



Forerunner

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GODLY JEALOUSY

A CONSUMING FIRE

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3

PERSONAL *from John W. Ritenbaugh*

The Third Commandment

7

PROPHECY WATCH

Smyrna: Faithful Until Death

BY DAVID C. GRABBE

10

The Sacredness of Marriage

BY JAMES BEAUBELLE

13

READY ANSWER

The Jealousy of God

BY RONNY H. GRAHAM

19

WORLDWATCH

The Rise (Again) of Nations

BY RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

20

BIBLE STUDY

The Miracles of Jesus Christ:

Healing a Withered Hand (Part Two)

BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

cover

Deuteronomy 4:24 tells us that "God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Jealousy, however, is thought by most to be a negative characteristic, related to envy and rivalry. Can jealousy be good? What does God's jealousy mean to the converted child of God?

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The Third Commandment

It is not hard to determine what the most common sin is. It is idolatry, a sin of commission. Five commandments bear directly on it: the first, second, third, fourth, and tenth. In addition, the others easily become involved in idolatry by being broken in their spirit. This article will focus on another commandment, the third, that connects directly with the sin of idolatry. Many of us do not generally understand its purpose. In fact, most of us understand it only in its most obvious application, and thus unknowingly, we may break it frequently.

Recall that the first commandment deals with *what* we worship. Our worship is to be directed toward the unique Creator, the Source of all things, and toward Him only. The second deals with the *way* we worship, in spirit and truth. No one has ever seen the unique Creator God, so we must use no figments of human imagination to portray Him. The third involves the sincere truthfulness, purity, and *quality* of our worship. It deals with glorifying God.

Isaiah 40:18, 25 asks, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? . . . ‘To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One.” From the second commandment, it is obvious that God expressly forbids the making of any representation of Him. Any such picture or statue is

automatically a lie because, other than knowing that we are in His physical image as to form and shape, everything else that He is cannot be expressed in a mere physical depiction.

John 1:18 confirms this truth: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” God is unique; nothing compares with Him. There is no point of contact, no physical reference, to which a human being can compare Him, revealing the absolute folly of image-making. Even Jesus’ declarations regarding God are never about what He looks like, but are all about His authority, position, purpose, character, and attributes.

However, knowing the importance of His purpose to our lives, should we not strive to learn what He is like? God does not want us concerned about what He *looks* like, for that puts the emphasis in the wrong area. He gives us enough information for us to know that He looks like a man—and that is enough.

However, He greatly desires that we know what He *is*. The entire Bible reveals His mind, character, attributes, offices, power, will, promises, plan, and relationship to us. The third commandment deals with these areas of study and application because they deeply affect the quality of our response to Him.

personal *The Third Commandment*

The Commandment

Exodus 20:7 says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” This commandment, like the second, includes a warning within it. What does He mean by “not hold him guiltless”? Sometimes God deliberately understates a warning as a subtle form of emphasis, which ultimately magnifies its meaning. The penalty for taking God’s name in vain is *death!*

It is helpful to define four words used in this command:

- **Take:** Several Hebrew words are translated into the English word “take,” but this one means “lift up,” “bear,” “carry,” “use,” “appropriate.”
- **Name:** The Hebrew root denotes something high or elevated, a monument implying majesty or excellence. It is an outstanding mark, sign, or reputation. Thus “name” is a word by which a person, place, or thing is distinctively known. A name identifies, signifies, and specifies.
- **Vain:** The underlying Hebrew word suggests emptiness, futility, and/or falsehood. It implies lacking in reality, value, or truth. Its single-word synonyms—depending upon the context—are “futile,” “worthless,” “profane,” “foolish,” “reproachful,” “curse,” “blaspheme,” “purposeless,” “useless,” “inconsequential,” “unsubstantial,” and “vaporous.”
- **Guiltless:** This word indicates “free,” “clear,” “innocent,” “clean,” “blameless,” “unpunished.”

