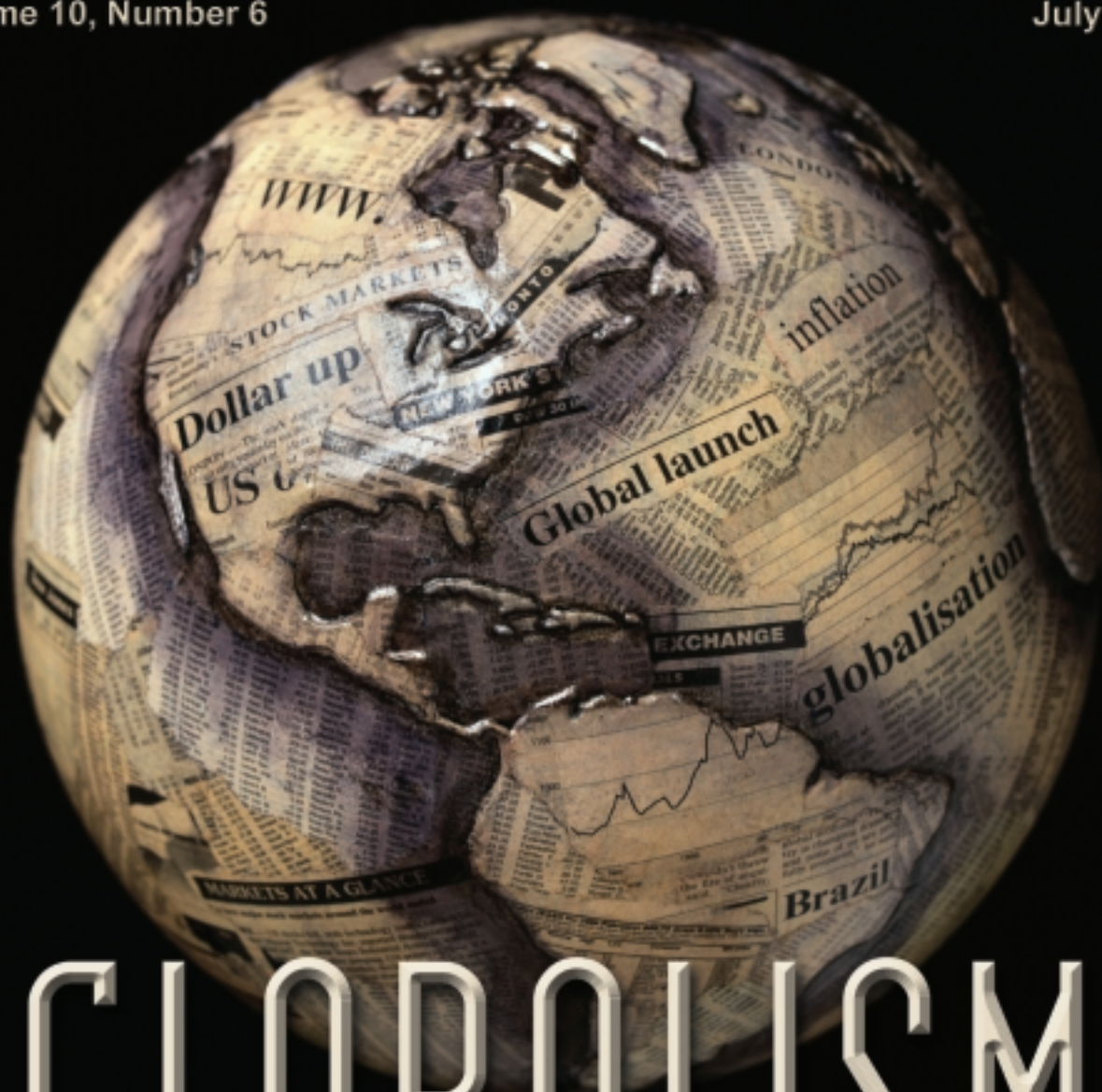


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 10, Number 6

July 2001



GLOBALISM

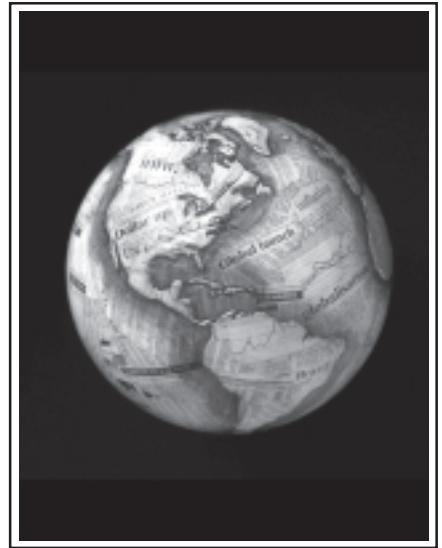
MODERN BABEL?

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About Our Cover:

“Going global” is a popular business catchphrase these days; it seems every corporation wants to have a worldwide scope. Though the media tries to convince us globalization is a positive, progressive trend, is it? Or could it be setting up the proper conditions for the climax of this age? (Corbis Images)

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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EATING: *How Good It Is!*

Part Five

Though we may possess certain knowledge about some concept, it may not truly convict us in the sense of what biblical living faith is. Mere agreement with God about His way of life frequently does not amount to what we need to take action. Faith involves trust, and trust is active, even though it sometimes involves only patiently waiting. Faith entails making practical use of knowledge—putting what we believe to work so that it actually produces righteousness.

In the biblical sense, faith—belief about or in something or someone—is dead, useless, unless we put it to use working toward the promised good result. When Paul admonishes us to “stir up the gift” in us (II Timothy 1:6), he is really telling us to discipline ourselves to put what we say we believe into action. He speaks most specifically about the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the intent of his admonition includes all of the truths we have received as a result of God giving us His Spirit.

Because of grace, the elect are responsible to God to act in agreement with these truths. To act contrary to them is to quench the Spirit. Resisting the truth stifles and smothers good results; it inhibits growth into God’s image. Proverbs 25:28 says, “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.” Such a person is defenseless against destructive forces that pressure him to submit. To do the right requires discipline, the self-control to act in agreement with truth, because virtually everything in life—including Satan, the world’s en-

ticements and our appetites—works against our fervent submission to God. Thus, Paul charges us to exercise the control to stir up the gift.

This same principle is true regarding good physical health. The public market makes available copious amounts of information on principles of good health. Upon examining it, we may find that we agree that we could use some of it to improve our health. What good does it do for us if we do not stir up our spirit, disciplining ourselves to make use of it?

Discipline Is Key

Recently, I heard two comments on radio talk programs that touch on these principles. The first came from a program on which three men, all former professional athletes, were interviewing a fourth man. The flow of the conversation motivated the fourth man to turn the tables on the athletes by asking them what differentiates top professional teams from the also-rans. One, a former football player, immediately answered, “Discipline,” and the other two quickly agreed. He explained that really good players discipline themselves to do the right thing regardless of how the game is going at any given moment or how well his own teammates are playing. He added, “When you have a whole team of men who do that, they win almost all the time.”

A few days later on a different sports program, the host was interviewing another sports figure, an older man who had a connection to high-level college basketball. One question led him to say that, all things being equal,

the talent level of the top-flight teams is about the same from one college to another and from one conference to another. It was his observation that what makes the difference is whether the coach can get his players to believe his system. He then remarked, "If the kids don't believe, they simply will not do it regardless of how athletically gifted they are." Out on the basketball court in the heat of the game, such "unbelieving" athletes will essentially do their own thing. Thus, the heat of the game reveals what they really believe in. In most cases, without belief in the coach's system, they simply revert to the way they have always played.

These two interviews illustrate the principle of biblical faith applied to a game. We must first come to believe the way of life, then we must stir ourselves, discipline ourselves, to put it into practice regardless of how life is going or how our peers are doing. As a minister, it is my responsibility to find ways to help us believe in God and His way of life, but a minister cannot live life for anybody but himself.

We live our lives based on what we believe. God wants to bring us to the point where we believe Him rather than our own or this world's experiences. He wants us to believe His truths and have that faith motivate us to produce the good works He is creating us to perform. Such faith will not be dead.

Mankind's Responsibility

Corinthians 6:13-15, 19-20 constitutes a major plank of this series of articles:

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the member of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! . . . 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.

