only by searing their conscience against love and obedience to the true God through repentance can their citizenship in the eternal Kingdom be taken away.

But make no mistake, being deceived is easier than anyone would like to believe. Even with the presence of Jesus Christ on earth, *many* people will be deceived by Satan. Notice what happens to the multitudes of Gog and Magog:

> REVELATION 20:7-9 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, **Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea**. 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And **fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them**.

I have to admit, I cannot understand how so great a multitude—"whose number is as the sand of the sea"—are deceived into fighting against God. It is the Father who sends fire down from heaven to destroy Gog and Magog. Certain nations may simply be more prone to evil works and that makes them more easily deceived by Satan. One example is the so-called Palestinians. Their heritage is not fully understood but they are not Arabs. Perhaps they are descended from the Amalekites who have been trying to destroy the Israelites since the time of Moses and Esther. Regardless, Gog and Magog are a *lot* of people whom God destroys.

Avoiding being deceived is the most important warning of Jesus Christ to believers. Notice these verses from the Olivet prophecy:

> MATTHEW 24:4-5, 11, 23-24 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 "For **many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many**. … 11 "Then **many false prophets will rise up and deceive many**. … 23 "Then **if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it***. 24 "For **false christs and false prophets will rise** and show great signs and wonders **to deceive**, if possible, even the elect.

Four times Jesus warned against FALSE christs and FALSE prophets. The fact that they WILL "deceive **many**" should make believers take this very seriously. But who are these false christs and false prophets?

The word *christ* simply means *anointed*. God anoints someone for a particular work or service. This was the case with Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, David, et al, who were kings, leaders, and prophets. A *false* christ or prophet is someone who was not anointed by God but assumes a role they were NOT given. They have one purpose—to take away eternal life from mankind. To accomplish that, false christs and prophets have some amount of LEGITIMACY in the eyes of believers!

> TITUS 1:10 For **there are many** insubordinate, both idle talkers and **deceivers, especially those of the circumcision**,

Let that sink in. Jesus Christ said there will be many false christs and false prophets among God's people who will deceive many belivers! These are not unknown politicians or the global elite—they are personally known to believers. John calls deceivers *antichrists* because they work against Jesus Christ:

> 2 JOHN 1:7 For **many deceivers have gone out into the world** who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is **a deceiver and an antichrist**.

This causes me great concern, both for myself and my brethren. How can anyone know if they are deceived? The answer is we CANNOT if we rely upon ourselves alone. Only God can remove deception because His Word is Truth[1]. But God will not keep His people from deception if they put themselves at risk of being deceived. The Bible gives several cases of deception that comes from within the Body of Christ. The first example involves the biggest problem within the Body of Christ—offenses:

> ROMANS 16:17-18 Now I *[Paul]* urge you, brethren, note **those who cause divisions and offenses**, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For **those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ**, but their own belly, and **by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple**.

Without a doubt, offenses have caused the greatest divisions among believers. Why? BECAUSE MOST OF THEM ARE NEVER RECONCILED! Whether it is a leader of an organization or among believers, offenses have divided the Body of Christ into hundreds if not thousands of groups. Divisions are even the result of many so-called *sermons*! Who has not heard a preacher say that other groups are not as converted or are ignorant of biblical truth? Many, if not most, organizations disallow their members to associate with other groups and even unconverted family members. These are not obscure organizations with a few dozen members.

Refusing to associate with other believers because they are not members of your organization is putting yourself at risk of being deceived. Continuing in the company of those who cause divisions and offenses is putting yourself at risk of being deceived. Those in an organization that preach, teach, and do such things are, according to Jesus Christ and John, causing divisions and offenses and the Bible is clear—they are false christs and false prophets and, therefore, deceivers.

But what about those who left an organization? Are they not, as John said, antichrists?

[1] John 17:17.

> 1 JOHN 2:18-19 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now **many antichrists have come**, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 **They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**

Perhaps; however, if they were 'disfellowshipped' or they left because of an offense, it is more likely that they are NOT antichrists. Instead, they left because they were the victim of one or more unreconciled offenses. On the other hand, it is impossible for organizations to disfellowship someone from the Body of Christ. God is Judge and only He can cut branches off the True Vine[2]. Disfellowshipping someone is a DECEPTIVE practice by those who claim to have authority that God never gave them. The Bible nowhere mentions it. In fact, Romans 16:17 simply says to avoid someone who is causing divisions and offenses; that is, until they repent. Then they are to be received back into the fold.

Another source of deception is ourselves:

> 1 JOHN 1:8 **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us.

Oh, but no one who is converted would ever say that, right? What about avoiding fellowship with those in other organizations or believing they are 'less' converted? Is it not self-deception to judge who is and is not in Body of Christ? The only Judges are God and Jesus Christ. Who would dare to claim that authority on earth? Still, many do. What about saying others are less converted? Is that not self-deception to know what is in the heart and mind of others? What about continuing to listen to someone whose prophecies fail to come true? That is certainly a false prophet according to God in Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Or what about following a minister who claims to be the only source of biblical understanding? Making excuses for them so we can continue following them is self-deception. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard, "Well, I do not believe everything so-and-so says but I learn so much from him." It takes an enormous amount of pride for someone to claim they are best or only source of truth. Are these not sins by which we deceive ourselves?

One major self-deception is relying upon men for biblical truth. Yes, true elders have the authority and responsibility to teach God's Word, but ALL can be deceived—"the heart is deceitful of all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Failing to thoroughly prove (or disprove) what men say is self-deception. The good news is that this is something that you can easily test. If someone asks a question on a biblical topic, is your response directly from Scripture or do you say that so-and-so preacher said such-and such? If it is the latter, then perhaps it is time to examine your relationship with God.

