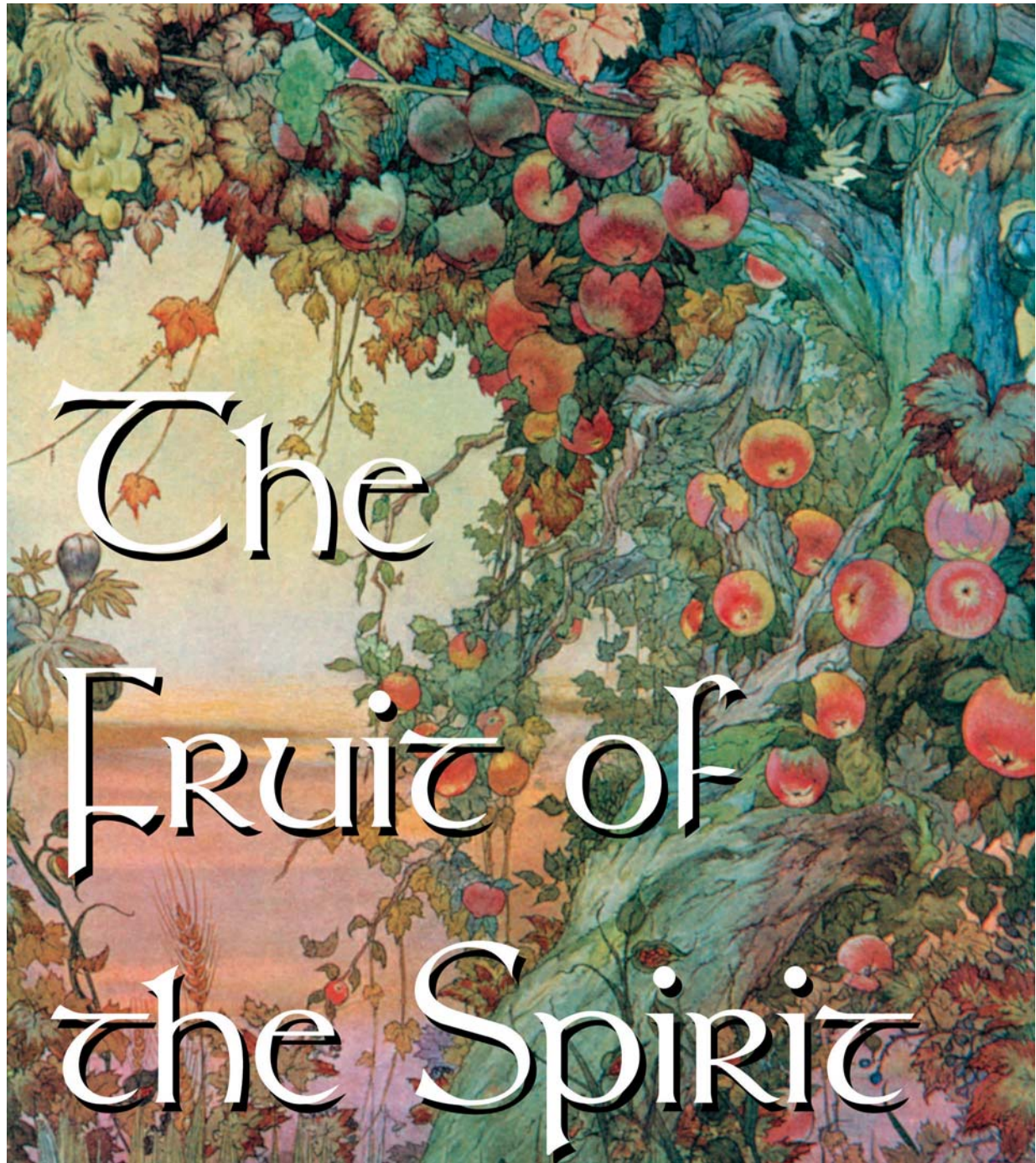


# *Forerunner*

**Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God**

Volume 7, Number 2

February 1998



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## About Our Cover:

Fruit is a biblical symbol of the results of one's actions, whether good or evil. Of course, God wants us to produce the fruit of His Holy Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23. These fruits exhibit the outgoing love and concern for others that is the hallmark of God's character. (PhotoDisc photo)

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Forerunner ♦ February 1998

# THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The Bible's peculiar elegance in its writing has helped make it the world's best seller decade after decade. The divine Author, who possesses beauty of expression far beyond even the best of human authors, has given us tiny glimpses of His genius in the soaring literary majesties of Psalms, Isaiah and Hebrews. He also shows us another side of His literary abilities in the simply stated but discerning, penetrating and practical insights of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The value of Scripture, though, does not lie in its elegance of style. It lies in the fact that the great God, the sovereign Governor of all creation, has chosen to write His law, His instruction to men revealing Himself and His purpose, in the common tongues of people worldwide. The more plain the Word and law of the Almighty, the more becoming the divine Author and Lawgiver—and the more profitable for mankind. His Word becomes like bread that can nourish every palate (Matthew 4:4).

God gives much of His instruction in similes, parables, allegories, metaphors, types, figures and symbols, providing illustrations that virtually everyone, no matter what their background or station, can grasp. To this He adds true, real life examples drawn from the whole spectrum of human and spirit life over vast expanses of time. We have access to the very wisdom of the ages! The Bible is a fund of knowledge especially useful concerning relationships, applicable and practical to anyone who believes at any time in human history.

A great deal of biblical instruction reflects the agricultural realm. God makes use of familiar aspects of agriculture like grapes, olives, apples, figs, oxen, mustard, pomegranates, wheat, corn, barley, flowers, farmers, plowing, sowing, planting, harvesting, fertilizing, rain in due season, weeds and seeds. He uses these ideas to illustrate practical moral and spiritual instruction for those who believe.

As a teaching vehicle, the general term "fruit" may be used more frequently than all other farming terms. In the physical realm, fruit is generally considered to be the seed-bearing product of a plant. Many of these are edible and very enjoyable and nourishing to eat. While the Bible agrees with this, it also frequently presents fruit as the product of effort or to provide a symbolical meaning.

Thus, we find phrases such as, "fruit of the trees of the

garden" (Genesis 3:2), "fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3), and "fruit of the womb" (Genesis 30:2). In the New Testament more than the Old, fruit is often understood symbolically as the product of either a good or evil life, or an obedient or disobedient life.

## Fruit as a Symbol

John the Baptist's teaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:8 is an example of this: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." Fruit symbolizes the consequence or product of repentance. The fruit of repentance toward God is, among other things, a change of attitude toward Him and His law. It represents quenching one's enmity toward Him, as well as turning from disobedient to His Word to obedient. It may also indicate a change of status and relationship from son of Satan (John 8:44) to son of God (Romans 8:14).

Jeremiah 6:19 is a clear example from the Old Testament:

Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it.

Calamity is the effect, the fruit, of evil thoughts. The lesson is clear: Calamity of this sort begins with evil thoughts, proceeds to evil actions, producing bitter and painful experiences for the self and others. Why not strive to avoid the bitter fruit evil thoughts produce by changing our thoughts to the good?

Romans 6:21-22 shows fruit as a product in both a bad and good sense:

What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

The context answers what the fruit in each verse symbolizes. In verse 21, the product of actions of which we are now ashamed would have been death. But because of God's calling and our subsequent repentance, our status and relationship with Him have changed—and so



has what we are producing with our lives. We are now His slaves rather than sin's, producing fruit to holiness rather than shame and death. In the end God will give us everlasting life. The choice is ours. Which fruit would we rather have, shame and death or holiness and life?

### Producing Good Fruit

**T**he Bible shows that producing good fruit has other, more specific causes than God's calling and repentance. Romans 7:4-6 is a good place to begin:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

We will add to this Romans 1:13, 15, where we need to remember that Paul addresses the congregation in Rome, one he had neither founded nor yet visited:

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. . . . So, as

much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

The fruit he wanted to see produced was not new conversions. Philippians 4:17, where Paul instructs a congregation to which he felt especially close, helps to explain what the apostle meant: "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." In writing to an existing congregation of converted people, he wanted them to exhibit the fruit of righteousness by making use of faith in God's Word (the gospel). They could do this by yielding in obedience to God's instruction through the power and guidance of His Spirit in them.