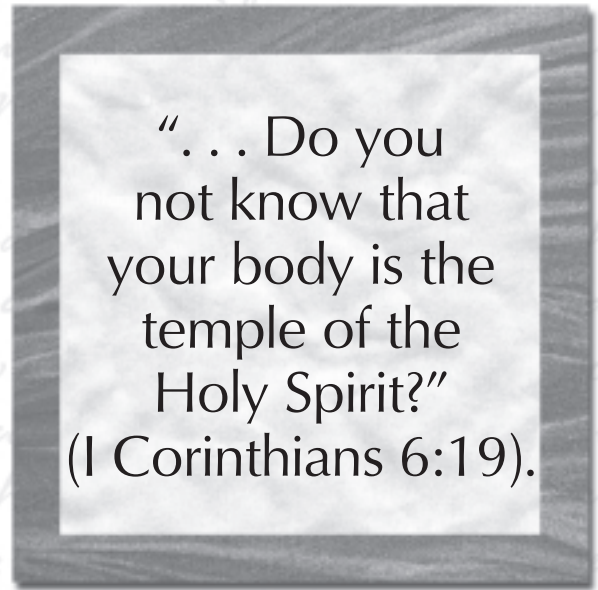
Maintaining good physical health is a stewardship responsibility that comes with our calling. We owe this obligation to our Creator God just as surely as we have spiritual responsibilities toward Him. We may deem these physical responsibilities as less important, but that does not nullify them.

Paul uses "body" in a dual sense, as both the spiritual body—the church—and the physical body of each member. Sin works to destroy both, and God did not create us to sin.

The sin here is fornication, *porneia*, which includes a broad range of sexual sins that pervert the right, godly use of sex. Paul uses it to illustrate sin's de-

structiveness. Sin is somewhat like junk food: It may "taste" good to the senses for a while, but before it is through, it will come back and harm us with its destructive properties. Junk food may taste good going down, but all the while, it is depriving the body of life-giving nutrients it needs to be truly strong.

In Genesis 1:28, God gave mankind dominion and responsibility to rule over His creation. Our own lives and bodies are the closest and most specific areas of God's



creation over which we are to rule. In Genesis 2:15, God commands us to dress and keep His creation, giving us more specific direction in this obligation. To dress and keep means we are to beautify, enhance, embellish, and improve the raw product, along with maintaining it and inhibiting its decay and degeneration. In Genesis 4:7, God admonishes Cain—and us in principle—that a desire to go contrary to God's desires will always be part of this mix. Sin lies at the door, He warns, but we must master it. In essence, we must stir up the spirit in us to discipline ourselves. In combining these major principles, we can see that God means our major areas of operation in His purpose are those closest to us.

Observing people from all over the world makes it plain that God used a common design in creating mankind. However, He also built into the gene pool enough variety that individuals are specifically different in some respects. This requires of us that we study and increase our knowledge of our own body's specific needs to maximize and maintain good health. We are all responsible to deal with life and health beginning where we are.


To some extent, all of us are victims of our ancestor's sins, a fact God knew when He called us. When He revealed Himself to us, and we accepted His invitation to enter into the covenant, we found ourselves responsible for seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Included within this is striving to overcome toward maturity. We are to submit ourselves to

grow in His image. This means working toward improving ourselves in knowledge, understanding, wisdom, attitude and character. Included within these giant areas is improving our physical health.

A Matter of Heart

Proverbs 23:6-7 says, “Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.” The principle stated here is the key to improving one’s physical health just as surely as it will improve one’s spiritual health. The sense of the usage of “heart” here is synonymous with the English word “within,” thus, what is within a person’s mind is hidden from view when one looks from outside. Appearances can be very deceiving because what is within may be far different from what another can perceive. A person may appear smiling and jovial, but he may only be acting to achieve a scheme that ultimately profits him. Therefore, he is using others to achieve his end.

Proverbs 16:9 adds, “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.” Again, the idea is that a man’s external actions have their genesis within him, in his heart. We often hear laments from those who want to improve their health or to lose some weight. Yet, for a person’s health to change for the better, he must begin by preparing himself and building strong convictions from



“A man’s heart
plans his way,
but the LORD
directs his steps”
(Proverbs 16:9).

within. *How* a person thinks, combined with *what* he thinks about, produces the conditions and the activities we see externally.

In Mark 7:15, 21-23 Jesus uses the same principle in a negative sense:

There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. . . . For

from within, out of the heart of a man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

Evil proceeds from within to without but so does good. Just as sin proceeds from within, so does righteousness. In Psalm 51:10, David pleads with God to create a clean heart within him because he understands that from a clean heart proceed clean thoughts and thus clean conduct that will glorify God. God promises exactly this in Ezekiel 36:25-26:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I 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.

Jeremiah 4:4, 14 adds another important and contrasting aspect of this principle:

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. . . . O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

Clearly, this project requires both God and us to contribute to make this change occur.

Our responsibility is to step out in faith, trusting Him, yielding to His truths taught to us. We do this by putting it to work in our lives, but it is not always easily done. What we are, what we have become since birth, is deeply entrenched in our character, and our nature does not cede control easily. Notice the example of Israel: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!’” (Exodus 32:9). “Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Exodus 33:3). “But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction” (Jeremiah 17:23).

This theme runs throughout the Bible. When Hebrews 4:1-2 says that the Israelites failed in the wilderness because “the word which they heard . . . [was not] mixed with faith,” Paul is referring to this principle. They simply would not yield their mind to admit that He was right. They seized upon their own opinions, observing them rather than what God commanded. Each individual Israelite may not have actually gone through the process of rejecting each command, but simply keeping their habitual attitudes and conduct produced the same end. Their

actions and attitudes, then, like the basketball players who never “buy” the coach’s system, spoke for them, revealing what they, in their heart of hearts, *really* believed.

In Luke 5:39, Jesus uses an illustration to help us understand this rejection syndrome: “And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires the new; for he says, ‘The old wine is better.’” He teaches that man has a natural resistance to the things of God. A wider and equally true application is that we humans almost immediately resist anything different from what we believe at the time. This is both good and bad. The important thing is whether we honestly consider and appraise behaviors and ideas before rejecting them.

Are our minds honest enough that, when hearing God’s Word truthfully expounded, we will consciously and promptly take action to change when wrong? The Israelites appear to have had an automatic *negative* reaction to God’s Word. They definitely did not have a childlike, submissive attitude! The Bible records that

Unbelief, sin, or even poor health habits wear a cloak of deception; they are not what they appear to be on their surface. Hebrews 11:25, speaking of Moses’ faith, says he, “[chose] rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. . . .” If sin were always an immediately horrible experience, nobody would commit it.

An unhealthy diet is similar. Indulging one’s appetite always tastes good. One commentator said, “If sin were without pleasure, only the mentally deranged would commit it because sin also contains death.” But death, and in many cases the pains that lead to it, are hidden in the anticipation of the immediate pleasures experienced while committing the sin. How many have suffered an early and painful death by eating themselves to obesity? Did they think about their obese condition and what caused it? Did they regret it and contemplate what they needed to do to lose it? Probably, but the combination of sin’s deceptions and their lack of conviction destroyed their self-discipline.

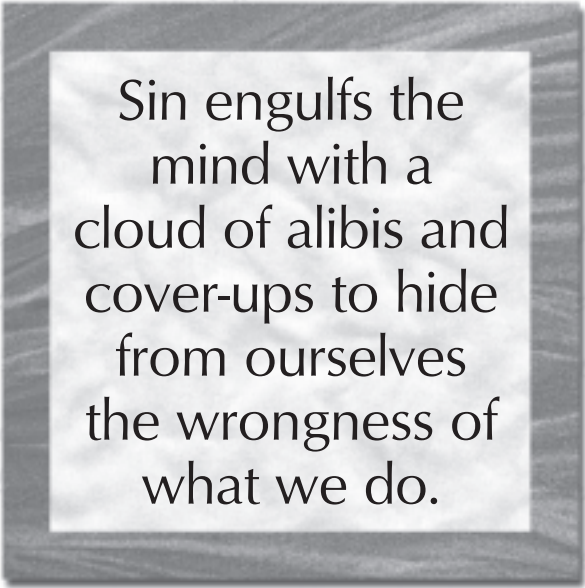
Notice what Jesus says about those who will grow in His way of life:

And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble [*honest*, KJV] and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:14-15)

Growth requires an honest and noble heart. We deceive ourselves through rationalizations and justifications, allowing our appetites to overwhelm what we know is true. Sin engulfs the mind with a cloud of alibis and cover-ups to hide from ourselves the wrongness of what we do. Sin promotes twisting and distorting of truth. We reason, “This isn’t so bad”; “I’ll do it just one more time”; “I’m too weak. God will just have to take me as I am”; “God will just have to do it for me.” We have all reasoned ourselves into transgressing.