Deception needs much greater emphasis, especially these days. All believers need to ask God to reveal deceivers and our own self-deceptions alike. In the last few years, the politics in the USA has demonstrated the extent to which deception has replaced rational discussions as a way to influence people. Satan has upped his

[2] John 15:4-6.

game to deceive the WHOLE world. That means he has also increased his deceptive influences upon the Body of Christ. And it is getting worse:

> 2 TIMOTHY 3:13-14 But **evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived**. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,

In fact, the worst by far is yet to come because the man of sin has not come:

> 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-4, 7-11 **Let no one deceive you** by any means; for *that day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and **the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition**, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. … 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 **The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish**, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

Brethren, stay humble and contrite before God. Pray that He keep you from deception. Spend your time in fruitful prayer with God so that you might be able to stand against ALL the deception that is here and is yet to come:

> EPHESIANS 6:11-13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand against the wiles of the devil**. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.* 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, **that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand**.

And always remember this promise:

> PSALM 72:14 **He *[the King; i.e. Jesus Christ]* shall redeem their soul from deceit** and violence; and precious shall their blood be in His sight.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-11-30—BLESS THE LORD!

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

This past week, many people in the USA celebrated the day of Thanksgiving. Formally established as an annual holiday by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 during the horrors of a Civil War, it has historically been a day when the nation acknowledged God, His providence, and His blessings. But times change. Even the best intentions of people these days fall far short in sincerity for giving thanks to God. This is especially true when compared to times of the ancient Israelites. For example, did you know they even appointed Levites whose sole job was to give thanks to God on behalf of the entire nation[1]?

> 1 CHRONICLES 16:41 and with them Heman and Jeduthun and the rest **who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the LORD**, because His mercy *endures* forever;
>
> NEHEMIAH 12:24 And the heads of the Levites *were* Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise *and* **give thanks**, group alternating with group, **according to the command of David** the man of God.

In the days of Nehemiah, he even appointed two choirs of the priests and Levites for the sole purpose of giving thanks to God:

> NEHEMIAH 12:31, 38 So I *[Nehemiah]* brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and **appointed two large thanksgiving choirs**. *One* went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. … 38 **The other thanksgiving choir** went the opposite *way,* and I *was* behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall,

Can you imagine keeping weekly Sabbaths and annual holydays in those times? How glorious, beautiful, and uplifting it must have been to hear the prayers, music, and singing dedicated to giving thanks to God! I doubt anyone has heard or seen the like of those days even though the ancient Israelites struggled at times to be faithful to God.

Today, prayer is the most common way people give thanks to God but, sadly, many are nothing more than dull words. I think many prayers are missing something. In ancient times, prayer involved much less form and a great deal more emotion. There is not a single biblical record of King David's prayers that were not intense and sincere. He prayed and sang with a heart that was bursting with passion whether of joy and elation or grief and sorrow. His prayers of sadness were just a powerful as his prayers of joy and that is why he was a man after God's own heart—he had a zeal for God that was profoundly real and obvious to everyone:

[1] Also 1 Chr. 25:3; 2 Chr. 31:2.

ACTS 13:22 "… He *[God]* raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, '**I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will.**'

The will of God is motivated by what is in His heart. The same is true of us. What is the desire of God's heart? To dwell forever (in Zion) with His people!

PSALMS 132:13-14 For the LORD has chosen Zion; **He has desired *it* for His dwelling place: 14 "This *is* My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.**

David was a man after God's own heart because he longed to be WITH God with every fiber of his being. This was a reflection of God's desire to be with *us*. When it comes to prayer, the heart matters. The kind of zeal David had is captured in a unique biblical phrase that you might have overlooked even though it is found throughout Scripture. That phrase is "blessed *be* the LORD" or "bless the LORD God"[2]:

1 CHRONICLES 29:10, 20 Therefore **David blessed the LORD** before all the assembly; and David said: "**Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.** … 20 Then David said to all the assembly, "Now **bless the LORD your God**." So all the assembly **blessed the LORD God** of their fathers, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD and the king.

PSALMS 103:1-2, 21-22 **Bless the LORD, O my soul**; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! 2 **Bless the LORD, O my soul**, and forget not all His benefits: … 21 **Bless the LORD, all *you* His hosts**, *you* ministers of His, who do His pleasure. 22 **Bless the LORD**, all His works, in all places of His dominion. **Bless the LORD, O my soul!**

When you think about it, it is hard to understand how flesh and blood can *bless* the LORD God—*Yehovah Elohim*. He is eternity. He is power without measure. He is wise beyond all understanding. He embodies kindness, mercy, compassion, loyalty, and love. How can flesh and blood *bless* HIM? And what does it mean to *bless* GOD? Literally, it is to kneel before Him. But it also infers an act of ADORATION. To "**bless the LORD God**" in ancient times was a common phrase describing love, respect, worship, and veneration of God.

Today, prayers are usually either a plea for God's help (supplication) or to praise and give thanks to Him. But neither of these really embrace the intent behind "bless the LORD your God." Adoration of God is much more than simply kneeling and bowing before God to utter a few words. After returning from captivity in Babylon, the ancient Israelites celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with great rejoicing.