As a shepherd or pastor, he claims the fruit would also be his, since it would accrue in them as a result of his teaching them the gospel in greater detail. The teaching in Romans exemplifies the detail of the messages he would have given orally had he been there. The good works that they produced by making use of God's Word would also accrue to him as the fruits of his labors for them. When students do well, their success is the fruit of a teacher's labors.

Conversely, Philippians 4:17 explains that Paul is not being self-centered in this. He yearns that they produce fruit through good works so they can receive the benefits. The fruit accrues to *their* accounts. Thus, producing good fruit requires sound instruction from a qualified teacher (Acts 8:30-31), the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, a believing and receptive mind and applying the instruction.

### Bearing Much Fruit

**I**n John 15:1, Jesus begins a message using the grapevine as His illustration. He concludes by stating in verse 8, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." In verse 16, He again mentions fruit in relation to His instruction:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

In this context, the bearing of fruit is generalized. It includes everything produced as a result of their labors of publicly preaching the gospel, their service to the church in pastoring, and their personal overcoming and growing in the image of God. They all bring honor to God by declaring the dramatic change for good that takes place as a result of being connected to the Vine and thus able to draw upon Him and His power to produce fruit.

Verse 16 briefly touches on the quality of fruit God desires. It implies that the disciples should be rich in good works and be striving to produce fruit that endures. God wants the fruit to endure both within themselves (by taking on God's character) and in others (in conversions so that the church grows and continues).

The remainder of the verse ties answered prayer directly to the production of fruit. We are all called to participate in the work of the church, if only to pray for it. God has not called everyone to work on the front lines

of evangelizing as apostles. But because God has called and chosen all of us, upon us falls the responsibility of producing fruit within the scope of our place in the body that we all glorify God.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

**T**he fruits we are most concerned about are those listed in Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul writes: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

These qualities or virtues are produced by the action of the Holy Spirit in us. They grow in a person who, by faith, obeys God's Word through the guidance and power of God's Spirit. Clearly, elements of this equation must be used so that the right fruit is produced—God's Word, His Spirit, faith and obedience to God's Word. These, along with some others, produce the major fruits of righteousness.

## Led by the Spirit

**P**aul writes in Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Galatians 5:18 is especially helpful in understanding the fruit of the Spirit because it directly precedes Paul's naming them: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Being led by the Spirit is a necessary precursor to producing the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Notice that the verse says "led," not dragged, forced, imposed upon or imputed to. This supplements what Jesus says in 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.

Some of the verbs in this sentence are telling. "Guide," "speak" and "tell" show that God has chosen to persuade rather than force us. In addition, they give the distinct impression that the followers and hearers will need to do something on their own.

They will have to make choices, pay attention to what is said or written, and set their wills and follow through on their choices in order to accompany and learn from the Guide. Without these, they will not produce fruit because they are doing insufficient or the wrong activities.

A teacher cannot impose knowledge, understanding and wisdom upon a student. The student must cooperate in the process. Without this, little or no fruit is produced. The Bible shows the Spirit of God as influencing, suggesting and, if we choose to permit it, dominating—

perhaps even controlling—our lives. This is good because God is good, and if we will yield, the fruit of His Spirit will be produced in our lives.

Are we aware that a divine influence is drawing us away from the corrupting passions and vanities of this world? Are we conscious of a desire to yield to that influence and be conducted along the path of holiness and life? Do we resist, or do we follow cheerfully and energetically, mortifying pride, subduing passion, destroying lust, stifling talebearing, humbling ambition and annihilating the love of the wealth and fashions of this world?

God will not lead us astray. Our real love, joy and peace consist only in yielding ourselves entirely to Him and being willing to be guided and influenced by His unseen hand. To be led by the Spirit is to choose voluntarily and consciously to submit to the Word of God.

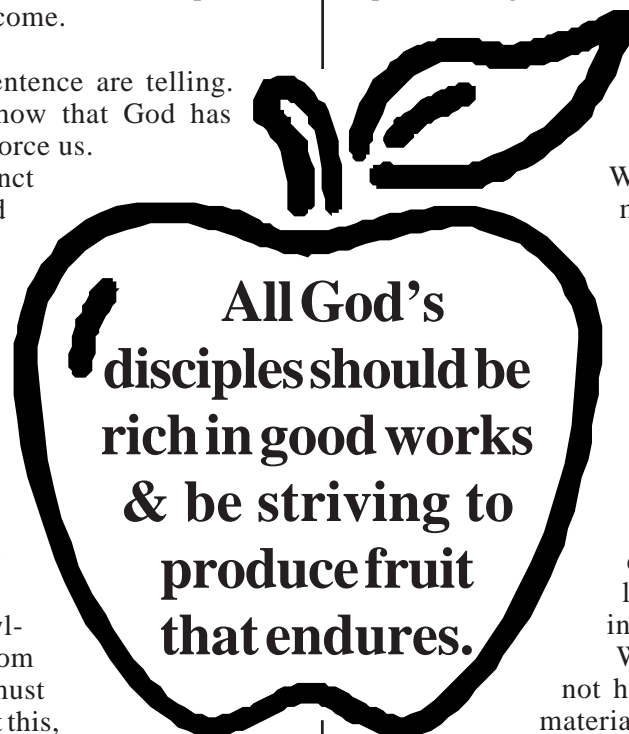
## The Power of God

**T**he Holy Spirit is described generally as the power of God, which is certainly correct, but power comes in a number of forms. There is a flowing power caused by the movement of an object. Thus God uses water to illustrate an aspect of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). There is healing and nourishing power, so God uses oil to symbolize His Spirit. Words, symbols we use to represent ideas, the raw material of our thoughts, have awesome power to influence. Thus God says through Jesus that His words "are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Words give us the power to communicate ideas from one mind to another or to many minds. They carry the power to instruct, encourage, discourage, mollify, anger, vilify, inspire, exhilarate, create or destroy. They can make a person change his mind, motivate him to stop or move, do, undo or redo. The power of words is almost limitless.

If we examine the fruit of the Spirit, we find that they all have something to do with our minds. Words are a large portion of the mind's working material and therefore play a huge role in what the person produces with his life. It is no coincidence that Jesus is the Word of God, and the Bible, the written revelation of God and His purpose, is also the Word of God! God is trying to tell us something. He is concerned about our minds because what goes into them will determine what we produce with our lives. Will it be fruit leading to eternal life or fruit leading to death?

We cannot think with what we do not have. If we do not have the right material upon which to base our thoughts, how can we possibly produce the right things? We are always, whether pauper or king, limited by what is in our mind. Paul shows this in



Ephesians 2:1-3:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This reveals to us that every human being who has ever lived (except Jesus) has been enslaved to a way of thinking generated by the prince of the power of the air, Satan. Because of this, we fulfilled the desires of our flesh and mind. Indeed, because our minds had little else with which to work, we could not produce anything else! We produced the fruits of a spirit but not the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:7-8 clarifies this:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

By using those who killed Christ as an illustration, Paul shows that everyone has been held captive to ignorance of God and His way. God's wisdom was hidden from "the rulers of this age." Had they had it, their minds would have had the material to reach a far different conclusion about what to do about Christ. They would have produced a different result.

The wisdom of God was hidden from us too until God began to lead us by His Spirit. I Corinthians 2:10-12 informs us of the change this has wrought in our lives:

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

God had the gospel preached to us through the medium of words. We believed them, and having been freed from enslavement to deception and spiritual ignorance by God's calling and forgiveness through Christ's blood, we now have access to a new and infinitely larger dimension of life.

Beyond that, we now possess the raw material for our minds to produce the fruit of Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:13-14 adds:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Without God's Spirit, we were limited to producing only things within the capabilities of the spirit in man coupled with the influences of Satan. Though we could produce wonderful material things, the spiritual and moral fruit was overwhelmingly bad.

What else can Satan's spirit produce? But now, as the saying goes, "the sky is the limit"

because access to the Spirit of God empowers us (with His help, of course) to produce the life God Himself lives—eternal life.

### Produce Fruit by Wishful Thinking?

However, doing this will not be easy because the Christian becomes a man with two natures. The old nature, ingrained with the thinking patterns and habits learned in this world, which lies under the sway of the evil one (I John 5:19), and the new divine nature, received as a new birth from God (II Peter 1:3-4), exist together. These two are irreconcilable antagonists—with the Christian in the middle, forced to make choices between them.