Have we been deceived into thinking of sin only in the sense of breaking one of the Ten Commandments? While sin *is* the transgression of the law (I John 3:4), its biblical usage is much broader. When we fail to think of sin in its broader sense, we stumble into a trap. It is far better to think of sin as falling short of the glory of God. The central concept of sin is failure—failure to live up to a standard, God Himself. The glory of God includes His attitudes, intents, and His very thinking processes, all of which produce the way He lives. For us to fall short in any of these areas is missing the mark—sin.

We are deceived, lured into actually transgressing, through neglect, carelessness, laziness, irresponsibility, ignorance, bull-headedness, fear, shortsightedness, and



Sin engulfs the mind with a cloud of alibis and cover-ups to hide from ourselves the wrongness of what we do.

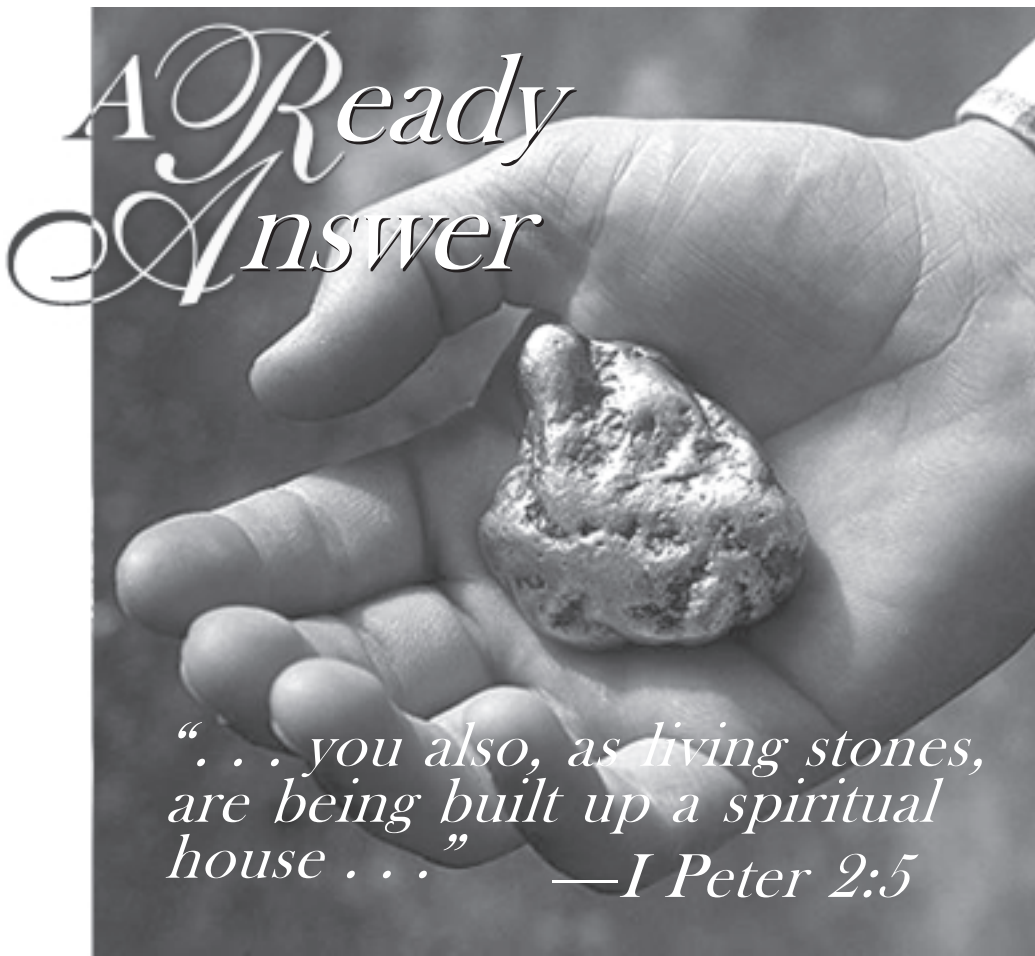
their conduct never changed, nor did their attitudes. In the game of life, they kept right on doing things as they always had, so they died in the wilderness. They left Egypt, but Egypt never left them.

What Does It Take?

Hebrews 3:12-14 touches on making changes regardless of whether they concern a spiritual or physical area of our lives:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

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Is a Rock Just a Rock to God?

Why does it always seem that the one person who can most easily get our dander up is in the right place at the right time and doing all the right things to get under our skin and cause us no end of grief? Such people often seem to know just the right thing to say or do to hit one's "hot button" and ruin a perfectly

good day. And how often has such a disaster occurred on God's Sabbath day at church services?

Something like this has probably happened to just about everyone in the church. If not, the rare exceptions are probably already perfect and have no need to read this article. In fact, to many of us this scenario seems to be more the rule than the

exception! And there are some good, spiritual reasons why this is the case.

At one time, when we attended larger churches, it was easy to avoid those who rubbed us raw or at least rubbed us the wrong way. Now, however, when we meet with just a handful of brethren, we are forced to deal with them every week. This kind of situation has the potential to become volatile and offensive. Conversely, it also creates an opportunity for growth.

Polishing Rocks

Our family had an experience while on vacation one summer many years ago. We were visiting the quaint and beautiful little mining town of Silverton, Colorado, nestled in the shadow of the San Juan Mountains. The prime attraction in Silverton is the narrow gauge steam train that makes a daily trip from Durango.

Up and down every street are many shops trying to sell the tourists any and everything they can, as this is their only source of income. At one of these shops, a man was polishing and cutting rocks. While watching him, I noticed a five-gallon bucket with a belt pulley on its bottom, sitting at an angle on some rollers. The pulley was being driven by an electric motor, causing the bucket to rotate on the rollers. The bucket was filled with rocks, most of which were covered with a heavy crust of limestone. The rocks sat in water, which created a slurry substance as the rocks tumbled and the outer crust began to erode away.

Having never seen this process before, I asked the man to explain what was taking place. He said that in order for him to get to the beautiful rock that lay beneath the surface of the outer crust, rather than take each rock to the grinder, he simply let them grind against each other until the crust was gone. The constant tumbling motion also removed most of the rocks' flaws or made them easier to work with.

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THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Emily Dickinson once wrote a cynical poem about a disgusting proclivity of human nature—to act irresponsibly and then to attempt to dodge the inevitable consequences:

The Heart asks pleasure—first—
And then—Excuse from Pain—
And then—those little Anodynes
That deaden suffering—
And then—to go to sleep—
And then—if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor—
The privilege to die—

In recent years, “victims” of self-imposed tobacco addiction had the chutzpah to attempt to extort millions of dollars from the deep pockets of big tobacco companies, shifting the blame for their own lack of self-control, as well as their inability to read the ubiquitous ominous warnings from the Surgeon General. Our courts are full of baseless lawsuits in which the plaintiff wants compensation for his own carelessness, stupidity or ignorance. Too few people today have the gumption to admit they are at fault.

Refusal to accept responsibility was perhaps the most striking trademark of the recent former president who, according to Bill Whalen of the Hoover Institution, “blamed Colin Powell for the death of U.S. troops in Somalia, Bob Dole for the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ controversy, and sex-obsessed Republicans for forcing him to commit perjury and obstruct justice.” After he allowed Janet Reno to take the heat for the botched Waco fiasco, a prominent radio commentator parodied him in a humorous variation of the Harry Truman expression, “The buck never got here!”

In Robert Ferrell’s informative biography, *Harry S. Truman: A Life*, he explains how and where Harry Truman, who made it a practice to accept responsibility, picked up the expression, “The buck stops here,” which he displayed prominently on a plaque at the front of his

White House desk. According to Ferrell:

. . . the saying had originated in the old frontier days, when players at poker tables used a marker or counter, often a knife with a buck-horn handle, to indicate the person whose turn it was to deal. If the player did not want to deal, he could pass the responsibility by passing the “buck,” as the counter came to be called. Truman’s refusal to do so had been a hallmark of his political career from the country level up.