[2] Also Exo. 18:10; Deut. 8:10; Josh 22:33; Judg. 5:9; 1 Sam. 25:32; 2 Sam. 18:28; 22:47; 1 Kings 1:48; 5:7; 8:15, 56; 10:9; 1 Chr. 16:36; 2 Chr. 2:12; 6:4; 9:8; 20:26; 31:8; Ezra 7:27; Job 1:21; Ps. 16:7; 18:46; 26:12; 28:6; 31:21; 34:1; 41:13; 66:8; 68:19, 26, 35; 72:18; 89:52; 103:102, 21-22; 104:1, 35; 106:48; 113:2; 115:18; 119:12; 124:6; 134:1, 2; 135:19-21; 144:1; 145:10, 21; Dan. 2:19-20; 3:28; Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 1:68; 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 1 Tim. 6:15; 1 Pet. 1:3.

Notice what the Levites said to the children of Israel two days later when they were fasting because of their sins.:

> NEHEMIAH 9:1-3, 5-6 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one*-fourth of the day; and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. … 5 And the Levites … said: "**Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! 6 You alone *are* the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.**"

Imagine being present at that time. The entire assembly was gathered before God at the temple mount, humble and contrite (ashamed) after being in captivity in Babylon for seventy years because of their sins. The Levites came out and stood before them and loudly proclaimed, "**Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God forever and ever!**" Actually, this was the beginning of a prayer of repentance. I picture them raising their hands toward God with tears, both of shame for their sins and of joy as they were once again in the presence of God! Standing before God, they listened to a highly emotional prayer of repentance given by the Levites. Their words were filled with great passion because of what was in their hearts!

What does God desire most from us? The things that reside in a heart filled with a desire and need for Him. While words matter, it is the unspoken words of the heart that touch God the most. If our hearts have no 'words', then how much can the words of our lips mean much to God?

On the day of Pentecost when the apostles were inspired to speak, they were given words directly from *God*:

> ACTS 2:4 And **they *[the disciples]* were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak** with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

While they spoke in other languages, the words that they spoke were profound because they were a mirror of God's heart via the Holy Spirit. God's words moved the multitude that was present. That is plainly evident because those who heard them were literally overcome with the godly sorrow of repentance[3]: "Now when they heard *this*, **they were cut *[pierced]* to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The words of God, through the apostles, *pierced* their hearts; so much so, that 3,000 were baptized as a result of hearing what God did for them through the blood sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

If our hearts are empty, it is likely our words have little impact with God. In fact, the 'words' of our heart are much more influential than those of our lips:

[3] 2 Cor. 7:9-10.

> ROMANS 8:26-27 Likewise **the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses**. For **we do not know what we should pray for** as we ought, but **the Spirit [itself] makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered**. 27 Now **He who searches the hearts** knows what the mind of the Spirit *is,* because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

If our prayers are only pleas for help with poverty, healing, suffering, disease, illness, and other aspects of this physical life, then perhaps we are missing the whole point of God. Prayers that "bless the LORD your God" are a passionate response to the whole purpose of this life and our calling by God the Father.

It may sound odd, but consider putting aside, for a moment, supplications for your pain, poverty, grief, sorrow, affliction, and trials of this life to give sincere, heartfelt THANKS that you can suffer after the example of our Savior[4]. The Son of God endured an unknowable torment so that we can dwell together with God the Father and Jesus Christ for eternity. Thank Him for the honor to have a small part in those sufferings. And then "**bless** the LORD God" with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Let it be known in the heavens above how much you adore—love, respect, worship, and venerate—God the Father and Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid to "stand up" with arms raised. Dance if you are so inspired. Let your HEART speak through the whole of your being as well as your lips! Be bold and shout, "Praise the LORD!" Tell of your love for Them. Their love is evidenced by Their sacrifice, Their forgiveness, Their grace, Their mercy, and Their help in time of need[5]. Rejoice and cry out to Them so they know how much you long to see Their faces in the eternal Kingdom of peace and joy!

> PSALMS 115:1, 11-16, 18 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. … 11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He *is* their help and their shield. 12 The LORD has been mindful of *us;* He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. 13 He will bless those who fear the LORD, *both* small and great. 14 May the LORD give you increase more and more, you and your children. 15 *May* you *be* blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth. 16 The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men. … 18 [And] **we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!**

God has shown you His heart—will you show Him yours?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[4] 1 Pet. 2:21.
[5] Heb. 4:16.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-12-07—THE ENEMY OF AGAPE LOVE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Agape love is a very powerful motive. It is thoughts and intents of the heart[1] to do good works unto others[2]. Anger, however, is also a very dominating emotion but it produces a desire to cause harm to others—it is lust for destruction and vengeance. But is there not such a thing as "righteous anger"? The Bible has many examples of God's anger, so surely there must be a time and place for God's people to be angry. Take for example this scripture:

> EPHESIANS 4:26 "**Be angry, and do not sin**": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

At first blush this appears to tell us how to be angry without sinning by assuaging our anger before the end of the day. Is it even possible to be angry and turn it off at the end of the day? How long does anger stay with us when someone offends us and refuses to repent or reconcile? How long is it before we put away anger when someone gossips about us? Is anger okay if it has a time limit? Notice some scriptures that address anger:

> COLOSSIANS 3:8 But now **you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice,** blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.
>
> PSALMS 37:8 **Cease from anger, and forsake wrath**; do not fret–*it* only *causes* [evil].
>
> GALATIANS 5:19-20 Now **the works of the flesh are** evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, **hatred, contentions,** jealousies, **outbursts of wrath**, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,
>
> MATTHEW 5:22 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment**. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.
>
> PROVERBS 19:11 **The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.**
>
> JAMES 1:20 for **the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God**.
>
> ROMANS 12:19 Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath**; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

[1] Heb. 4:12.
[2] Gal. 6:10.