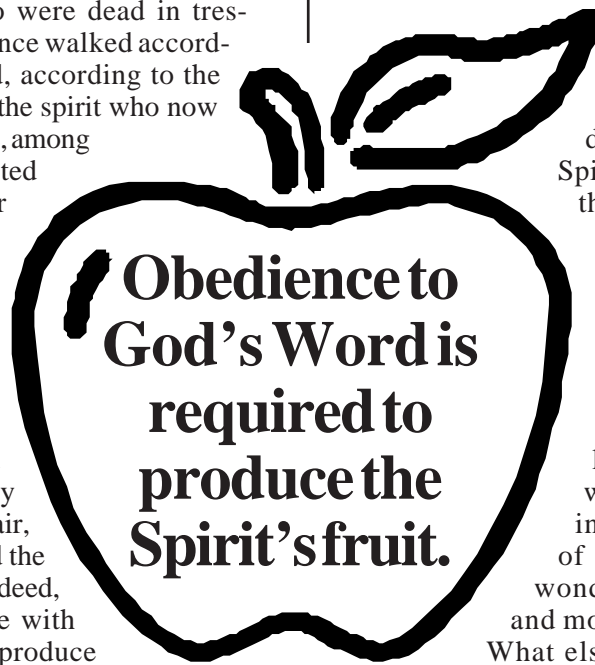
In Galatians 5:16-17, Paul says:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Again, the context in which these verses appear is important to understanding the production of the fruit of the Spirit. This immediately precedes the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, showing that Paul means that they will be produced through much internal conflict.

This is true because obedience to God's Word is required to produce the Spirit's fruit, and the Christian is being pulled or led in two directions. The one tries to make us satisfy the desires of our old nature, and the other leads us toward producing the fruit of the new. Paul expresses his experience with this in Romans 7:15-19:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate,



that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Christians, as Martin Luther stated, “are not stocks and stones.” As humans, we are creatures of desires, drives and emotions. Certainly, as we learn to walk in the Spirit, we increasingly subdue our flesh. But flesh and Spirit remain, and the conflict between them is fierce and unremitting.

We need not become discouraged over this conflict, though, because Paul also gives us a very hopeful solution. In Romans 7:24-25, he exclaims: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

Every Christian striving to produce the fruit of God will experience this combination of lamentation over sinfulness and joyous expression of gratitude over the certainty of deliverance. The unconverted do not feel the agonizing struggle against sin with the same intensity as the converted. The converted have their peace disturbed and can feel wretched in their conscience.

But this has a good side to it as well. We know it is degrading to the divine nature, and it humbles us to know full well that we have succumbed to evil passions. We then realize more fully that the law cannot come to our aid, neither can other men, and our strength has already betrayed us. Therefore, if we really desire to glorify God and produce spiritual fruit, this conflict will drive us to God in heartfelt prayer for the strength only He can give. God’s Word and eventually our experience prove that without Christ, we can do nothing!

## A Singular Fruit

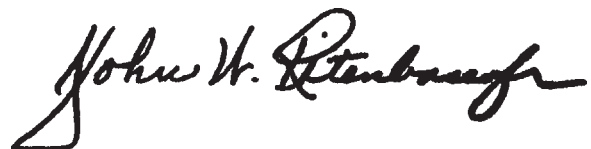
It might be helpful to note that Paul wrote “fruit” in the singular, indicating that we should understand that the fruit has a number of components, but at the same time, all of them will be produced within each person the Spirit leads. This does not mean that each component will be in exactly equal proportions like so many segments of an orange. Nor does it give any indication of its quantity or quality in each person. However, it ought to encourage us to know that some part of each of them will be produced.

Paul pointedly drew attention to the source of the fruit as being “of the Spirit” to make us fully aware that these qualities do not flow from our natures. The vices or “works of the flesh” listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are the product of our human heart. But the spiritual fruit is produced by means of a “foreign” influence, the agency of the Holy Spirit. Even after conversion our heart is not the source of this spiritual fruit.

A final factor to consider is that Paul names nine qualities. This divides neatly into three general groups, each consisting of three qualities. Of course, we can expect some overlapping of application between the groups, but generally the first group—love, joy and peace—portrays a Christian’s mind in its most general aspect with special emphasis on one’s relationship with God. The second group—longsuffering (patience), kindness and goodness—contains social virtues relating to our thoughts and actions toward fellow man. The final group—faithfulness (fidelity), gentleness and self-control—reveals how a Christian should be in himself with overtones of his spiritual and moral reliability.

Each of these virtues is a quality we should greatly desire, for without them, we cannot rightly reflect the mind and way of God. The fruit of the Spirit reflects the virtues God would manifest before mankind. Indeed, when Jesus became a man, it was by his life He glorified our Father in heaven. God, of course, is far more than this brief listing describes. But seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness through yielding to His Word will produce these characteristics of God in us. Then, as we become like Christ, we will, like Him, glorify God.

In Christian love,



# Why the Transfiguration?

It is absolutely wonderful when God answers one of my questions. Now, I would not want anyone to think that God speaks to me personally, sends me dazzling visions or the like. That sort of thing has yet to happen. Just like everyone else, I usually have to dig out the answers, and very frequently, it is a long time between question and answer. Sometimes I wait days, sometimes weeks, sometimes months. More often than not, God makes me wait years for the answers to some of the most nagging questions.

This particular question goes back to the fifth grade—about 20 years—and God answered it for me just recently. One of our fifth-grade assignments focused on prefixes. The teacher, Mrs. Martin, gave the class a list of about ten prefixes, and our job was to write down the longest words that we could think of that started with those prefixes. The student with the longest word for each prefix received a prize, and the student with the highest total score also received a prize.

Well, I won the prize for the prefix “trans-.” Living in the Bible Belt, I thought more kids would have come up with the same word I did, but no one but I thought of the word “transfiguration.” That is fifteen letters. I upgraded to chocolate milk that day at lunch.

Thinking of the word, “transfiguration,” made me curious, so I read the account in Matthew 17. I thought it a wonderful story, miraculous and almost incredible. The three disciples received a rare glimpse into the glory of God! What a tremendous thrill that must have been!

*“...Suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”*  
(Matthew 17:5)

But why? Why did God do it? What was its purpose? What exactly was He trying to get across? These are the questions to which I think I finally received the answers. However, before we get to the answers, we must set the scene. In the *background details*, the *religious milieu* of the day and the *disciples’ perceptions* of

things, we see the reasons for this stunning display of Christ’s glory.

## Background

Matthew 16 provides the background for the transfiguration. Looking quickly through the chapter, we see several sections, all of which tie into the lessons of the transfiguration.

◆ The Pharisees and Sadducees seek a sign, but they cannot discern the signs of the times (verses 1-4). Even with their extensive knowledge of the Old Testament, they did not understand what was happening. They would not accept the myriad signs proving Jesus’ Messiahship.

◆ Jesus warns His disciples against the leaven—the doctrine—of the Pharisees and Sadducees (verses 5-12). Their teaching did not square with the revelation of God; it was based more on tradition than truth, as Jesus had shown in the previous chapter.

◆ Peter proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah, and Jesus speaks of building His church and being crucified and resurrected (verses 13-23). This was a ma-

## A Ready Answer

“Be Ready Always To Give An Answer” – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

jour step forward in the disciples' understanding, and it corrected the erroneous prophetic teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. However, from the incident that occurs in verses 22-23, we can see that Peter—and probably the other disciples also—were not yet fully convinced of it.

◆ Jesus warns the disciples that they must imitate Him in sacrificing themselves to bring about the Kingdom of God (verses 24-28). Following Christ means imitating Him, to the point that they would have to give their very lives in service to Him. Their reward would be based on how they gave themselves to this cause.

These ideas swirled around in the disciples' minds for six days before the transfiguration took place (Matthew 17:1). Jesus' teaching and warnings served to prepare them for the glorious vision they would witness atop the mountain. As Peter later wrote, it was something they would never forget, an experience that helped forge them into apostles of Christ (II Peter 1:16-18).

## Religious Milieu

Because of Daniel's Seventy Weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27), the Jews knew that the coming of Messiah was imminent. It was a constant topic of conversation (John 7:25-31, 40-44). They could easily count the weeks equal to years and come up with at least an approximate year. They expected Him to reveal Himself at any time.