This commandment has nothing to do with the proper pronunciation of God’s name, which no one knows for certain how to say anyway. It also has nothing to do with superstition or magic. This commandment’s application is much broader, deeper, and more dignified than that.

It pays dividends in insight and understanding to take notice of biblical names. In biblical thought, a name is not merely a label of identification but also an expression of the bearer’s essential nature. It includes its bearer’s reputation, character, and distinctiveness from others. For example, in all probability Adam named the beasts based on his observations of the distinctiveness of their natures. Similarly, to know the name of God is to know God as He has revealed Himself, that is, to know some of His nature.

This same thought is true of many biblical characters, providing insight into understanding them within the events recorded about them. To illustrate, Jacob supplants his brother Esau twice. A supplanter is one who by skill, deceit, or force takes the place of another. When this happens the second time, Esau says, “Is he not rightly named Jacob?” (Genesis 27:36). Regarding the birthright and blessing,

Jacob takes Esau’s place using his supplanting nature.

Another clear example occurs when Abigail pleads with David for Nabal’s life: “As his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him!” (1 Samuel 25:25). *Nabal* means “a dolt, a vile person.” Thus, the Bible shows that a name tends to exercise constraint on a person to conform to its nature.

In Hebrew thought, then, a name is inextricably bound with the named thing’s existence. Nothing exists unless it has a name, and its essence is concentrated in its name. Hence, creation is not complete until Adam names all the creatures. To cut off a person’s name is to end the bearer’s existence, or to change a person’s name is to indicate a shift in his character and standing before God. Revelation 3:12 adds to this picture:

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

Note the import of the Philadelphians receiving three new names! They reveal the very existence, nature, and responsibility of these heirs of God’s Kingdom.

God’s Nature in His Names

To speak or act in another’s name is to act as that person’s agent and to participate in his authority. To be called by another’s name implies that person’s ownership, and one bearing that name falls under the authority and protection of the one whose name is called upon.

The third commandment sets the standard of the spiritual cleanliness in a person using the name of God because it is so weighty. It must be used or borne in truth, without hypocrisy or vanity but in purity of conduct. A person is better off being sincerely wrong than being a professing Christian and denying God’s name by the conduct of his life.

Herbert Lockyer’s book, *All the Divine Names and Titles*, lists 364 names and titles for Jesus Christ alone. Through His names and titles, God has chosen to reveal a great deal about His attributes, offices, authority, prerogatives, and will. Each name designates some distinct virtue or characteristic of God’s nature. Thus, God has made known the glory of His nature through His names. They are not to be abused.

This commandment is certainly against common swearing, including the use of euphemisms so common in this Protestant society, examples of which are “gee,” “gosh,” “golly,” “cheese and rice,” “got all muddy,” “jimony cricket,” and “doggone.” However, it also includes the light or disrespectful *use* of any of God’s attributes or character traits. More directly than any other, the third command-

ment teaches how much God is to be a part of our every word, deed, and attitude.

Consider that to help us to know David, the Bible shows him as shepherd, warrior, king, prophet, poet, husband, father, musician, sinner, and penitent—each part of a rich and varied nature. Yet, God is manifold times greater than David! The Bible reveals Him, His nature, in a similar way, by adding names to aid us in identifying His many glorious characteristics. God names Himself what He is, just as He names people what they are. Thus, Jacob is at first a supplanter, yet when he changes, God names him more appropriately for his new life. *Israel* is “one who prevails with God.”

God’s Names in the Psalms

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? (Psalm 8:1-4)

Modern translations replace “excellent” with terms like “glorious,” “great,” or “majestic.” The glory of God is revealed in His creation. One of His names, of course, is Creator. The psalmist sees the starry heavens stretched above him as an awesome and spectacular showcase of the majestic power of God.