The word *give place* in Romans 12:19 is translated from *didomi* and *topos*. But *topos* can also mean *scabbard*. A scabbard is the place a sword is kept so that it does no harm. Figuratively, we must sheath our anger just as a sword is put into a scabbard so that it will not cause injury. We are to put away anger—only God has a right to anger and vengeance. I am not even certain what righteous anger is other than many claim it to justify holding onto anger. In reality, no scripture condones anger!

So what was Paul talking about in Ephesians 4:26? Put it into context with the surrounding verses where Paul addressed relationships between brethren. He reminds us that we were once like the gentiles—vain and alienated from God because of the hardness of our own hearts:

> EPHESIANS 4:17-27, 30-32 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling *[of love toward others]*, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you **put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts**, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you **put on the new man** which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "*Let each one of you* speak truth with his neighbor," for **we are members of one another**. 26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. … 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul said we are to walk in "true righteousness and holiness." The truth is that there is no place for anger in the Body of Christ. We must put away anger toward brethren because it is something from our "old man"—an unconverted mind and heart. Anger is an opening for Satan because it grieves the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? It means to cause heavy sorrow. How can we cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit? By suppressing the agape love and the fruits it produces in us. Anger prevents God's power working in us to nurture agape love. In other words, anger is the enemy of agape love. But verse 26 is a quote from a Psalm:

> [KJV] PSALMS 4:4 **Tremble *[with anger]*, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.** Selah.

The word *tremble* means to quiver with extreme emotion, especially anger. Paul quoted this scripture but said instead "be angry, and do not sin." The Psalmist said that we are to "commune with your own heart upon your bed." Commune means to utter or declare. In essence, this says to declare the anger that is in our hearts

through our prayers and put our trust in God. Anger is contrary to agape love. As we pray about our thoughts and feelings, we are to "be still"; that is, wait. Wait for what? For God. When angry, we are agitated in our minds and bodies. We must replace the anger with forbearance, peace, quiet, and calm within our hearts by trusting God to help. In doing so, we are letting God perfect His agape love in us!

Is there a timetable for being angry? Yes, but it is not what most think. Ephesians 4:26 does not expect us to entirely eliminate anger by "sundown." Instead, we are to begin dealing with it as soon as possible in prayer to God. When we have feelings of anger, commune with God and ask for His help and peace to replace the anger. Prayer is a sacrifice[3] on the altar before God's throne; therefore, pray that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7). Anger that festers long will lead to hatred and hatred leads to a root of bitterness[4].

God doesn't want our hearts filled with anger but, rather, with His peace. He promises that peace will rule in our hearts[5] if we resist[6] anger that is the enemy of agape love. Jesus Christ dealt with the anger and hatred that the world threw at Him in His prayer: "**Father, forgive them**, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34). Mankind laid upon Him the worst of their angry hearts—and He forgave them. How was it even possible for Jesus Christ to forgive the sins of the world? He did not allow anger to limit the Holy Spirit in Him. God's agape love and forgiveness produces a peace that the world does cannot comprehend—and He promises to give us that same peace:

> JOHN 14:27 "**Peace I *[Jesus Christ]* leave with you, My peace I give to you**; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your heart be troubled**, neither let it be afraid.

Putting aside anger is challenging; it requires time in prayer with God. But there is more to it than that. We must also "**pursue** righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. 2:22). *Pursue* is the Greek word *dioko* and it is a very strange word. It means to *pursue* after something OR to *persecute* others for destruction. We have a choice: persecute others through our angry thoughts or pursue agape love toward others for their good. Either way, we are *dioko*-ing.

The fact is that God forbears and suffers long with us: "Or **do you despise** the riches of His *[God's]* goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). The reality is that none of us have any right to be angry with anyone ("righteous anger"). The only one who does is Jesus Christ because He gave His life for sin. But He is so full of agape love that He asked

[3] Ps. 141:2; Heb. 13:15.
[4] Heb. 12:15.
[5] Col. 3:15.
[6] Jas. 4:7.

His Father to forgive the whole world—including us. If we continue in anger in this life, do we expect it to just disappear when we are in the Kingdom? If we are angry with one of our brethren, how will we be able to agape-love them for ALL ETERNITY? Does anyone actually believe we can put off reconciling until Christ returns? There is a warning for anyone who believes such:

> 1 JOHN 3:15 **Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

Do we hate someone and refuse to reconcile? Have we been angry with someone for years? If we fail to reconcile in this life, then there is only "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries *[of God]*." (Heb. 10:27). Anger is like the sword in a scabbard we wear on our belt. Even though we are sometimes tempted to draw that sword, pursue agape love by keeping it sheathed and refraining from using it. Anger is something that we should not have toward God's people or the world. We must put away anger. Always. The whole of Colossians chapter 3 is a message of dealing with anger but notice these verses in particular:

> COLOSSIANS 3:13-14 **bearing with one another, and forgiving one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; **even as Christ forgave you**, so you also *must do.* 14 But **above all these things put on love**, which is the bond of perfection.

The phrase at the end of Colossians 3:13 is worded very similarly to the new commandment pronounced by Jesus Christ: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34). We are commanded to follow the example of Jesus Christ in agape love, forgiving others, and putting away anger.