However, they were expecting a conquering King to come and overthrow the Romans—not the Lamb of God led to the slaughter to die for our sins. They looked at the prophecies of the Old Testament, seeing the ones that spoke of Christ coming to fight the enemies of Judah (see Zechariah 12:1-9), and ignoring the ones speaking of His redemptive work (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). In effect, they wanted to skip right to His second coming without any of the "unpleasantness" of the first.

Also, and this is vital to understand, they thought the Messiah to be *just* a prophet, a man, a physical savior. They probably derived this from Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 of "a Prophet like me." Since Moses was a mere man, they thought the Messiah to be no better.

Any idea of the Messiah being God

*"Also we have  
come to believe  
and know that  
You are the  
Christ, the Son  
of the living  
God."*

or the Son of God they would think to be close to, if not real, blasphemy. Even when Jesus explained the truth of this to them (John 10:31-39), they rejected Him and tried to seize Him and stone Him. Thus, as Paul and Peter later said, He became to them "a stone of stumbling" (Romans 9:33; I Corinthians 1:23; I Peter 2:6-8) because they were stubbornly fixed on their preconceived notions about Christ.

This is what the disciples had learned as they had grown up in Galilee, and it was what they were having to unlearn under their new Master, Jesus. Since their whole world was being turned upside down, God knew that to encourage them as they learned, He had to show them incontrovertible proof that they were on the right track. The transfiguration gave them that boost.

## Disciples' Perceptions

Sometimes we give the disciples too much credit. Though they knew enough to follow Jesus, and their understanding was growing, they still did not have the benefit of the Holy Spirit to any great degree.

They were still very much in the unlearning process—that is, unlearning the false teachings they had received all their lives. It would be akin to asking an American to believe that individual rights, capitalism, baseball, hot dogs and apple pie were evil, and that an uneducated man from the backwoods knew a better way.

The disciples' thinking was still based on the typical Jewish understandings promoted by the Pharisees and Sadducees. They had never known any other way of life, and they were proud of their strictness in following it (Acts 10:14; Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4-6). Even years after they both had received the Holy Spirit, Paul corrected Peter for the tendency to fall back on his Jewish upbringing (Galatians 2:11-21).

For all that, however, they knew Jesus was special. A short while before, when many of Jesus' disciples deserted Him because of misunderstanding His teaching, He asked the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67). Peter's answer for himself and the others is insightful:

Then Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (verses 68-69)

This shows that they had this one fact firmly in hand. However, they were still not totally ready to swallow everything Jesus told them right away. Peter went so far as to rebuke Jesus for even mentioning that He would suffer crucifixion and rise from the dead (Matthew 16:21-22). To Peter, the Messiah should not have to endure such a thing! Even the transfiguration, crucifixion and resurrection did not completely persuade them to accept the outworking of God's plan. Before Christ ascended to heaven they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

In reality, though the disciples had at least recognized Him as Messiah, they were still in their spiritual infancy. They had a long and arduous work before them, and God found it

expedient to kindle their faith with a raw dose of His Son's once and future glory.

## The Transfiguration

**M**atthew tells the story of the transfiguration in a very straightforward manner:

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain by themselves, and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (Matthew 17:1-3)

Jesus clearly calls this mysterious occurrence a "vision" (verse 9). It was not reality but a glimpse of what the future held for Jesus Christ.

The word "transfigured" in verse 2 sounds esoteric, but it is merely the passive form of the Greek word *metamorphoo*, meaning "changed in form" or "transformed." This same word is used in the well-known Romans 12:2, ". . . be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind. . . ." Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke uses the phrase *egeneto heteron*, translated as "was altered" and meaning "became different" (Luke 9:29). In the vision, the three disciples saw Jesus change to the form He will have in God's Kingdom, which He alluded to in Matthew 16:28.

Why did Moses and Elijah appear with Him? This is where the events of Matthew 16 become important. These two servants of God were the most revered among all the Old Testament figures. Moses, the Great Law-giver personified the Law, and Elijah, the Archetypal Prophet, the Prophets. Evidently, the vision depicted Moses and Elijah speaking to Jesus in a servant-Master relationship, but the disciples failed to see this vital distinction:

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still

speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

Notice how Peter puts it. "Let's make three tabernacles, one for each of you." The other accounts say he did not really know what he was saying, meaning that he had missed something in his fear, that he spoke without thinking it through (Mark 9:6; Luke 9:33).

What happened as a result of his thoughtless comment? Notice that Matthew writes, "While he was still speaking. . ." This is a big clue. God, immediately seeing that the disciples did not understand, took steps to make it plain. To paraphrase what God says, "Look! Jesus is **MY** beloved Son, and He has **MY** highest approval. Listen to what **HE** says! He is **FAR** greater than Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets."

This is why the transfiguration occurred. God wanted to make it very clear to the disciples that His way of

*"Look! Jesus is  
MY beloved Son,  
and He has MY  
highest approval.  
Listen to what  
HE says!"*

life is based on the life and death and life again of Jesus Christ, not on the Jews' traditional beliefs. He had to stun the disciples so that they would put Jesus and His teachings on a higher level than Judaism—even higher than the teachings of Moses

and Elijah.

Whatever Jesus says is far more important to our salvation than the minutiae of Moses' law or the vagaries of prophecy. In many instances, Jesus makes upgrades to Old Testament law, giving a higher, spiritual meaning (for instance, Matthew 5:21-22). Hear Him!

## Confirmation

**H**ebrews 3:1-6 confirms that this is the true understanding of the transfiguration. In the early AD 60s, Paul was still having to reiterate this point to the Jewish Christians:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 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.

Jesus, the Son of God, is greater than Moses, a servant, and He is certainly greater than Elijah. We will do well if we first start with the teachings of Christ and use them to "interpret" the rest. He is the Chief Cornerstone (Isaiah 28:16; Ephesians 2:20). Upon Him, everything hangs.

In Hebrews 3, Paul admonishes us to hold fast to what Jesus taught us (see also Revelation 3:11). If we do, he writes, we also will be sons and daughters in His house. We will no longer be servants, but heirs, actual children of the Father (Romans 8:16-17). Is that not good reason to put Him first? Hear Him!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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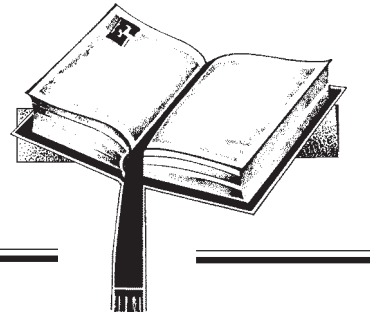


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# Symbolism and Duality

*Are the prophecies of the Old Testament primarily aimed only at the physical peoples of Israel and Judah? Can we apply them directly to the church? If so, on what authority and how?*

**W**ho can understand the Bible? Just anyone? Christ spoke in parables to hide the spiritual meaning from all but His true disciples (Matthew 13:10-17). In these verses, he quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to show that rebellious physical Israel and the rest of the world could not understand His Word, but His true disciples can know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. God gives His Spirit to those who obey, not those who abandon obedience (Acts 5:32), and it leads them to understand (John 14:26).

Of the Old Testament, Paul boldly states that its accounts were *all* “written for *our* admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Corinthians 10:11). “Our” includes the New Testament church at Corinth and himself. The Old Testament was written for the church!

To the Roman church he attests, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Earlier, he says that God recorded Abraham’s faithfulness not for him

alone, but for *us* (Romans 4:20-24).

Paul informs Timothy that “*All* Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:16). Verse 15 makes it clear that Paul refers to the Old Testament since it was what was available to Timothy as a child.

These plain passages state emphatically that the Old Testament was written primarily for the church! God has consigned physical Israel to unbelief until the Millennium and Great White Throne Judgment (Romans 11:25-26, 32). Other than as a warning of physical punishment and captivity for breaking the Old Covenant, the Bible is “Greek” to the Hebrews! They have no opportunity for spiritual salvation until later—unless called into the church for whom the Bible is chiefly written! Though they may consider themselves Christians, God has not offered them, nor do they understand, the New Covenant. They do not even know why they exist!

## Duality

**D**oes anyone who came out of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) because of doctrinal heresy *not* apply Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23 and Malachi 1 to the ministry of God’s church today? Is anyone so naïve as to think these incriminations are against only the Catholic and Protestant ministers of “Churchianity” today? If we feel they apply to a true ministry gone awry, we have applied the *principle of duality*.