PASSING THE BUCK

Throughout the Bible, we find myriad examples of people, not assuming responsibilities for their own actions or behavior, but instead “passing the buck,” blaming others for their own mistakes.

Our original parents lose little time refusing to accept responsibility for their errors, shifting the blame to someone else. Notice Genesis 3:12: “Then the man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.’” When God confronts Eve, she also refuses to accept responsibility for her own action: “And the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate it’” (verse 13).

Their offspring, Cain, learns from their example to shirk responsibility for his own actions: “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ And he said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’” (Genesis 4:9). Cain seems to shift his responsibility to God with his rather flippant retort: “Is he my responsibility?” or, “Am I responsible for him?”

Even some of the most faithful people succumb to this human failing. After Sarah persuades Abram to cohabit with Hagar, she conveniently shifts the blame to Abram when the consequences turn out differently than she had expected: “Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘My wrong be unto you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when

she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me” (Genesis 16:5). Sarah blames Abram for the acute discomfort in which she has placed herself by her prior request.

After Esau frivolously and carelessly sells his birthright for a bowl of red lentil stew and bread—demonstrating his lack of self-control and his contempt for his birthright—he bitterly accuses Jacob of stealing it from him, just as his twin brother had stolen the blessing. “And Esau said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!’” (Genesis 27:36). Evidently, he has



HARRY S. TRUMAN

totally forgotten about his own responsibility—really, his irresponsibility—in the earlier transaction.

Israel’s first high priest is no more immune to this not-my-fault syndrome than we are. When Moses confronts Aaron about his responsibility in forging the molten calf, Aaron quickly shifts the blame to the people:

So Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.” (Exodus 32:22-24)

Aaron, in effect, denies all culpability in the shaping and molding of this idol, a deed for which he is largely responsible.

Saul, like a recent former president, was quick to assume the credit for things done correctly and properly, but lightning quick to shift the blame for things running amok:

And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the

voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag, king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” (I Samuel 15:20-21)

This shirking of accountability appears in the New Testament too. The death of our Savior is partially attributed to a leader shifting the burden of responsibility onto the people. Rather than making an unpopular decision, he “washes his hands” of the responsibility:

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and our children.” (Matthew 27:24-25)

Notice how the people also presumptuously pass the responsibility onto their extant and unborn offspring. How incredible! How could one who does not yet exist be responsible for the actions of others?

REALITY THERAPY

Modern-day Israel has a remarkable tradition of not assuming personal responsibility but transferring it to someone or something else.

In his book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* psychiatrist Karl Menninger describes a bizarre metamorphosis in which behaviors that were once termed “sin” are renamed crimes, “rendering the designation sin increasingly pointless from a practical standpoint.” Later in the “progression of our civilization the behavior once called crime was relabeled or reclassified as ‘illness.’” Menninger suggests that “some sins,” ones that never became proscribed by law and labeled “crimes,” are also regarded now as symptomatic. In his chapter on “Sin as Collective Irresponsibility,” Menninger concludes, “We have ceased to be so completely individualistic and have joined together with others in many ways to do and to share many things, including responsibility for crime and sin.” Because we behave in groups, we are no longer individually accountable for our actions but share responsibility with the members of the group.

Swimming against the prevailing current of group irresponsibility, Dr. William Glasser, the father of reality therapy and choice theory, has built a system of counseling based on the premise, “We choose what we do; things do not happen to us.” Glasser expresses perturbed amazement that people “have a hard time getting over the external control idea that a difficult life situation makes people into victims.” Advocating self-responsibility, he insists that if someone decides to become an alcoholic, “it

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GLOBALISM

Part Two: The Tents

Ronald McDonald tells an interesting story. Today, McDonald's has more than 25,000 fast-food outlets in 119 nations. The corporation's international revenues surpass its stateside revenues. In "closed" China, 235 McDonald's exist, in tiny Taiwan, 310, and in cramped Japan, 2,985.¹ As if that were not enough, a new McDonald's opens its doors somewhere on the planet every 17 hours. The company has staged an international culinary takeover, without firing a shot!

God told the same story millennia ago. In Genesis 9:27, Noah speaks of his sons, Shem and Japheth:

May God enlarge Japheth,
And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;
And may Canaan be his servant.

We witness the closing stages of Noah's comments today. Canaan, broadly the peoples of Africa, is in the process of being marginalized by world powers.² God has indeed "enlarged" the population, prestige, and power of Japheth, the Asian nations collectively, especially in the last hundred years or so. Japheth's general and widespread "blooming" is one of the most obvious and important trends today.

What is not so obvious, however, is the role of Shem in bringing about this growth. Nevertheless, the fact is incontrovertible: God has used (and is using) Shemitic civilization to transform Japheth into a great people. Japheth is coming to "dwell in the tents of Shem"—in those

cultural fixtures originated by Americans and Europeans. This widespread realignment of cultural bearings, from traditional oriental to post-industrial occidental, often comes with reservation—and with a good deal of adaptation as well. Nevertheless, it has come about:

◆ The Japanese Emperor wears Western-style clothes. His people, isolated from the occident for centuries, have today thoroughly accepted the institution of capitalism, "a peculiar creation of Western culture."³ The Japanese people have come to feel quite at home "in the tents [and tenets] of Shem."

◆ India may lack an emperor but not Shem's tents. India is the world's largest democracy. Just like capitalism, democracy, as we will see shortly, is a Shemitic invention. In the 1830s, an Englishman, Lord Macaulay, formulated a civil and criminal legal code still used in India today. Macaulay believed that Britain's aim in ruling India should be the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste and intellect."⁴ To an extent, Britain succeeded.

◆ As is evident to all, China is moving into Shem's tents as well, slowly adopting a market economy. While no one can say

for sure, there will probably be more of Shem in China's future.

One writer offers remarkable insight into these tents. He does not refer to Shem, but to his descendent, Abraham. The Abrahamic

world emerged from the triad of religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—that trace their roots in the Biblical patriarch and spawned the great secular ideologies of scientific empiricism, liberal democracy, and Marxism. Unlike the Buddhist and Hindu worldviews, the Abrahamic perspective sees nature as reducible to predictable laws and history as a process with a meaningful beginning, middle, and end. The Muslim, the Marxist, the democrat, the Baconian scientist, the Christian, and the Jew all share this fundamentally similar outlook on life.

Because the Western perspective focuses on the sibling rivalries between Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Jefferson, Bacon, and Marx, it too often overlooks the extraordinary spread of Abrahamism out of its native Middle East into nearly every corner of the world. *Virtually every human culture that has encountered Abrahamic ideology has adopted it sooner or later.* Asia is no exception. In the last 100 years, each major

of Shem

Asian state has embraced at least one Abrahamic faith. Consequently, every Asian society is today engaged in a fundamental effort to reconcile its increasingly Abrahamic outlook with its native culture.⁵

The commentator concludes:

In fact, the twenty-first century may well be remembered more for the *end* of Asia than for its rise. On the one hand, the universal solvents of capitalism and Abrahamic ideology will

continue to sow deep social and cultural changes among the peoples of geographical Asia, steadily reducing, transforming, and remixing—although probably never finally eliminating—the last traces of pre-Abrahamic culture.⁶

The point, of course, is not that Asia is “ending” as a power structure. Rather, Asia is buying into occidental thought at the cost of her traditional, oriental culture.

The Tent’s Names

Shem’s tents have names. Here are a few of them.

1. Most prominent of all is the *sovereign nation state*, “a European innovation that replaced feudalism and established the rule of law.”⁷ This tent took years to erect, but a good benchmark date is 1648, when the Treaty of Westphalia ended Europe’s Thirty Years’ War and created a state-centered international order, which very slowly grew in power and popularity.

The Treaty was the death knell of feudalism, an economic system

where the king owns *all* the land. For a fee (or fief), he parcels out the land to vassals, who in return owe him a part of the land’s wealth, as well as military muscle and loyalty if the king should be attacked. The vassals could subdivide their fiefdoms, giving land to lesser nobles, and those nobles to yet more inferior nobles, and so on. Feudalism is government by loyalty oath.