Everyone gets angry on occasion. The "sons of thunder" (James and John) knew anger. They once wanted to call down fire on a city[7]. In response, Jesus said "the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives **but to save *them***." (Luke 9:56). Just as Christ forgave us for our own salvation, putting away anger toward others allows God to work to save them—AND us. In the kingdom of God, there will only be those made into the fullness of agape love.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[7] Luke 9:51-56.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-12-14—HUMILITY & MEEKNESS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Humility is a modest and unpretentious view of oneself in regard to others and, especially, God. Meekness is the gentle and respectful treatment of others from an attitude of humility. Paul said no one should "think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). This is, basically, humility. Taking it further, he said "*Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." (Rom. 12:10). It is, perhaps, one of the best definitions of meekness.

Humility and meekness might seem rather blasé topics, but they are quite the opposite in the eyes of God. The source and existence of everything—the heavens and earth, time, life, power (both physical and authoritative), wealth, wisdom, knowledge, etc.—that has been, now is, and ever will be is God the Father through the hand of Jesus Christ:

> COLOSSIANS 1:16-17 For **by Him *[Jesus Christ]* all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him**. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Compared to God, flesh and blood are so insignificant that they are basically nothing. While a penny has value, compared to a trillion dollars (million million) it is utterly inconsequential. Who has measurable worth compared to God?

> ISAIAH 40:17-18 **All nations before Him *[God] are* as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and [vanity]. 18 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?**

I cannot imagine that God loves any who are not humble and meek. All are a penny compared to His vast worth. It is difficult, if not impossible, to love someone who is proud and arrogant (opposites of humility and meekness). From the perspective of God, none even come close to His power and abilities so pride is particularly offensive. It is actually completely repulsive to Him:

> PROVERBS 6:16-17 These six *things* the LORD hates, yes, seven ***are* an abomination *[disgusting, abhorrent]* to Him: 17 A proud look**, …
>
> PROVERBS 16:5 **Everyone proud in heart *is* an abomination *[disgusting, abhorrent]*** to the LORD; …

This should not be surprising. Satan was "perfect" in wisdom and beauty[1] and obviously far superior to any flesh and blood. But he was lifted up in pride and, in that state, this great being became "profane" or defiled to God[2]. Pride is an abomination to God who has slated such things for destruction:

[1] Ezek 28:12.
[2] Ezek. 28:16.

ISAIAH 2:12 For **the day of the LORD of hosts *shall come* upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up**– and it shall be brought low–

MALACHI 4:1 "For behold, **the day is coming**, burning like an oven, and **all the proud**, yes, all who do wickedly **will be stubble**. And **the day which is coming shall burn them up**," says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

REVELATION 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, **abominable**, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars **shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone**, which is the second death."

I hope this strikes home. While becoming agape love is a matter of salvation so, too, is putting away pride and arrogance. One enemy of agape love is anger but pride and arrogance are also enemies of agape love. Pride is also an enemy of humility and arrogance an enemy of meekness. Can agape love exist without humility or meekness? Doubtful, especially considering that the eternal Kingdom is reserved solely for those who are humble (and meek):

ISAIAH 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: "**I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite *[remorseful]* and humble spirit**, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Pride and arrogance can affect everyone. Humans are very susceptible to such things, as we know from the story of Adam and Eve. But pride and arrogance can be particularly troubling for those with unique gifts or offices such as elders. It is, in my experience, a daily fight to be humble and meek:

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-2, 6 This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires **the position of a bishop**, he desires a good work. 2 **A bishop then must be** … 6 not a novice, lest **being puffed up with pride** he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

1 PETER 5:2-6 **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly**, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 **nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock**; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, **all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility**, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

I have written about the role of elders in the past[3]. There are many influences that affect elders including organizational hierarchies that emphasize position, authority, and power. But false teachings of biblical roles have also led some astray. For example, some have mistakenly used this verse to claim elders have special honor:

[3] Sabbath Thought 2022-03-05 - Role of Elders.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17 **Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor**, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Most often, the error is to think that God bestows upon elders a double honor. It is not FROM God; rather, it is how elders should be TREATED by the *ekklesia*. But that does not mean elders are really above others. As Peter said, "**all of *you [including elders]*** be submissive to one another, and be clothed with **humility**" (1 Pet. 5:5). Even if someone were worth TWO pennies, they are still insignificant compared to God.

The problem is that pride and arrogance arise when we compare ourselves to other *people*. However, God has a different standard: "… **be perfect, as your Father in the heavens is perfect**." (TS2009 Matt. 5:48). But pride and arrogance abound and can afflict anyone, especially as the end draws near:

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-2 But know this, that **in the last days** perilous times will come: 2 For **men will be lovers of themselves**, … **boasters**, **proud**, …

This is directed to the *ekklesia*, not the world, as indicated in verses 6-7. When it comes to pleasing God, humility and meekness are paramount:

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 Therefore, as ***the* elect of God**, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, **humility, meekness**, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another *[NOT easily offended]*, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.* 14 But **above all these things put on love**, which is the bond of perfection.

MATTHEW 18:4 "Therefore whoever **humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven**.

It is interesting that agape love is the foundation of the character of God (God IS love[4]), for keeping the Law of God, for forgivness of sins, and so forth. Humility, on the other hand, is the metric (in both the Old and New Testaments) for being EXALTED by God in the Kingdom:

PSALM 138:6 Though the LORD *is* on high, yet **He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar**.

LUKE 14:7-11 So He *[Jesus Christ]* told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: 8 "**When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;** 9 "and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. 10 "But when you are invited, **go and sit down in the lowest place**, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. 11 "For **whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted**."

[4] 1 John 4:8, 16.