This is not duality as worldly theologians view it (good and evil, light and darkness, or other conflicting powers), but duality as the true church defines it. It occurs when a passage of Scripture applies on two different levels. For example, a verse may apply both physically and spiritually, in the letter and spirit of the law, or to Israel and the church.

The prophecies absolutely apply to physical Israel and her pagan, so-called Christian ministers. In recent startling reality, they also apply to apostate WCG ministers, wolves who have rent the flock.

How can some so easily apply these

prophecies to the church, yet have trouble seeing the rest of the prophecies as speaking first to the church, second to physical Israel? This is especially curious with such emphatic, unequivocal quotations from Christ and Paul about their intended audience, the church.

In Ephesians 1, Paul exerts quite a little energy explaining that God fore-ordained the church—us—before the foundation of the world to be redeemed and sealed as His children to receive spiritual blessings, not just physical ones. God offered Israel physical blessings, but they rejected Him, forcing Him to divorce them—since they obviously left the marriage—before He ever came in the flesh, when they rejected Him again!

Jesus' words in Matthew 21:43 confirm that physical Israel has no authority or current offer to participate in the Kingdom of God: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." He had given the keys of the Kingdom to the apostles (Matthew 16:18-19), telling them plainly they would each rule one of the tribes of Israel in the Kingdom (Matthew 19:28).

Though the Pharisees may still "sit in Moses' seat," it would no longer carry any influence or spiritual value to God or the church. This is the lesson of the transfiguration! It explained to the disciples, taught all their lives to look to Moses, that now Christ was the authority. "Hear Him!" God thunders (Matthew 17:5). (See the article, "Why the Transfiguration?" on page 8.)

Who is this "nation bearing the fruits of" the Kingdom? A series of scriptures will make it clear.

Hebrews is a choice place to begin understanding biblical symbolism as it refers to the church. The book is written to physical Israelites whom God had called into spiritual Israel, the church (Galatians 6:16). The author's very first point is that God spoke in the past by the prophets—Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others—but now through Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2), underscoring that Moses' seat is now obsolete—of no value—to the church. Look to Christ! Much of Hebrews is devoted to focusing our

attention on Christ, that He changed the priesthood, tithing, etc., bringing a better way.

In Hebrews 11, using notable names from the past, Paul puts them in perspective to the New Testament church. Verse 39 must have hit these Jewish converts like a bombshell. They had looked to Moses all their lives, yet Paul says Moses was not one whit ahead of them or us, the New Testament church! We will all be resurrected in the same batch—all the firstfruits! In Hebrews 12:18-21, he explains that access to God is not now through Moses.

Hebrews 12:22-24 shows where we now look:

◆ *Mt. Zion*, a type of the church (compare Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:19-20; I Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 14:1-4).

◆ *City of the living God*, the holy city, New Jerusalem and Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2, 9).

◆ *Heavenly Jerusalem* (Galatians 5:26; Revelation 21:2).

◆ *General assembly and church of the firstborn*, the called-out ones (Romans 8:14-19, 23, 29-31; James 1:18).

◆ *Those written in heaven*, which Luke 10:20 defines as the disciples of Christ.

◆ *The spirits of just men made perfect*, which are all of those who have completed their course and are awaiting the resurrection of the dead.

## Bible Defines Its Symbols

These various symbols are all one and the same! Wherever these terms appear in the Bible, we can apply them spiritually to the church. Their first application should be to the church, to God the Judge of all, Jesus the Mediator, the New Covenant and our salvation.

Paul lumps all these synonyms of the church together to show Jewish converts that the church is now the apple of God's eye, not physical Is-

rael. Israel will have to wait for salvation in their order (I Corinthians 15:23). It is similar to what Christ Himself told the Jews: "Indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30). Physical Israel came first in history, but they will be among the last in salvation. Spiritual Israel came last in history, but will be first in salvation.

True, physical Israelites comprise most of the church, but God has grafted in Gentiles, who are just as much spiritual Israelites as the original branches (Romans 9-11). Neither Greek nor Jew has any advantage unless converted.

In Acts 8, the eunuch from Ethiopia was reading Isaiah and could not understand it. Philip began *with that scripture* and preached Christ, baptism and the New Testament church! By the time he finished, the eunuch was baptized. Do Isaiah and his prophetic companions apply to the church or not?

Other New Testament passages confirm the use of various symbols to the church. In Galatians 4:26, Paul writes, "Jerusalem above . . . is the mother of us all." Hebrews 12 already equated heavenly Jerusalem to the church, and here "Jerusalem above" is symbolized as our mother, the body in which we mature before spiritual birth into God's Family.

Galatians 6:16 calls the church "the Israel of God," giving us authority to apply prophecies about Israel first to the church, second to physical Israel. Paul's point is that spiritually circumcision is nothing, but the new Israel of God, His new creation, is everything (verse 15)! Now we see the "nation bearing the fruit" to which God will give the Kingdom.

I Peter 2:1-11 confirms this. Peter addresses his letter to the "pilgrims of the Dispersion [scattering]," and he refers to the church as a "holy nation" (verse 9). Lest any miss the symbolic applications of Israel to the church, Peter uses many other symbols in his letter: newborn babes, living stones, spiritual house, holy priesthood, Zion, chosen generation, royal priesthood, special people, the people of God, sojourners, pilgrims and sheep.

## Analogies

Scripture frequently uses these symbols as analogies describing the church, its members and their relationship to the Father, the Son and the Kingdom of God. *We must be careful*, for each analogy adds to the picture but is not the whole picture in itself.

For example, we are called firstfruits (of the grain harvest) and firstborn (of beasts). Each adds to understanding but is not the whole picture. If we mix these two analogies, we come up with a weird combination—something half vegetable, half animal!

Another example is in the family analogy. We are called children, sons, brothers, daughters, virgins, bride, the 144,000 and mother. If each of these is the whole picture in itself, we have a problem with Christ breaking His Father's laws! The mix would include polygamy, incest and homosexuality!

We can authoritatively use all these symbols from both the Old and New Testaments and apply them to the church. However, we must not take them so far that they break down.

God warns us not to return to *Egypt* and to come out of *Babylon*. Is it really a great stretch to see the symbolism here? WCG has gone back to Egypt (doctrinal sin) and back into the captivity of Babylon, having joined the pagan churches of physical Israel. When we read of Egypt and Babylon in the prophecies, the spiritual tie-in is clear.

In the same vein, God types the Assyrian as a destroyer and a rod of His anger. Have we not seen a destroyer in the church? Does not God say He will send the Assyrian to punish His people and that He Himself sent him (see Lamentations 2:1-8)?

Ezekiel 34, which nearly all have applied to the church, shows a scattered flock (verses 5-6). Sounds like the current church!

Revelation 3 says Christ will spew (scatter) the church for Laodiceanism. Did not *all* the virgins, the whole church, slumber and sleep (Matthew 25:5)? Should we be shocked to realize Christ's abandonment when we were too spiritually lazy to open the door for our Bridegroom (Song of



A watchman at the gate slumbering—just as Christ said the virgins of His church would!

Songs 5:2-3)?

Paul directly addresses II Thessalonians 2:1-9 to the church. Why is it that we have applied it only to the Beast and False Prophet? Verse 4 **ADAMANTLY** declares that this man “sits as God *in the temple of God*, showing himself that he is God.” The church is frequently called the temple of God, the members lively stones. Where is this man of sin? In the church! Did not many in the church flee from the swine of false doctrine offered on the spiritual altar of God? Was there not a falling away from the true doctrine of God as Paul warns (verse 3)?

Yes, a world religious figure will stand in physical Jerusalem and fight first the Two Witnesses and then Christ at His return. Here is a lesson in duality. Antiochus Epiphanes in

Daniel 11 was not a type of only one man, but of at least two. One in the church, one in the end-time global government of Satan.

Which can potentially do greater damage to God's plan, the one who attacks the firstfruits or the one who devastates physical Israel? Judgment is now on the church (I Peter 4:17), while physical Israel must wait until the Millennium or Great White Throne Judgment. The spiritual application of these prophecies could be far more eternally destructive to God's purpose than to physical Israel.

## Daughters of Zion

An analogy that mystifies some refers to the split-off churches from WCG as “daughters of

Zion.” They reason that, since the church is “not divided,” is “one body” and Christ built “one church,” it cannot be several churches or daughters.