Europe’s development of a nation-state system “contrasts sharply with Asia’s.”⁸ The great potential of Japheth remained untapped by her leaders for centuries because they refused to set feudalism aside. Consider that as early as the 13th century, the Mongol Genghis Khan could project enough power to threaten Eastern Europe. Even then, Japheth had a greater population than Europe and a greater economic potential by virtue of her large market. Asia, furthermore, enjoyed technological superiority over Europe, having “pioneered the development of clocks, the printing press, gunpowder, and iron.”⁹ However, because of Asia’s refusal to set aside her feudal system, her manpower and technology advantages were never able to serve her internationally. It was not until 1948, centuries after Europe put aside feudalism, that China followed suit. That happened when Mao Zedong consolidated his control over a number of Chinese warlords and proclaimed himself chairman of what later became the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). As we will see, in 1948 China stepped into one of Shem’s tents—Marxism.

Japan, likewise, did not abandon her feudal system until the mid-19th century, after American Commodore Matthew Perry steamed into Tokyo Bay, demonstrating to the Japanese leadership the extent to which she had fallen behind the rest of the world during three centuries of strict isolationist policy. Japan, as well, subsequently set about to step into Shem’s tents.



The nations of Asia—from Japheth—have adopted many Western/Shemitic ideas and ways. Here, in a simple example, Japan’s Crown Prince Naruhito and his wife, Masako, are shown in Western clothing rather than the traditional regalia of office.

prophecy watch

2. A second tent of Shem is the institution of *private property*, which the nation states established gradually and with varied success. While some peoples in antiquity enjoyed private property (notably those in ancient Israel), such rights were virtually nonexistent under feudalism. The right of common individuals to own property spurs entrepreneurial activities by permitting people to keep the fruits of their labors. It also encourages the clearing of land which otherwise would remain unused. An important spin-off of private property is the creation of a universally valued asset that serves as collateral for loans. Private property provided the “grub-stake” upon which modern credit banking is based.¹⁰

3. *Democracy*, a system of government accountable to the people, is another tent of Shem. It received its European start in the parliaments that developed in the tenth century to “advise” kings, and it took a major, if somewhat abortive, step forward in the signing of the Ma-

gna Carta in 1215, which limited the powers of the king.

European states developed the notion that the sovereign (whether a monarch or a parliament) had a duty to protect subject and property in return for taxes and service in the army. Rulers in the Qing, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires, in contrast, never recognized a comparable responsibility to their subjects.¹¹

4. The *separation of church and state* is yet another of Shem’s tents. The same treaty that established an incipient nation-state system in Europe, the Peace of Westphalia, also prompted the idea that man’s government works best when civil and “sacred” power structures remain separate. The Catholic Church’s hegemony eclipsed soon thereafter.

5. *Capitalism* is yet another tent of Shem. It arose in the power vacuum that resulted from the eclipse of the Catholic Church. The “creative

destruction” characterizing capitalism could never operate until “organized religion lost its power to execute as heretics those entrepreneurs who would upset the status quo.”¹²

Max Weber, focusing less on Catholicism, traced capitalism’s rise to the “Protestant work ethic” that was an unintended consequence of the “reformed” theology peddled by John Calvin (1509-1564). More realistically, we can trace the roots of capitalism back to a nexus of a weakened church hierarchy, the cool climate of northern Europe, the rise of technology, and the opportunity of millions to emigrate to the New World in search of a better life. All these factors—and others—combined to facilitate capital markets and mercantilism.

Much later in history, neo-mercantilist “export-promotion regimes were adopted by Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. . . . Almost all of the East

Feudalism in the Ancient World

It is worth noting that the ancient world, spanning millennia, was not characterized by a single form of government. However, it appears that a feudal arrangement often carried the day, especially in the Babylonian and Assyrian worlds. To a good extent, the various city-states of Egypt were in fact feudal (and feuding) fiefdoms. Athens and Rome effectively developed alternative systems to feudalism. Ancient Israel, with its God-given institution of inherited land, certainly broke the mold.

Along this line, the example of the patriarch Joseph is extremely interesting. Joseph probably did more than anyone else to ensure the eventual *dissolution* of Egyptian power by turning a strong capitalist system into a feudal one. Egypt’s famine was so severe and prolonged that it destroyed the economy of Egypt and Canaan—“the money failed in the land” (Genesis 47:15). With no money, the economy (not to mention the populace) was in deep depression. Joseph’s “economic recovery plan” was to switch the nation’s

economy from a capitalistic one, wherein the people owned livestock and land (verses 16-18), to a feudal one, wherein the Pharaoh owned the means of wealth (e.g., livestock), the land, and the people themselves. The Egyptians became reduced to serfdom in a feudal system (verse 25). With the passing of time, of course, the Israelites themselves became serfs.

One can guess that Joseph’s actions pleased immensely those in leadership positions, blindsided by short-term interests (i.e., greed) to the point that they could not see the longer-term ruinous effects of Joseph’s plan. Nonetheless, his actions set Egypt on a course to slow but sure economic stagnation and ruin. Egypt would eventually come to the point where she simply could not vie with the more progressive and innovative nations around her, particularly Greece and Rome, both of which had institutions of private property. In the times of their hegemony, she became tributary to both. Joseph’s brilliant plan—inspired by God—worked slow but sure. But it definitely worked!

Asian success stories, China included, are modern versions of the export-oriented form of mercantilism.”¹³ Another economist claims that the economic success of China is a result of “European economics, commercial law, science and technology.”¹⁴ These “Western institutions” interplaying with certain Asian values, “brought about successful development.”¹⁵

6. Finally, some of Shem’s tents are so undesirable as to be downright disgusting. Of such are *Marxist-communism, fascism and nazism*. For all their differences, each of these three totalitarian systems deny democracy and the rule of law. They all—though fascism to a lesser extent—get their intellectual underpinnings from Karl Marx. It is interesting to note that China, when she finally cast aside feudalism in the late 1940s, adopted communism as a culturally acceptable substitute for authoritarianism. She is only slowly and fitfully moving from this tent of Shem into somewhat more respectable digs.

These are the tents that Shem built. You can certainly identify others. With every passing day, Japheth is feeling more at home in them. They have been erected over the centuries by a number of occidental peoples, Israelites being among their major architects. Today, in fact, some of the more possessive Israelites claim to own them!

Globalism: Act One

Their claim contains a measure of truth, for the basic ideas behind globalism, chiefly democracy and capitalism, are certainly the products of Israelite thinking during the Enlightenment. It is not surprising then that modern-day Israel, especially Ephraim and Manasseh, are the peoples most committed to rebuilding Babel—to constructing a single, cohesive, globalized economic and governmental system. Two centuries



Interior view of London’s Crystal Palace, built in 1851 to showcase Great Britain’s technology and power and advance free trade principles. Britain (Ephraim) became the first of the nations of Joseph to possess a truly global reach. America (Manasseh) has followed his younger brother’s lead.

ago the world entered the first age of globalization. Trade and investment spread rapidly around the world, spurred by revolutions in communication and production technologies and a stable gold standard. Behind the scenes stood *Great Britain*—preeminent in manufacturing, finance, and naval power—which championed free trade throughout the Victorian era. . . . The result was an unprecedented flow of goods, capital, and people—and the rise of the first truly open world economy.¹⁶

Ephraim built a very great city, the British Empire. In fact, in terms of the relative size of monetary flows, the amount of world trade and the movement of peoples, the “first age of globalization” was at least as thoroughgoing as the second one, in which we dwell today.¹⁷ “In 1900 there was every reason to expect and welcome a future of continued world economic openness. . . . But this optimism was soon to end. The open world order came crashing down in 1914. . . .”¹⁸

The glories and promise of the first age of globalism ended in the conflagration of the First World War. Ephraim began his decline. There followed about a seven-decade period (1918–1988) of *Sturm und Drang*, during which the world successively witnessed a deep and prolonged economic depression, then another fighting war followed by a “Cold War.” Of the fighting war, one commentator makes an almost breathtaking appraisal: “The strength acquired by the United States in the aftermath of World War II was far greater than any single nation had ever possessed, at least since the Roman Empire.”¹⁹

Globalism: Act Two

The Cold War, following quickly on the heels of World War II, provided the rationale for the United States to maintain her military strength in order to “contain” communism. For decades, she maintained it. Then, in the late 1980s, the Soviet Union suddenly collapsed, her former client states fragmenting into squabbling, impoverished Third World nations. “[T]he end of the Cold War left the

United States in an unprecedented position of pre-eminence.”²⁰ Awash in wealth and military assets, the United States just could not resist the temptation to lead the world, as a second Rome.