Notice the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. The Pharisee compared himself to other *people*; whereas, the tax collector compared himself to *God*:

> LUKE 18:9-14 Also He *[Jesus Christ]* spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "**The Pharisee** stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that **I am not like other men**– extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 "And **the tax collector**, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, '**God, be merciful to me a sinner!**' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted**."

Humility and meekness are integral to agape love. Obviously, "… God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." (John 3:16). But in order to do this, Jesus Christ had to HUMBLE Himself. While this is obvious, have you ever *really* considered just how much humility was required for Jesus as GOD to become flesh, endure torments of suffering unto death, and be a vessel for the world's sins? Even though He is far above flesh and blood, He places a high worth upon pennies:

> PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus**, 6 who, being in the **form of God**, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore **God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name**, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus Christ created all things "that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers." (Col. 1:16). WHO compares to His pre-eminence and ascendancy?? Jesus HUMBLED Himself for *all* mankind. Humility is the outcome when a penny compares itself to the immeasurable worth of God and meekness is the response to other pennies. A single penny is not worth much alone but God is gathering many pennies so that He, in all His immeasurable greatness, may be all in all[5].

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[5] 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:19-23.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-12-21—FELLOWSHIP

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus Christ said, "this **gospel** of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a **witness** to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:14). How is the Gospel a witness? For starters, of the coming Kingdom of God, of a coming day of judgment, and of God the Father and Jesus Christ who are Judge of all.[1] But the Gospel was also another witness—of the sacrifice for sins and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of God's gift of eternal life to all who repent and obey.

These two aspects of the Gospel witness to two different audiences: people with hard hearts and those who are humble and contrite. People of the latter bent respond after the manner of those who heard the preaching of Peter on that monumental Pentecost day:

> ACTS 2:37 Now when they heard *this,* **they were cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

Receiving the Holy Spirit sets people apart from the rest of the world as the begotten children of God[2]. Aside from being a seed to eternal life, God places His Spirit in His children in order to have a RELATIONSHIP with them:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom **you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ** our Lord.

Every relationship, at least ones that are good, involves time and communication. In effect, relationships are formed through fellowship—talking with each other. Those with God are called fellowship of the Spirit:

> PHILIPPIANS 1:27; 2:1-2 Only **let your conduct *[behavior]* be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I *[Paul]* come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, **with one mind** striving together for the faith of the gospel, … 2:1-2 Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **fellowship of the Spirit**, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, ***being* of one accord, of one mind**.

The Holy Spirit brings about a fellowship where all people, regardless of the differing personalities, are "of one accord [and] of one mind" with God and Christ:

> JOHN 17:20-21 "I *[Jesus Christ]* do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that **they all may be one, as You, Father,**

[1] John 18:36-37; Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:31-32; 10:39-42; 17:31; Rom. 8:16; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:2; et al.
[2] Rom. 8:16.

> ***<u>are</u>* <u>in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us</u>**, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

A fellowship of the Spirit exists among the *ekklesia* because the Spirit from God the Father and Jesus Christ in the same in all. This means that those who have the Holy Spirit love God the Father and Jesus Christ, and all who love Them also love all other members of the Body of Christ[3]. It cannot be any other way—the Holy Spirit is the common thread among the *ekklesia* that binds us together just as God and Christ are one[4]. This fellowship is unique and special because only a few have ever known it. The primary reason for having the Holy Spirit is to have FELLOWSHIP with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and Their children for all eternity!

These days many (most?) spend much of their Sabbaths and Holydays *without* fellowship. Some might go to a church every week, but do they have TRUE fellowship? What happens at church? People listen to a sermon. What happens afterwards? Some small talk and then everyone leaves. Where is the fellowship? Fellowship requires time communicating with each another.

What I am about to say might sound like heresy, but fellowshipping on the Sabbaths and Holydays is *more* important than listening to a Bible study. Anyone can listen to a message during the week and get the same result, even if it is done alone. Fellowship in the Spirit, on the other hand, requires interaction with God AND His people. The Sabbaths and Holydays are, for many, the only time that they are able to set aside to be with brethren. While some do make time for true fellowship in the Spirit on Sabbath days, I dare say most do not. And if not on those days, then when? During the week with the demands of family and work?

This is not to say that all overlook the priority of fellowship. There are many who are unable to fellowship for logistical or health reasons. Even so, they have a deep longing for fellowship. How do I know? They have told me in words that were choked with tears running down their faces.

It is a great irony that fellowship is lost in the typical organized church setting because it is a gathering where one might expect it to be the objective. However, fellowship is often lost in the rigid formality of rules and decorum. It is lost in the emotionless prescribed songs, prayers, and messages within the solemn propriety of ties and high heels. All of this steals the true JOY of being in the presence of God! But that is not the way it was in the early days of the *ekklesia*:

> HEBREWS 10:24-25 And let us **<u>consider one another in order to stir up love</u>** and good works, 25 **<u>not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together</u>**, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another,* and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

"Assembling of ourselves together" is not limited to Sabbaths and Holydays. The fellowship of the Spirit can occur anytime and anywhere God's people come

[3] 1 John 5:1-3.
[4] 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 5:30.

together. These days that can be in homes, via the phone or Internet, or even primitive cards and letters. But I think this verse has another emphasis. What about those who have no fellowship due to circumstances beyond their control? Are WE—those who have the means and opportunity—forsaking THEM?? God forbid!

Fellowship in the Spirit is much more than weekly church attendance. Notice what happened *after* those who heard Peter's message on Pentecost were baptized:

> ACTS 2:40-42 And with many other words he *[Peter]* testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them.* 42 And **they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers**.