The Soncino Commentary translates the second phrase of the first verse as, “Whose majesty is rehearsed above the heavens.” The author comments, “The psalmist is saying that day after day man has the awesome splendor of God’s power displayed before him.” Thus, God has invested the heavens with glorious splendor to direct the mind of man to the Creator’s majesty. This idea accepts that He is greater than even His creation demonstrates.

What excellence or glory do we see in the earth and sky? Do we consciously realize that a creator, any creator, is greater than what he creates, and do we then apply that inference to God? Do we see in it our holy Creator’s power, order, beauty, loving providence, wisdom, reason, logic, and vastness of thought? Some measure of this will occur if we make the effort to seek Him.

God intends this psalm to direct our thinking toward His greatness and puny man’s insignificance. Yet, that majestic, awesome God is glorifying Himself in man by creating in him the desire to be like Him! He has chosen what is weak and foolish—even by the world’s standards—to appreciate and respect His glory, His name. Rightly understood, this is a truly humbling meditation.

God also reveals Himself as the eternal covenant God,

who, though our master and owner, has made an agreement with man. “LORD” is translated from *Yahweh*, called among the scholarly “the Tetragrammaton” (YHWH), the “I Am Who I Am” of Exodus 3:14. “Lord” is the Hebrew *Adonai*, the Master or Owner of the whole universe!

Psalm 23:1 says, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want,” another instance of *Yahweh*. This name for God is frequently combined with other words to form more specific descriptions of Him. Psalm 23 is in reality a brief expounding of eight names of God in the first five verses. It brings to light:

YHWH-Roi—God our shepherd—Psalm 80:1.

YHWH-Jireh—God our provider—Genesis 22:14.

YHWH-Shalom—God our peace—Judges 6:24.

YHWH-Nissi—God is my banner—Exodus 17:15.

YHWH-Ropheka—God our healer—Exodus 15:26.

YHWH-Zidkenu—God our righteousness—Jeremiah 23:6.

YHWH-Shammah—God is present—Ezekiel 48:35.

YHWH-Mekaddishkem—God who sanctifies—Exodus 31:13.

Each of these names provides us with building blocks of knowledge to strengthen and encourage us in the use of faith.

Psalm 18:1-3 provides us with a fitting example from David’s life:

I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.

David begins by declaring, “Fervently do I love you!” and then delivers a torrent of God’s names, eight of them! He knew God’s attributes as expressed by His names, trusted what they taught him, and conducted his life accordingly. By faith, he trusted God to intervene in the affairs of men. Paraphrased, the eight names are “strength,” “foundation,” “place of safety,” “fountain,” “deliverer,” “my strong God,” “defender,” and “horn of my salvation.”

Consider what David did in light of a modern circumstance: When the car needs repair, we take it to the person who has the title (“auto mechanic”) or name (reputation). We do not take it to the dentist. In like manner, we are to seek God in our need in areas in which He has revealed Himself to us as skilled and willing to help. However, where does that leave one who has not sought God and does not know what He can and will do or what He requires?

personal *The Third Commandment*

God's Glory Revealed

The episode in Exodus 33 sets the stage for what occurs in the next chapter. We should pay special attention to verses 12-13, 18 and the terms “name,” “way,” and “glory.” Moses, a man like us, wanted to be reassured—by seeing God's glory.

And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, . . . the LORD talked with Moses. . . . Then MOSES said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.’ Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.” . . . So the LORD said to MOSES, “I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.” And he said, “Please show me Your glory.” Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (Exodus 33:9, 12-13, 17-19)

Moses may not have gotten the answer that he expected. If so, what God gave him was exceedingly better—and very instructive to us:

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:5-7)

Here is how God obliged Moses: Besides passing before him and revealing His form except for His face, He preaches to him what amounted to a sermon on His name—on the third commandment! He expounds eleven attributes: *Yahweh*, *El*, the Merciful Being, the Gracious One, the Longsuffering One, the Mighty One, the Bountiful Being, the True One, the Preserver of Bountifulness, He who bears away iniquity, and He who visits iniquity.