The Bible often symbolizes churches as women, both faithful and evil. Ephesians 5:22-33 plainly shows physical marriage as a type of Christ and the church. Men are types of Christ, women, types of the church.

When Herbert Armstrong said there is only one church, he was absolutely correct. At the time, there was only one organization so far as we knew, though little groups in other countries had at least some truth and could have been remnants of the early church. Mr. Armstrong often referred to himself as our “father in the faith.” He did not mean it as the Pope does, calling himself the “Vicar of Christ,” but as Paul did—the one through whom God called us.

In one sense, though scattered, the church is still not divided, for within the whole assembly, including tares, God knows those that are His. The tares He will separate out. In addition, some will fall by the wayside, among thorns, on rocky ground or good ground. A separation will occur. So the *true Christians* are the church, together in truth and obedience no matter what corporate organization they are part of.

On the other hand, we all slumbered and slept—became Laodicean—and God is spewing us out of His mouth, scattering us like spit under pressure. So, by analogy, there was one organization until God scattered us (Lamentations 2; Daniel 12:7). Since Zion represents the church, and church members are scattered into many organizations, these organizations are analogous to “daughters of Zion.” Many Old Testament prophecies refer to them as such. Paul himself applied Hosea’s prophecy of children of harlotry to the church (Romans 9:25-26).

## Application to the Church

**W**hen we understand how the New Testament writers applied the Old Testament, we can begin to see how the prophecies fit what is happening before our very eyes in the church.

The judgment on the true ministry of Christ in spiritual Israel has al-

ready become manifest and their flocks are being scattered (Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11). In Hosea, the church is pictured as a harlot with her disobedient daughters. God was “a little angry” with the church, but when the heathen entered, He became “exceedingly angry” (Zechariah 1:15).

While God may still see the WCG as having been the “mother” church, He views her as a harlot and refers to her as Egypt and Babylon, where her leaders have taken her. In some passages, He is not too pleased with the “daughters” either. Maybe we ALL have some repenting to do!

He calls physical Jerusalem “Sodom and Egypt” in Revelation 11:8. See how the analogy fits? Spiritual Jerusalem has also become “Sodom and Egypt” (see Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:44-46; 23:11-21)!

This is why God is scattering us. He is putting us to the sword (many are spiritually dead or dying), to famine and pestilence (the spiritually starving and sick) and many are now in captivity (back in spiritual Egypt, Babylon or Assyria—the world).

God is fulfilling Ezekiel 5 on spiritual Israel just as He will on physical Israel in a short time! He will save a very small remnant (Isaiah 1:9, Ezekiel 5) of the church from the Tribulation just as He will save a small remnant of physical Israel from death to work with in the Millennium. Ultimately, He will save most of the church just as He will save physical Israel (Romans 11:26).

A remnant of the church will be taken to a Place of Safety, but many will only repent during the Tribulation, though they may have to give their lives physically to prove their worthiness. Physical Israel will essentially be killed as well, but will be saved in the second resurrection (Ezekiel 37) when God will give them physical life and spiritual opportunity.

Reading the passages having “daughter(s) of Zion” in context makes an eye-opening study. The prophecies, both good and bad, parallel what is happening in the church today, just as they will soon apply to physical Israel.

## A Future Scenario

**W**hen physical Israel finds herself in captivity in the near

future, what is she to do? She is to repent and return to God with her whole heart that she might be saved. When we went to sleep and woke up in spiritual Babylon, Egypt or Assyria, what were we to do? Repent, turn to God with our whole heart, buy oil for our lamps if we lacked, and pray that God will save us and reunite us.

He will, but alas, it will be only a remnant. He will draw us one by one into one fold (Isaiah 27:12-13). He will apparently do this through the Two Witnesses, who will lead the building of the latter temple by working *with the people* (Haggai 2). Zechariah 3-4 shows them as supplying oil to all seven churches, divided by the different attitudes that prevail at the end. We do not know whether this gathering will be before the Tribulation or in the Place of Safety.

Who God will use as His Witnesses and when remain to be seen, though it is clear from the above scriptures that they will be active in helping build the church. For 3½ years they will make a strong testimony against the world (Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 11).

Another thing that remains to be seen is who will repent, overcome, don the garments of holiness and be included in the righteous remnant (Revelation 2-3). This depends on our individual response to God.

Through the Bible-defined symbols for the church, we can begin to see how intimately God and Christ are involved with us. We can see how the story of the church is central to understanding the prophecies of the Bible as they pertain to us today.

They are not just something to consider for physical Israel, but are very living, real and dynamic for us TODAY. They were written for us “upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” The apostles constantly referred to the prophets in preaching Christ to the early New Testament church. In fact, much of the New Testament is quotations from and references to the Old. God has not “done away” with the Old Testament; it is part and parcel of our lives.

Physical Israel has no idea who they are and what part they play.

Do we?

—Darryl Henson

# The Importance of Follow- Through

**H**ow many of you have ever bowled? played golf? played tennis? thrown a ball or swung a bat? kicked a ball? Though these activities are quite different, at least one skill is common to them all.

One of the most valuable metaphors or analogies we can apply from recreational or team sports is the concept of “follow-through.” After contact is made with the ball, or after it is released, the arm or leg continues in a continuous, unbroken arc.

It took me years to understand this concept, and even now I find myself goofing up because of poor follow-through. I find it embarrassing to admit (but instructive to mention) that I received a mid-semester warning slip from my college Physical Education instructor that I would fail bowling unless I learned to execute a proper follow-through.

If God were to give us mid-semester progress reports on our spiritual follow-through, how many of us would be getting warning slips? What ever came of those commitments we made 15, 25 or 30 years ago at the time of our baptism—at the time of our first love for God’s truth? Anybody who is called can have red-hot enthusiasm for the truth, but without the vital follow-through, the initial flush of first love can and does fizzle out.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 suggests that “the end of a thing [a completed arc or swing, in our analogy] is better than its beginning.” While the initial stages are important, God is much more interested in the result. Our backswing may be impressive, but do we hit the ball into the cup?

## **Commitment**

**I**t always used to amaze me that something I did after I released the ball could have any influence on the ball’s trajectory. One golf expert explained to me that the error always occurs before the release. The completed motion must be realized in the imagination before the swing has started. The mental arc of the arm, leg, bat, club or racket has to be envisioned and maintained until the movement is concluded—not when the ball looks as though it might make it, and certainly not at the beginning.

Notice Exodus 19:8. The people of Israel enthusiastically proclaimed their intention to follow God's law, but God gives them their final report card in Hebrews 3:10-11: "I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

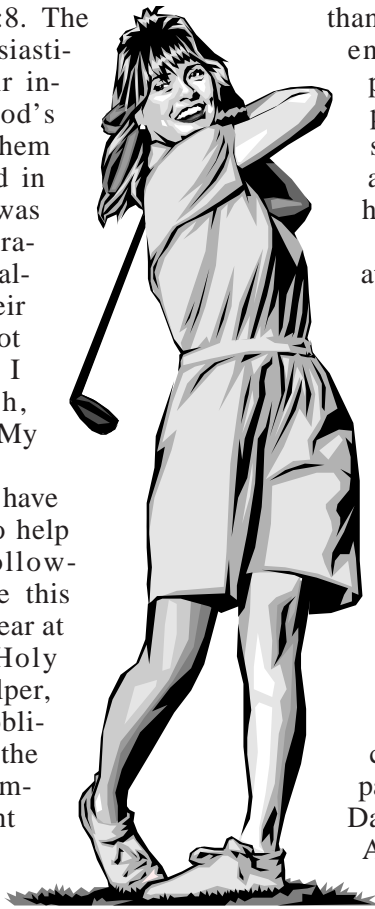
Today, God's people have an extra component to help them with their follow-through. We rehearse this additional aid every year at Pentecost: God's Holy Spirit. With this Helper, especially, we are as obligated to understand the seriousness and solemnity of our commitment as our forebears back on Mount Sinai.

The follow-through begins with the will and commitment to carry an action through to its ultimate completion. We call this intent to complete our follow-through "counting the cost."

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." (Luke 14:28-30)

The time for wavering, vacillating or indecisiveness is *before* we make the agreement, not after the process has begun.