They "CONTINUED STEADFASTLY" to obey the teachings of the apostles, in fellowship, in breaking bread, and in prayers—TOGETHER. It does not say they came and listened to a sermon on the Sabbath and then went home. They spent TIME with each other. Above all, it was NOT just the Sabbath and Holydays:

> ACTS 2:46-47 So **continuing daily** with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God** and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the *[ekklesia]* daily those who were being saved.

They fellowshipped DAILY. Well, you might argue, it was different back then. Granted; however, where is the fellowship on the Sabbaths and Holydays that everyone is so diligent to keep? If we pray daily with God the Father and Jesus Christ, why do we not have the same urgency to fellowship directly with each other? Fellowship in the Spirit is with God the Father, Jesus Christ, AND brethren:

> 1 JOHN 1:5-7 This is the message which we have heard from Him *[Jesus Christ]* and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that **we have fellowship with Him**, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus said, "**where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them**." (Matt. 18:20). Fellowship is more than uplifting one another and edifying one another in love, it is also being together WITH our Father and Lord Jesus. What did Malachi say about that? "**those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them***" (Mal. 3:16). There is nothing more important and glorious to God our Father and Jesus our Lord than fellowship among those of the Spirit:

> ROMANS 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant **you to be like-minded toward one another**, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that **you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. 7 Therefore **receive one another, just as Christ also received us**, to the glory of God.

Why is fellowship the most important purpose for having the Holy Spirit? Because God the Father and Jesus Christ desire to spend eternity with children who are ONE with them and each other. Eternity will not be spent listening to endless sermons but having the unspeakable joy of agape love relationships!

Do not get me wrong. Without the understanding that comes from hearing the Gospel there can be no fellowship of the Spirit. The Bible is crucial because it is the basis for a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ as well as understanding Their purpose for mankind. However, in the end, it is fellowship that matters. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was thinking of his time with them:

> PHILIPPIANS 1:3 I thank my God upon **every remembrance of you**,

Paul was reminiscing about the people in Philippi, whom he called, "my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown." (Phil. 4:4). And his experiences were good memories that, I am certain, he never forgot:

> PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6 always in every prayer of mine making request for you **all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now**, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

If Paul had spent his entire time preaching to them, he would have never known them. It is impossible to spend as much time as he did with people and not get to know them. He talked with them and listened to them. They worshipped God and Jesus together. They ate together, sang together, prayed together, rejoiced together, and, perhaps, cried together when Paul left even though they knew they would be united in the Kingdom. BTthat is what fellowship in the Spirit is all about:

> 1 JOHN 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life– 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us– 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, **that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ**.

Fellowship is about relationships. Do not avoid it. Do not refuse it. And certainly do not forsake it with those who need it. Make fellowship in the Spirit the priority.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-12-28—FAITH & DOUBT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When it comes to healings, faith and doubt can have an affect. Perhaps the most troubling verse for many when someone asks to be anointed was when the blind men were healed:

> MATTHEW 9:28-29 And when He *[Jesus Christ]* had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith let it be to you.**"

Does doubt come into your mind when you ask to be anointed for healing? When someone is not healed, the weakness of the flesh can cause doubt that they will be healed or to question their faith. While there is no question that afflictions occur because all must suffer as Jesus Christ gave us the example[1], I have heard some express doubt immediately after praying with them. They are probably not aware they do it, but it happens frequently. Some have said it may not be God's will or healing may only happen at the resurrection.

I want to make a very important point in this regard—those begotten by God HAVE faith. Faith was required for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sins. Faith was required for repentance. Faith was required for forgiveness by God. Finally, faith was required for the Holy Spirit. Therefore, all those begotten by God HAVE faith.

In the story of the blind men, they did *not* have the Holy Spirit. They likely did not even realize that Jesus Christ was the Son of God because they called Him the Son of David. When they told Jesus they believed He could heal them, it may have simply been because they heard about others being healed, not because they believed He was God.

In contrast, the children of God HAVE faith. For everyone, it began at their calling and was established through baptism, from which all are "raised with Jesus Christ THROUGH faith":

> COLOSSIANS 2:12 buried with Him *[Jesus Christ]* **in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

It stands to reason, then, that all who are begotten by God HAVE faith! Some more, some less; but ALL *have* faith. Oftentimes when someone asks for an anointing for healing, doubt creeps into their thoughts usually about having enough faith or that God will heal within their lifetime. Those with the Holy Spirit certainly have faith but doubt can exist even though there IS faith. Notice Peter's state of mind when he walked on water but started to sink:

> MATTHEW 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him *[Peter]*, and said to him, "**O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**"

[1] 1 Pet. 2:21.

Doubt, on top of faith, can be a reason for unanswered prayer. Doubt is to faith like water is to fire:

> JAMES 1:6-7 But **<u>let him ask in faith, with no doubting</u>**, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For **<u>let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord</u>**;
>
> LUKE 12:22, 29-31 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, **<u>do not worry about your life</u>** … 29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, **<u>nor have an anxious *[doubtful]* mind</u>**. 30 "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and **<u>your Father knows that you need these things</u>**. 31 "But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

No one should expect to "receive anything from the Lord" when they have doubts. Though doubts can plague everyone at times, James emphasizes putting away all doubt and praying in the full confidence of faith. <u>How many prayers have gone unanswered because of doubt?</u> God KNOWS what you need but does not want you to doubt Him! And THAT is the crux of the matter—doubt is always directed toward GOD! The power to heal is not within ourselves; therefore, all doubt is about God—His will, His timing, having enough faith from God, etc.