Today the world is well into the second age of globalization, propelled by technological revolutions and the advanced industrial states’ commitment to the liberalization of capital and trade. This time, the *United States* has put its hegemonic weight behind developing the open world economy—creating multilateral institutions, sponsoring trade rounds, opening its own markets to imports, and singing the praises of commercial liberalism.²¹

The “technological revolutions”

are primarily in the areas of transportation, communication and information processing. These technologies facilitate the rapid movement of goods, money and people, as well as the gathering and analysis of vast amounts of data. The Internet and the computer have teamed up to provide at least a somewhat effective counterbalance to the effect of multiple languages. The ease with which people can communicate worldwide has made the creation of a “global village” appear even more possible.

The technology, the money, the leadership, the military muscle is American. As one writer puts it, “[G]lobalization is made in America.”²² Another is even more emphatic:

Today’s international system is built not around a balance of power but around American

hegemony. The international financial institutions were fashioned by Americans and serve American interests. The international security structures are chiefly a collection of American-led alliances. What Americans like to call international “norms” are really reflections of American and West European principles.²³

Today, America is leading the world’s second age of globalization, pushing people around the world to “dwell in the tents of Shem.” Next month, we will briefly trace the development of globalist and internationalist policies in American history and examine a key prophecy about Joseph’s tendency to lead nations, Israelite and Gentile alike, into global integration.

—Charles F. Whitaker

Continued from page 6

EATING: *How Good It Is!*

ingratitude for forgiveness and the awesome potential that God has freely and graciously handed to us on a golden platter of grace. We are detoured from progress to holiness and are enticed into sin by failing to see God and by not considering seriously the subtle influences on the fringes of actual transgression of the law. At the foundation of both spiritual and physical health is how we think and what we think about.

James 1:13-16 confirms this:

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The way to stop sin, as well as to improve health, is to change our thinking. Between what God does and what we should do, we can do it. This is real conversion!

Our Attitude Toward Truth

Notice II Thessalonians 2:9-10: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” A major area that separates those who are being saved from those who are perishing is the love of the truth. Truth sanctifies; it sets those who love and use it apart for the rewards of applying it to gain eternal life or better health.

Salvation is a process. Consider this: When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He redeemed them, but the process was not finished. It had only begun and did not end until they entered the Promised Land, a type of God’s Kingdom. God intended the journey through the wilderness to prepare them for living in the land. However, a whole generation died in that process because they did not love the truth God gave them throughout the journey. The journey symbolizes the process of being saved.

Salvation is not religious rite, nor is it just a catchy theological term given to make people feel at peace. It is the experience of being saved from what would otherwise destroy us, which takes place between the time of our redemption and actually being born again into the Kingdom of God. God is using His creative powers to get us to respond to truth. It does not matter what area of life or where the truth comes from. Truth is truth, but some truths are more important than others.

Verses 11-12 add more: “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the

Endnotes

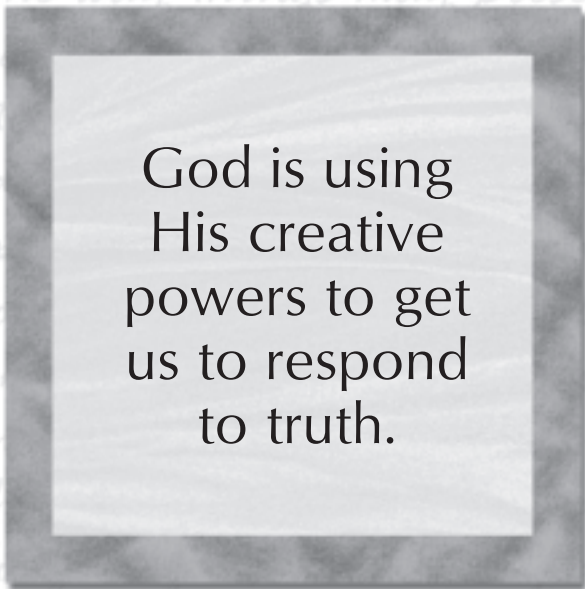
- 1 James L. Watson, "China's Big Mac Attack," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2000, p. 120.
- 2 See especially *United States Interests and Policies in Africa: Transition to a New Era*, edited by Karl P. Magyer, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- 3 Robert J. Samuelson, "The Spirit of Capitalism," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 205.
- 4 Quoted by Neil McInnes, "'Orientalism,' the Evolution of a Concept," *The National Interest*, Winter 1998/1999, p. 73. As a rule, the British thought their political/economic/social institutions were universal.
- 5 Walter Mead, "The End of Asia? Redefining a Changing Continent," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000, p. 156 (emphasis added). Mead is Senior Fellow in U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. His comments are part of his review of *Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia*, by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
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- 7 Bruce R. Scott, "The Great Divide in the Global Village," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001,

- p. 160. Scott is Paul W. Cherington Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.
- 8 Scott, *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 9 Scott, *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 10 Robert J. Samuelson, "The Spirit of Capitalism," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 205.
- 11 Scott, *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 12 Scott, *ibid.*, p. 173.
- 13 Scott, *ibid.*, p. 173.
- 14 W. J. F. Jenner, *The Tyranny of History: The Roots of China's Crisis*, London: Penguin, 1992, p. 172.
- 15 Deepak Lal, "Does Modernization Require Westernization?" *The Independent Review*, Summer 2000, p. 5. Lal is James S. Coleman Professor of International Development Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.
- 16 G. J. Ikenberry, "Don't Panic: How Secure Is Globalization's Future?" *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2000, p. 145 (emphasis added). Ikenberry's remarks appear in a review of Robert Gilpin's book, *The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st*

- Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. See also, Martin Wolf, "Will the Nation-State Survive Globalization?" *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 179.
- 17 See also Kenneth Waltz, "Globalization and American Power," *The National Interest*, Spring 2000, p. 48:
Finding that the level of [economic] interdependence in 1999 approximately equals that of 1920 is hardly surprising. What is true of trade also holds for capital flows, again as a percentage of GDP. . . . Despite today's ease of communications, financial markets in 1900 were at least as integrated as they are now.
- 18 Ikenberry, *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 19 Robert Kagan, "The Benevolent Empire," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 24.
- 20 Stephen Walt, "The Ties That Fray: Why Europe and America Are Drifting Apart," *The National Interest*, Winter 1998/1999, p. 3.
- 21 Ikenberry, *ibid.*, p. 145 (emphasis added).
- 22 Waltz, *ibid.*, p. 46.
- 23 Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The Present Danger," *The National Interest*, Spring 2000, p. 57.

prophecy watch

lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." To those who will not yield to a love of truth, Paul warns, God will send a "deluding energy." As they reject the truth and continue in sin, a deceptive force will build and pull them deeper into it like a drug



addiction. This parallels Romans 1:28, where Paul says, "God gave them over to a debased [reprobate, KJV] mind." This is what happens to people who leave the church: They continue to move further and further from the truth.

Proper Food for the Mind

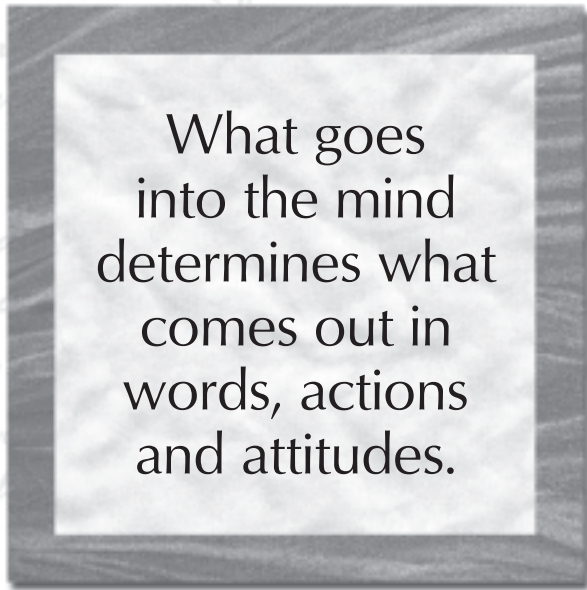
Philippians 4:6-9 clarifies the quality of what God wants us to feed our minds and adds further instruction:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

We need to pay careful attention to this sequence of instructions because it contains much that can help us attain both good spiritual and physical health. In the past fifty years, men have come to understand how deteriorating and destructive stress is to life. Paul's counsel, written nearly two thousand years ago, tells us not to be driven by anxiety or fearfulness about life. Even earlier, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonishes us to "take no anxious thought." The stress of anxiety is wearying, setting us up for multiple afflictions. If we really "see" God, we should know that He is with us. Should we not feel great assurance in His promise never to allow us to be tempted above what we can bear? Faith is a prime solution for anxiety.