God did not demonstrate for Moses His power and majesty, but His love, His way of relating to His creation. In other words, the glory of God is the manifestation of His character, His nature, His manner of

dealing with His people, His potential children. His names are signposts of His attributes and character. They advertise His nature. They remind us of what we can expect Him to do and what He requires.

A Better Revelation

Normally, an individual cannot see God or be as close to Him as Moses was. Besides, what we have learned was written in Hebrew and translated—perhaps even somewhat vaguely at times—into English. Where does that leave us who come along millennia later and cannot read Hebrew? Matthew 11:25-27 begins to answer this question:

At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Undoubtedly, God is being revealed to us, but how? Two factors are at work in this. In speaking to the apostles, Jesus reveals the first: “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. . . . But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear” (Matthew 13:11, 16). The second factor appears in John 1:14, 18:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

What is being declared is the glory of the Father! John 14:9-10 expands this:

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Phillip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”

The Father is declared to us through the life, works, and words of Jesus Christ! Moses asked God to show him His way. Jesus is saying, “If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's attitudes, look at Me.”

(continued on page 16)

SMYRNA: FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH

Until recently, we who live in the United States and Canada have had many personal liberties, particularly the freedom to worship God.

In the post-World War II era, most other modern Israelitish nations have also enjoyed such freedoms, and thus most in the church of God are not accustomed to widespread or severe persecution. Because it is so rare, it is almost foreign to our thinking. Yet, when compared to the rest of history, this is clearly not the norm.

However, times are changing. As the Western world becomes increasingly secular because of weak Christianity, and as that secularity is, in turn, overcome by stronger cultures and religions (such as Islam), incidences of persecution for righteousness' sake are steadily mounting. From the rejection of prayer and the Ten Commandments in schools to the fining of those who point out what the Bible says about homosexuality, the culture of modern Israelitish nations is becoming increasingly hostile to the Judeo-Christian ethic upon which it once stood. Persecution and tribulation are not yet common, but as the end approaches, we are seeing them increase.

These are not pleasant things to contemplate, but they are a central theme of the letter to one of the end-time churches in Revelation 2-3. As we near the end, we will benefit from examining Christ's words to His church in Smyrna:

These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (Revelation 2:8-11)

This letter to Smyrna is unique in that it contains no criticism or rebuke. The one to Philadelphia runs a close second in this regard: It contains more praise, but also a slightly negative aspect when Jesus says that they have but a little strength (Revelation 3:7-13). Smyrna's letter contains neither as much praise on the one hand, nor the slightly negative observation on the other.

The letter is also unique in its length, containing just four verses. (In contrast, the letter to Thyatira spans twelve verses.) It is so brief that it almost appears abrupt. Jesus gives neither a lengthy admonition to

prophecy watch *Smyrna: Faithful Until Death*

repent, nor much praise. To use a military metaphor, it resembles a commander's final instructions to his company of Special Forces. They are already focused and disciplined, aware of what is expected of them, wholeheartedly committed to their duty, and willing to go to their deaths for their cause, if need be. Unlike new recruits or infantry misfits who continually have to be reminded of the basics, these are seasoned veterans. This letter is from the Captain of their salvation to a unit that knows its marching orders and has been following them faithfully. Little needs to be added.

A THEME OF DEATH

The letter to Smyrna also has death as a recurring theme. Death is directly mentioned three times in these four verses, and the name *Smyrna* contains a probable fourth reference as well. Jesus Christ refers to His own death, points to their death as a finish line, and also mentions the second death. While He is not warning that their deaths are imminent, these references combine to produce a sober message.

Smyrna means "myrrh," a highly valued spice. Many of its uses in Scripture fit with what we know of the church at Smyrna. For example, myrrh was a primary ingredient in the holy anointing oil that God commanded Moses to make (Exodus 30:22-33), which was used to consecrate the Tabernacle, the Ark, two of the altars, all of the utensils, as well as Aaron and his sons. In Smyrna, we likewise see a people who are set apart and consecrated, whose lives are dedicated in service to God despite the cost.