One of the greatest deterrents to healing is doubting our faith, which contradicts Scripture. Remember, "**<u>Jesus *[is]* the author and finisher of *our* faith</u>**" (Heb. 12:2) and we need to be "**<u>confident</u>** of this very thing**, <u>that He *[God the Father]* who has begun a good work in you will complete *it*</u>** until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

Now, what about having too little faith? That is quite possible as was the case with Peter; however, the "faith OF Jesus Christ"[2] is a *work* that was begun by Him and will be perfected by both Him and God the Father. That means no one has the faith to move mountains in the beginning—faith, like agape love, must grow over time.

So, what can be done when there is too little faith? That is a really important question. The first thing is to ask God for more faith. The apostles did (Luke 17:5) as well as the father of a son with the mute demon (Mark 9:18). But there is more. The disciples obviously had some amount of faith even though the Holy Spirit was not yet in them. Notice the story of the demon in an epileptic:

> MATTHEW 17:15-21 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 "So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." 17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 So Jesus said to them, "**<u>Because of your ~~unbelief~~ *[little faith]*</u>**; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 "However, this kind does not go out except **<u>by prayer and fasting</u>**."

[2] Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9; Rev. 14:12. NOTE: the phrase is "faith OF Jesus Christ" not "faith *in* Jesus Christ" as Hebrews 12:2 proves.

The disciples had, according to Jesus, "little faith" (not *unbelief*). Obviously, some amount of faith is required when asking God to heal. But the story itself is no indication that the disciples had any *doubt* beforehand. They had cast out demons before and would not have expected their efforts to be fruitless. They failed because their faith was insufficient even without doubt. When they asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon, He did *not* say it was impossible or that more faith was required. Instead, Jesus Christ gave them the keys to receiving God's intervention even though they had "little faith"—PRAYER AND FASTING!

Though all must suffer, doubt is an unnecessary impediment to healing. Likewise, too little faith does not necessarily mean God will not heal. Both can be compensated with prayer and fasting. But there is another aspect of faith that needs to be addressed:

> JAMES 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various **trials**, 3 knowing that **the testing of your faith produces patience**. 4 But **let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete**, lacking nothing.
>
> 2 THESSALONIANS 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into **the patience of Christ**.
>
> REVELATION 13:10 … Here is **the patience and the faith** of the saints.
>
> REVELATION 14:12 Here is **the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep** the commandments of God and **the faith of Jesus**.

Does God test our FAITH? Absolutely, according to James. How? Through patiently WAITING upon God. The idea of patiently waiting is a theme throughout the Bible[3], but here are two very uplifting scriptures:

> PSALMS 33:18-20 Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, 19 to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. 20 **Our soul waits for the LORD; He *is* our help and our shield.**
>
> PSALMS 40:1-3 **I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.** 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth– praise to our God; many will see *it* and fear, and will trust in the LORD.

God tested Abraham who patiently waited 25 years for the birth of Isaac:

> ROMANS 4:20-21 He *[Abraham]* did not waver at the promise of God through **unbelief**, but was strengthened in **faith**, giving glory to God, 21 and **being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform**.

What is the purpose of patiently waiting upon God? A couple of things come to mind. One is it allows God and Christ to finish perfecting us in agape love, faith, and obedience. As mentioned previously, "**Jesus *[is]* the author and finisher of *our* faith**" (Heb. 12:2) and we must be "**confident** of this very thing, **that He *[God the Father]* who**

[3] Also Ps. 27:14; 37:7, 9, 34; 39:7; 123:2; 130:5, 6.

has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). Works take time.

Another reason to wait patiently on God is it is a time to focus on HIS faithfulness. What? Yes, waiting for God to fulfill His promise of something that does not immediately occur is time to reflect upon the FAITHFULNESS of God. It is hard to have doubts while pondering God's faithfulness. Think of it this way. God's children are waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. That requires patience, sometimes under terrible burdens. Still, no one questions that Jesus Christ will return because we believe GOD IS FAITHFUL to fulfill that promise. Why, then, do we not have the same patience when we ask for healing? Why is there not the same absolute assurance in the faithfulness of God for healing[4] when it does not happen quickly? There are MANY verses about the faithfulness of God and I would encourage you to look for more[5]:

> 1 PETER 4:19 Therefore **let those who suffer** according to the will of God **commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator**.
>
> DEUTERONOMY 7:9 "Therefore know that **the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God** who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;
>
> PSALMS 91:1-4 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, "*He is* my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust." 3 Surely **He shall deliver you** from the snare of the fowler *and* from the perilous pestilence. 4 **He shall cover you** with His feathers, and **under His wings you shall take refuge**; His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler.

Finally, yes, there are times when God does not heal as in the case of Paul:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9 And He *[God]* said to me *[Paul]*, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **My strength is made perfect in weakness**." Therefore most gladly **I will rather boast in my infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Do not stop petitioning God for healing. Engage others in prayer. Ask an elder for an anointing. Cast off doubt by knowing "**all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen**, to the glory of God **through us**." (2 Cor. 1:20). If you think you might lack faith, FAST and PRAY more. Finally, PATIENTLY WAIT upon the Lord your God. Always remember, "**[you] can do all things through Christ who strengthens [you].**" (Phil. 4:13). But if you are not healed—even after years—*BOAST* in your infirmities so that "**the power of Christ may rest upon [you].**" (2 Cor. 12:9).

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene
https://sabbathreflections.org
sabbathreflections@gmail.com

[4] Isa. 53:5; Jas. 5:14-15.
[5] Also Ps. 89:8; 91:1-4; Lam. 3:22-23; Rom. 3:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; Heb. 10:23; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13.