Our society has a deplorable philosophy about commitment and follow-through. Authors Kevin and Marilyn Ryan, in their book *Making a Marriage*, claim that lack of commitment, the willingness to follow through, constitutes the primary reason the divorce rate is so abominably high in this nation—and particularly in Los Angeles County, where more



than 60% of new marriages end in divorce. Young people try on marriage partners like pairs of shoes. When they tire of a partner, they discard him or her for a new one.

Students taking courses at our local colleges and vocational schools show a similar short attention span. The typical attrition rate for extended day classes runs about 60%, roughly the same as the divorce-to-marriage ratio in Los Angeles County.

The unwillingness to follow-through rears its ugly head in the increasing slaughter of human life in the abortion clinic, rivaling—even surpassing—the slaughters in Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz. It is frustrating to hear feminists talk of a woman's right to

control her body. Obviously, some of them have *not* exercised any control when it really counted!

Private debt has caught up to public debt. Uncle Sam has dutifully taught us the fine art of deficit spending, as well as the lack of follow-through in exercising control over our lusts. We have learned to charge all our desires to the Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover card, and leave the phone off the hook when the creditors call.

God makes it abundantly clear what He thinks of people who make commitments but fail to keep their word—fail to follow through:

◆ When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. (Deuteronomy 23:21)

◆ It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward reconsider his vows. (Proverbs 20:25)

◆ When you make a vow to

God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5)

## Point of No Return

**M**any people in the greater church of God have reached what Dibar Apartian, in his 1966 *Good News* article, termed "The Point of No Return." He writes, "Once the distance ahead is shorter than that already traveled, a plane can no longer turn back to its starting point—however serious its mechanical difficulties may be."

Metaphorically, some of us have serious mechanical problems, but we cannot go back or land at our destination. We cannot run from our problems no matter how badly we want to—not any more than a woman in the delivery room can say she does not want to have her baby! We gave up our choice to decide whether we wanted to go through with it—to finish our course—when we accepted God's calling and were plunged into the waters of baptism.

Two verses illustrate this:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

In the words of the Mafia Godfather, "You people know too much to get out of this alive." By pulling out of our commitment, we stand the same

chance as a tiny, premature fetus ripped from the womb.

God's Holy Spirit prompts us to follow through, the exact opposite of timidity and fearfulness. Paul writes, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7).

If we allow God to continue working with us, He will lead us to the ultimate follow-through:

And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you. (Philippians 1:6, *The Amplified Bible*)

## Looking Back

**G**od has already envisioned the end of the arc or swing. The only thing that can hold us back is our timidity or faintheartedness. We hope that the similar lesson of Lot's wife has not been lost on us either.

Jesus uses yet another metaphor to hammer the follow-through point home: "But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:62).

I remember many times when my brother and I used to pull cockleburrs and Canadian thistles out of our bean field back on the farm. One of the most discouraging or demoralizing things we could do was to look back too

early and see how little progress we had made.

Even after attending services for 20 or 30 years, if we look back to see how little progress has been made in our spiritual lives, we tend to be discouraged. An

overwhelming urge to run away from our problems wells up. To this natural inclination to run and hide, God tells us, "Don't do it!"

Hebrews 11:38 describes God's perspective: "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." Timidity and indecisiveness have no place in God's plan. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart," (Galatians 6:9).

Long-time member Jesse Bates once used the metaphor of the field stake providing a guiding image to the farmer on his tractor. The plowman better not take his eyes off either the furrow or the stake at the end of the row! As soon as he looks away, any small movement can skew his aim.

Yet it is possible to modify and adjust the direction of our trajectory if we concentrate on it. In other words, it is not too late to make a course correction or adjustment while the swing is in motion—just as long as the completed arc or trajectory is maintained as a guiding image.

## Last-Second Botching

**U**nfortunately, we can botch the most carefully executed swing in the last few milliseconds if we take our mind off the goal. Consider Proverbs 25:26: "A righteous man who falters before the wicked is

like a murky spring and a polluted well." Ecclesiastes 10:1 conveys the same point: "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor."

One could blow a whole lifetime of overcoming by the wrong follow-through. In I Samuel 15, when Saul was ordered to kill the Amalekites, he carried out about 87.6% of the objectives. Perhaps this percentage of the swing is defined by the time the ball is

released. Perhaps we have just about reached this percentage up to this point in our lives.

Will we, like Saul, proclaim, "I have performed the commandment of the LORD" (verse 13)? But Samuel replied to this effect, "What a minute, Saul. Did you follow through? Weren't you supposed to obliterate every trace of the Amalekites, including their possessions and King Agag?" (verses 14).

Then Saul said, "But, but, but—the people took of the plunder, not me!" (verse 15). Then and there God rejected him as Israel's king (verse 26).

Responding to the present fiasco in the church, some have said, "I've had to put up with incredible stress for umpteen years. I'm tired of it." A friend said he has totally burned out. "Come back and talk to me in 20 years about this, and I might become interested again." Sadly, this attitude is fairly typical following the atomizing of our former affiliation.

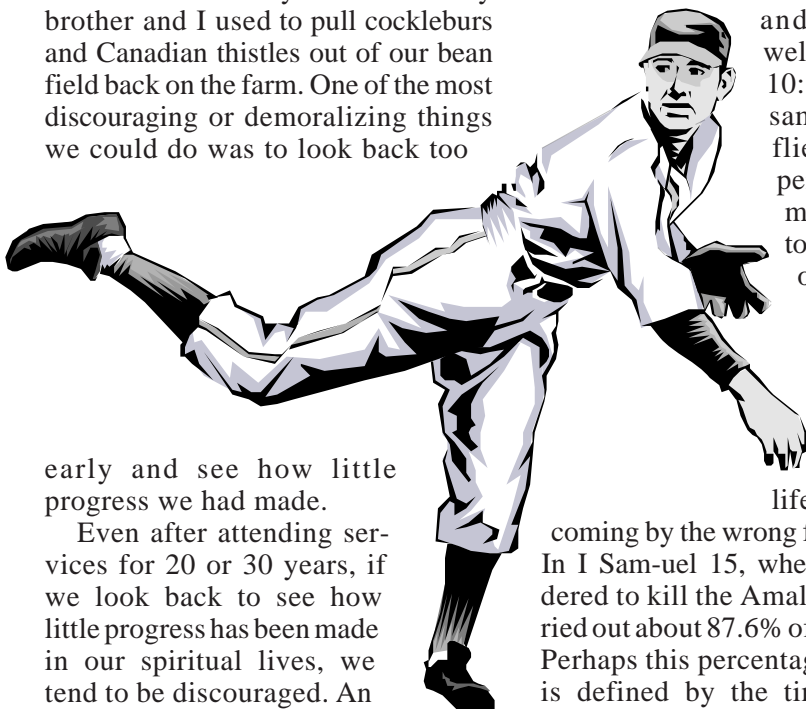
The church at Ephesus had a good initial swing (Revelation 2:1-3). For the most part, they were diligent, perseverant and resistant to false teaching. But they lacked follow-through in that they lost their first love (verse 4). God warns them to rekindle it or lose their eternal life (verse 5)!

Some veteran members of God's church have come precariously close to losing their first love. Losing love on the physical plane is full of anguish, but on the spiritual it is infinitely worse. As Jesus says of this age, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:13). Such lawlessness was the basis of the many doctrinal changes we endured over the past decade.

In describing this anti-law movement, Jesus says, "And you will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mark 13:13). We have a responsibility—not only to ourselves, our family, our church, but to the whole human race—to follow through on our task of overcoming.

We cannot let down—end our follow-through—until we are face to face with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God.

—David F. Maas



# WEATHER



- Up to 3,000 families lost their homes as Typhoon Paka ravaged Guam for 12 harrowing hours on December 17. Winds blew at 150 m.p.h. and reached a record gust of 236 mph. Hospital officials said low barometric pressure induced nine pregnant women to give birth.
- As a result of El Niño, 1997 will go on record as the world's worst year for wildfires. The Amazon region of Brazil had more than 45,000 fires, destroying about 5 million acres, an area almost the size of Vermont. Fires in Indonesia burned 4.9 million acres. Vast areas of New Guinea, Colombia, Peru, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and other parts of Africa also burned. Large-scale fires also struck Australia, China, Russia and several Mediterranean countries.