Paul continues, urging us to let God know our needs in

every matter of life. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, He already knows our needs, but He wants *us* to recognize, evaluate, and communicate them to Him, accompanied by thoughtful expressions of thanksgiving for what He has already given, as well as His promises of blessings in the future. Do we see what this process achieves? It disciplines us to think within certain well-defined parameters that have Him and His way at the center of our life.



Paul then asserts that one benefit of this is tranquility of mind, respite from the restlessness so common to the carnal mind, which is constantly searching for new stimulation to satisfy its insatiable longings. This peace of God will stand guard over our minds like a sentinel, allowing us to meet and cope with the problems of life.

Verse 8 begins with the word “finally.” While not technically wrong, it does not adequately convey Paul’s intent. We can understand it better as “in this connection” or “in this regard as I close this letter.” In relation to anxiety, the peace of God, and coping with the problems of life, our minds should be occupied with things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. Through this discipline, we program our minds with the right things; what goes into the mind determines what comes out in words, actions and attitudes.

This is a biblical version of the “garbage in, garbage out; wholesome in, wholesome out” cliché. It specifically expands on Jesus’ statement, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). We could take this further and say that out of the abundance of the heart the mind thinks and feels, and the body acts.

In verse 9, Paul defines what is wholesome specifically as what they had learned, received, heard and seen in him. He is indirectly telling them to eat Jesus Christ because he, Paul, as His apostle to the Gentiles, was His agent to them and their teacher of His way of life.

Back to the Starting Point

In one sense, we have come full circle back to the starting point in the parallel between spiritual and physical eating. The quality of what goes in determines the quality of what comes out—but it will produce good results only if we believe and practice it with patient discipline. One cannot have a truly healthy life without a spiritually healthy mind as well as a physically healthy body. Paul affirms in I Thessalonians 5:23, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This verse does not define man as a trinity. It is a Hebraism, a common saying among the people, which simply means “the whole” or “every part.” A.T. Robertson, in his authoritative *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, defines it as “every part of each of you.” It corresponds to loving God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” but it is somewhat paraphrased and placed in a specific context.

Good mental and physical health are achieved by the same basic processes as good spiritual health and salvation. It begins by putting first things first. In Philippians 4:8, what did Paul say we should think upon first? Whatever is true! Jesus says in John 8:32 that it is truth that sets us free. In John 17:17, He states that God’s Word is truth and it sanctifies us.

However, we must also understand that God’s Word is not the only place truth resides. It contains the truth most essential to good relationships, to salvation, and to fulfilling God’s purpose. But God has left many things in the physical realm for mankind to discover and pass on so they can be known, shared, and used. Truth used correctly will set its users apart. Those who seek it out and use it are distinguished, made different, by their very use of it. Those who use God’s truth are set apart for salvation. Those who seek out and use truths about good mental and physical health will be set apart for better, improved mental and physical health. God lays this stewardship responsibility on those He has called to salvation.

Jesus states in John 8:34, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” As mentioned earlier, the basic concept of sin is failure—failure to live up to a standard, failure to hit the bull’s eye, failure to stay on the path. The slavery Jesus speaks of is bondage to a pattern of thinking that produces failure. This is what God wants to deliver and convert us from. All who come out of the world have been addicted, held in bondage, to ways of thinking that produce failure, mental illness, physical disease and death. God desires to give us freedom through applying truth in faith and love for the Father, His Son and the brethren.

He has revealed Himself, His way and His truth. Do we believe it? Will we discipline ourselves to use the truth? This is the responsibility that faces us. It has been done, and we can do it. Will you?

In Christian love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John W. Stenbaugh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

is his choice: he is not a victim of his heredity, or anything else.” In affirming self-responsibility, Glasser maintains, “Reality therapy contends that while we are all products of our past, unless we choose to be so, we need not be victims of the past. And, all of our counseling is to help people make the choice not to become, or continue to be, a victim.”

One of the first major figures in scripture to practice reality therapy—that is, assuming responsibility for his behavior—is, of all people, Judah, son of Jacob. One could even speculate that doing so led to his receiving the scepter promise in Genesis 49:8-12. Although he initially acts deceitfully and in a shamelessly mercenary fashion in the sale of his brother, Joseph, into slavery, Judah later undergoes a metamorphosis in which he becomes the truly responsible leader of the brothers. By taking full responsibility for the safety of his brother Benjamin, he shows fruit of repentance from his former behavior and the beginnings of character growth.

An intervening event helped to contribute to his assumption of responsibility. When Judah’s firstborn son, Er, dies, leaving his daughter-in-law Tamar childless, thus unable to continue the line of Er, he instructs his second son, Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother” (Genesis 38:8). Onan’s refusal leads to his death, leaving the grieving Judah with two deceased sons. Fearfully perhaps, Judah denies Tamar the services of his third son, Shelah. Angrily, Tamar masquerades as a prostitute to seduce Judah. When Tamar becomes pregnant and exposes Judah, he owns up to his behavior and publicly repents, saying, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son” (verse 26).

Rabbi Paul Saiger, in his article “Judah: Our Overlooked Patriarch,” quotes Maimonides, suggesting “the truest form of repentance occurs when someone has not only publicly confessed his or her sin and sought atonement, but has subsequently found himself or herself in a similar situation and has refrained from sinning.” Judah’s repentance for this misdeed is heartfelt and genuine. His subsequent behavior indicates that he had matured and grown as the result of this humiliating experience.

We can glimpse the fruits of his repentance in his negotiations with his father Jacob concerning Benjamin’s safety:

Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” (Genesis 43:8-9)

Later, when the revelation of the silver goblet that Joseph concealed in Benjamin’s sack threatens his promised return to Jacob, Judah, realizing the intense pain of losing two children, offers himself in his brother’s stead, affirming the genuineness of his repentance and establishing his mature leadership. This act of assuming responsibility and self-sacrifice does not go unnoticed by his father Jacob, who designates Judah as the head of his generation. He blesses him with these words: “Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. . . . Your father’s children shall bow down before you. . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah. . . .” (Genesis 49:8-10).

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

From Judah’s loins came other leaders who assumed responsibility for their actions, including David. The prophet Nathan confronts David by telling him the parable of the poor man and the ewe. David deeply repents (II Samuel 2:13; Psalm 51) and expresses willingness to endure the consequences.

David’s Offspring, Jesus of Nazareth, not only assumes the responsibility for His own behavior, but also the awesome responsibility of our sins and transgressions:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Like his maternal grandfather Judah, Jesus offers His life as surety for the transgressions of His brethren, truly becoming in the full sense of the word His brother’s keeper.

As begotten brothers and sisters of Christ, we ought—as a minimum—to take responsibility for our own behaviors and accept the consequences. Though this is not an easy thing to do, it is in the end the best course of action. We have the assurances of God’s Word:

◆ Proverbs 28:13: He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

◆ I John 1:8-9: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Following Judah, David, and Christ’s example, when it comes to sins and personal transgressions, we must, like Harry Truman, mentally place a sign at the front of our desk, “The Buck Stops Here.” After that, we must stand solidly behind it and put it to work every day. When this happens, we will begin to take real steps toward Christian growth.

—David F. Maas

Is a Rock Just a Rock to God?

Continued from page 7

He also explained the purpose of the water and why the slurry was so important. The limestone crust itself, when mixed with the water, made a natural solution to act as an abrasive in completing the process of polishing the outer surface. Some minor polishing and buffing finished the process. The stone, once an ugly, crusty, hard rock, had now become a thing of beauty.

It became evident that, as these rocks agitated in the spinning bucket, some of them clashed against the others with enough force that one or more would be thrown out. When this happened, the stone seller picked up each stone that had fallen to the floor, examined it, and put it back in the tumbling bucket to continue the job of cleaning it up. After all, his livelihood was invested in each rock he could polish for sale. He tried to save every one he could.

This story illustrates a similar process God puts His children through to build His righteous character in them. If we can catch the vision of what God is allowing us to experience to help us become something of real beauty to Him, then we may well be more appreciative of the trials we often think are so difficult. Paul, speaking from much experience, says, “No trial is of the moment easy to bear, but the fruit produced from it is far greater than we can now understand” (Hebrews 12:11 paraphrased).

The Gem Beneath

God surely knows our weaknesses, but He also knows what hides under the surface, what will be exposed only when the crust has been scraped off. He knows that our bumping and grinding against each other is necessary for us to learn to become forbearing and patient and willing to accept the differences we each have.

God did not make us all “yellow pencils.” He knows we are not all made from the same cast, and that the different personalities we have will enhance the beauty of His Creation, once our various strengths and talents are channeled in the right direction. Not all flowers are red; many various colors make a beautiful bouquet. The physical creation we see all around us should be clear evidence that God loves variety. How boring it would be if everyone thought and acted alike! He wants us to have and use our creative minds to create beauty from our particular perspectives.

Those of us who have more than one child are certainly aware how different each of them can be. Sometimes their thinking seems to come from opposite ends of the spectrum. While this may be a challenge to our childrearing techniques, it will also be just as challenging to steer each in the direction that will help them use their talents and abilities to realize their potentials. “Challenge” is the key word here. Their methods of doing things will often test our patience and make us bite our lips, but when they have accomplished their goals, we can stand back in awe and appreciate what they have achieved. God will do the same with us when He has caused us, through many trials, to reach the loftiest goal of all.

Many scriptures show stones to be something lasting, beautiful, lively or living. (e.g., Exodus 28:15-21; I Kings 5:17-18; 7:9-11; Isaiah 54:11-12; Malachi 3:17; etc.). In Revelation 21:19-20, God will use beautiful and precious stones in the foundation of the walls of New Jerusalem. Could God use a more fitting illustration when He inspires Peter to call His children “living stones,” which He uses to build “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, . . . acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5)?

Through Paul in I Corinthians 3:12-13, God says our work will be manifest by the type of material we use in building, whether of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw. God will judge and try by fire everyone’s work, and the durability of our “building material” will be exposed when that happens. Doubt-

less precious stones are enduring, for, as we have already seen, God Himself uses them as foundations in His own eternal city.

Tumbling in the Bucket

Just as each stone was important to the man in Silverton, likewise each of us are precious to God, and He will do whatever it takes to prepare us for His Kingdom. How much He has to scrub off us depends on how stubbornly we resist the process of cleaning, shaping, and polishing. The more we yield to His efforts, the better and more thorough we will be prepared for His Kingdom.

When we are tested to the limit by someone—in light of what God is preparing us to become—does it not seem logical that we should be learning to be more patient, caring, compassionate, merciful, kind, gentle, and forgiving than ever, seeing that all these character traits express love for others? The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 teaches us that expressing these things to our brethren is tantamount to doing them to God. Is this not what God is looking for in us?

God in His mercy is letting us tumble around in the bucket He calls His church. He has added water—His Spirit—to create a slurry, which represents all the trials we go through in life. His Spirit serves as a means for each of us to help polish one another. Like the stones, when they had all the crust removed and became smooth and non-abrasive to the other stones, we, when our human nature is completely removed in the resurrection, will be able to work with and appreciate the beauty of each other in a way we never could have before.

We can just endure trials others bring on us, or we can learn from them. God says He can raise up other stones to replace us if necessary (Matthew 3: 9). But why should we fail with the kind of help we have available to us? The choice is ours. If we make the right one, our reward will be to share eternity with God and all the other beautiful stones He is now—and in the future—tumbling, shaping and polishing to use in the building of His spiritual house, the Family of God.

—Bill Keese

BIBLE STUDY:

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

Death is a reality we all must face (Hebrews 9:27), but the hope of the Christian is the resurrection of the dead (I Peter 1:3). The same God who resurrected Jesus Christ from the grave nearly two thousand years ago will also raise all the dead to life again. The New Testament consistently teaches hope in the resurrection based upon the resurrection of Christ as the firstborn from the dead.



1. How many kinds of resurrections are there? John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:5-6, 12-15.

COMMENT: The Bible identifies two types of resurrections: special acts of God's mercy in which He restores people to physical life, and resurrections to spiritual, eternal life. The New Testament also contrasts resurrection to life with resurrection to judgment or condemnation. Theologically, resurrection to judgment can also mean being raised to one's opportunity for salvation, in the same way that "the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17).

2. What makes the resurrection to life possible? John 3:16; Romans 5:8-10; I Corinthians 15:14-18.

COMMENT: Our resurrection to eternal life is possible because Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins and rose from the grave as the firstborn of many brethren. His death justifies us, but His resurrection to life makes our resurrection possible. Of itself, the blood of Christ does not save us, and had He remained dead, we could not be saved or given eternal life. We are saved because Christ lives now and forever.

3. Is there more than one resurrection of the dead? Daniel 12:2-3; John 5:28-29; I Corinthians 15:22-24; Hebrews 11:35.

COMMENT: The saints of God will be part of the first and better resurrection. The Bible nowhere says that those resurrected to everlasting life and those resurrected to shame will both come up in the same resurrection. The apostle Paul tells Felix, the governor of Judea, that there would be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust dead, indicating at least two separate resurrections.

4. Who is resurrected at Christ's second coming? I Corinthians 15:23, 50-53; Revelation 20:4-6; Romans 8:9, 11, 14.

COMMENT: Only the just, the righteous, will rise at Christ's second coming. God will raise the martyred saints to eternal life, but the unjust dead will not be resurrected until the end of this period. If we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us when we die, we will be resurrected through the power of that same Spirit at that time. In addition to the dead in Christ, those who are true Christians at His coming will rise in the first resurrection. The Feast of Trumpets celebrates the second coming of Jesus Christ to intervene in world affairs, resurrect the

By means of the resurrection, the vast majority of mankind will receive the opportunity for salvation and subsequently the gift of eternal life. Only a few who willfully reject God's way of life will not. This Bible study begins a three-part series on this basic biblical doctrine (Hebrews 6:2). This installment will analyze the first resurrection, that of the firstfruits of God's Kingdom.

firstfruits, and establish God's Kingdom on earth (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 11:15).

5. Where do Christ and the saints go after this rendezvous in the air? Zechariah 14:1-9; Acts 1:4-12. When and how long will the then-immortal saints rule with Christ? I Thessalonians 4:14-17; Revelation 5:10; 19:11-21; 20:4.

COMMENT: Christ's angels tell the disciples that He will return to this earth just as He left it. On that day, Christ will descend through the clouds to stand on the Mount of Olives with His saints to begin ruling as King over all the earth. Paul says those who die faithful before that time will rise first, then the faithful who are still alive will ascend to meet Christ in the air as He returns. From that time on, through eternity, the saints will be with Him as He rules the nations with a rod of iron.

6. What did Paul mean by "the redemption of our body"? Romans 8:19, 23; I Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:7-12, 20-21; Colossians 1:9-18.

COMMENT: Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things so he could experience the power of Christ's resurrection. Since our citizenship is in heaven, our hope lies there. Christ our Savior will change our corrupt bodies into bodies like His glorious body—from mortal flesh to immortal, incorruptible spirit.

7. What does Christ promise the overcoming saints? Revelation 2:17, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21; Ephesians 2:6.

COMMENT: Jesus promises the saints that, if they overcome and live His way of life, He will give them a new name that only the recipient knows, as well as the names of God and of His city, New Jerusalem. God will give the saints power over the nations under Christ. They will also be clothed in righteousness and sit with Him on His throne. The resurrection of the saints is so certain that Paul speaks of it as already accomplished.

God has established an order of resurrections. His saints will rise first, followed at length by a second resurrection of most of mankind who never had a chance to know God's truth during their lives. Finally, in a third resurrection, the wicked—those who knew God's truth and rejected it—will come up to face eternal judgment, death in the Lake of Fire. It is far better to be in the first resurrection, to live as eternal spirit beings in the God Family, filled with God's own character and incapable of sin.