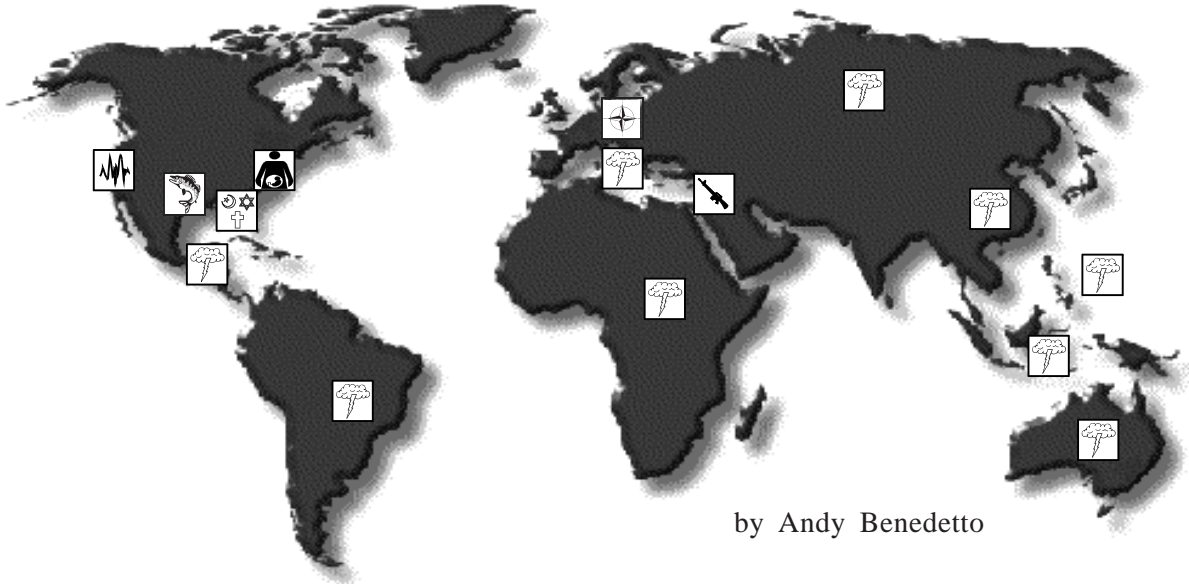
# MIDDLE EAST

- Israel and the Vatican signed an agreement recognizing the status of Catholic Church institutions in Israel. Foreign Minister David Levy said the pact "strengthened the already good relations which exist between Israel and the center of the Catholic Church, the Holy See."
- In response to Prime Minister Netanyahu's statement that Israel would annex the Jordan Valley and other territories if the Palestinians unilaterally declared themselves a sovereign nation, Yassir Arafat said, "Let it be quite clear to all that the state of Palestine exists and al-Kuds al-Sharif [Jerusalem] that was occupied in 1967 will be its capital."

# Marine Disease



Zoologists believe that high levels of ultraviolet radiation-B (UVB) can cause physical deformities in amphibians. Increased solar UVB, attributed to an eroded ozone layer, has played a role in the worldwide decline in amphibian species. In a laboratory study, where egg masses of long-toed salamanders were exposed to UVB, 85% of the embryos died, and all but 4 of the remaining salamanders were deformed.



# ABORTION



In the 21 years since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion on January 22, 1973, 32.5 million abortions have been performed in America. In the years 1993-1996, an estimated 1.4 million abortions occurred each year.

On December 16, the government of Helmut Kohl took the first step toward securing German consent to NATO's plans for expansion by allowing its Foreign Minister to sign protocols on extending alliance membership to Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

# NATO



# EARTHQUAKE



A 4.9 magnitude quake struck the California mountain resort of Mammoth Lakes on November 30, the strongest of thousands of earth movements since summer. Seismologists think the quakes are caused by magma moving under the Sierra Nevada. Such strong quakes raise fears in Los Angeles—hundreds of miles away—that the city's water supply could be severely upset if a volcanic eruption occurs in the Mammoth Lakes area.

# RELIGION



Over the past 2 years, nearly 2 million people have attended 650 church services at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, where believers wait up to 17 hours to shake and roll on the floor, convinced that God is making them do it. Evangelist Steve Hill began the revival on Father's Day 1995, when church members spontaneously began showing signs of being "slain in the spirit." Critics believe that the evangelist is manipulating the emotions of weak people who want to surrender.

# BIBLE STUDY:

# LOVE

As Christians trying to overcome, we often think in terms of ridding ourselves of sin, which can be a discouraging and sometimes overwhelming experience. Nevertheless, it is only part of a Christian's life. It is just as important—if not more important—to concentrate on producing the fruit of the Spirit, the positive result of overcoming. Producing the fruit of the Spirit means—above and beyond “merely” obeying

the Ten Commandments—we begin to produce and grow in godly character. Building character requires sacrificing ourselves in service to God and our brethren (Romans 12:1-2). In this second Bible Study on the fruit of the Spirit, we will focus on the first and most important fruit, love (Galatians 5:22). Love could be considered a vine as well as a fruit as it is the channel through which all of the fruits are borne.



**1.** What are we without love? I Corinthians 13:1-2. What does a life without love profit us? I Corinthians 13:3. Whom should we love? Deuteronomy 6:5; I John 2:10; 4:7, 11; Matthew 5:43-46; 22:36-39.

**COMMENT:** Man's natural state is to be God's enemy (Colossians 1:21) and to hate Him (John 15:18). The love of God is not naturally in man (John 5:42). Since carnal humans cannot love properly, they are of no lasting benefit to their fellow human beings. They rarely give anything of true value to others.

**2.** What is love? John 14:15, 21; Romans 13:10; I John 5:3; II John 6;. What must God give us so that we may have true love? Romans 5:5; I John 3:24; 4:12-13.

**COMMENT:** God's divine love is entirely different from the world's version of it. God imparts love to us by the Holy Spirit, and we express it by obeying His law as outgoing concern for others.

**3.** What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments? Deuteronomy 5:33; 6:25; Matthew 22:36-39; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; I Timothy 1:5.

**COMMENT:** God's character is based on love, and He has given us His law to guide our character development. Love is and results from keeping God's law.

**4.** Do we have to show true love to know and understand God? I John 2:3-6; 4:7-8; 5:2. How has God shown His love toward us? John 3:16; Romans 5:8; I John 4:9-10. Why does a converted person love God? I John 4:19. What must we do to love God? I John 4:20-21; John 15:13.

**COMMENT:** We can see the Father's love for us in His offering of His Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for our sins. Christ demonstrated His love for us by giving His own life for us (Ephesians 5:2). We show our love for God in our adoration, worship and obedience, resulting in outgoing concern, compassion, kindness and service toward others (II Corinthians 5:14) and giving our lives as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

**5.** How does love relate to perfection? Colossians

3:12-14; I John 4:12. Why is love perfected in us? I John 4:17.

**COMMENT:** Love is the bond of perfection (I Corinthians 13), and God's love is perfected in us as we love each another. “Perfected” means complete or mature as God wants us. God is completing our character development by instilling in us His own character of love, seen in our love for one another.

**6.** How is love related to truth? I Peter 1:22; I John 3:18-19. How can we show love without hypocrisy? Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 6:1-4.

**COMMENT:** By obeying the truth with the help of the Holy Spirit, we understand love from a godly perspective. A humble attitude is paramount to showing genuine love toward others.

**7.** Is there a wrong type of love? I John 2:15-17; Proverbs 7:18-19; I Timothy 6:10. Can we fear if we have perfect love? I John 4:18.

**COMMENT:** Love of the world is forbidden by God, and conforming to it shows that a person loves it (Romans 12:2) and therefore hates God. Much of the time, the world equates lust with love, but nothing could be further from the truth. Lust is self-centered and destructive. The person who has God's love perfected in him cannot fear because he has no dread of punishment and no torment from sin.

**8.** What characteristics and fruit does love produce? I Corinthians 13:4-7; Proverbs 10:12.

**COMMENT:** The mutual love that issues from the unity of the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:1-3) is a witness to the outside world of the reality of God's existence. The love of God is perfected in us if we keep God's commands and love one another, and this unifies us by one Spirit into one body, as Christ is one with the Father. God is developing a Family whose main characteristic is love, therefore, the Kingdom of God is also the kingdom of love. This fruit of the Spirit opens the way for the other spiritual fruit to be produced.