A second use is found in the book of Esther, where the eligible maidens were prepared for twelve months before they were sent to meet the king (Esther 2:12-13). For the first six months of their preparation, they were purified with the oil of myrrh. Looking at this spiritually, myrrh could represent purification before being able to meet the King of kings, Jesus Christ. From what we read of Smyrna, this also parallels their situation.

A third use of myrrh helps to understand why it is linked with death. In Mark's account of the crucifixion, Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:23). *Easton's Bible Dictionary* points out that the Jews commonly did this for prisoners because it would render them insensible during their torture. The myrrh used in this concoction is thought to be a species that had many of the characteristics of opium. Here, then, myrrh was a drug given to dull the senses of those who were condemned to death—and Jesus rejected it. Considering Christ's letter to Smyrna in this light, we see a people who may not all actually be condemned to death, but who are still admonished to *be faithful until death*. Christ set the example of this, rejecting the option of compromise that would have eased His sacrifice.

A fourth use of myrrh also refers to death, as myrrh is a spice used for embalming bodies. More specifically, Nicodemus used it to prepare Christ's body for burial

(John 19:39). For this reason, myrrh is often associated with bitter circumstances. Realizing what the people of Smyrna were going through, it is fitting that their name would mean *myrrh*.

After addressing His letter to the "church of myrrh," Jesus draws attention to the fact that He was dead but "came to life" (Revelation 2:8). In doing this, He encourages them by highlighting His own experience. To this church of bitter circumstances, He says, in essence, "I was martyred too, just as some of you will be. But I was resurrected, and now live eternally." He reminds them that He has overcome death, and that it is not the end (I Corinthians 15:50-57).

In Revelation 2:9, Jesus declares, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)." This contrasts directly with the church at Laodicea, which has worldly riches yet is *spiritually* poor (Revelation 3:17), while those at Smyrna are *materially* poor yet *spiritually rich*. God counsels the Laodiceans to buy gold that had been tried in fire, meaning to seek the true riches that come by accepting God's tempering and by rejecting compromise.

However, Christ points out that the Smyrnans are *already* enduring tribulation—already experiencing pressure, which is what the underlying Greek word literally means. They suffer affliction, anguish, persecution, and trouble. They are already buying the gold, tried in the fire of persecution. Because of their fidelity, they do not take the easy way out when it would mean being unfaithful to God.

"THOSE WHO SAY THEY ARE JEWS"

Jesus then remarks that He knows "the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." The Greek word for "blasphemy" is primarily used in reference to blasphemy against God, but it can also be used with regard to blasphemy against men. In Matthew 15:19, Ephesians 4:31, and I Timothy 6:4, it means slander, abusive language, or evil speaking—what the King James calls "railing."

Who are these people who say they are Jews, but are not? Jesus also refers to them in His letter to Philadelphia (Revelation 3:9). Remember, these letters are written to the church of God. In His eyes, when there is true faith in Jesus Christ, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul mentions this repeatedly in his epistles (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). "Those who say they are Jews" does not refer to physical descent, as there is no spiritual benefit in being of one race or ethnicity. A church member has no spiritual reason to claim—truly or falsely—to be a physical Jew.

The key to this puzzle is found in Romans 2:28-29:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he

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

Applying this to the letters in Revelation, some claim to have a circumcised heart, but they really belong to Satan's assembly. The same situation appears in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The wheat and the tares look identical until fruit is produced. At that point, it becomes apparent which is genuine wheat and which is not. Thus, Jesus teaches that we will know people by their fruits (Matthew 7:16-20). Recall also that the workers in the parable are commanded to leave the tares in with the wheat. We see this in Revelation—people with circumcised hearts being troubled by those without them.

In Romans 2:29, Paul provides a trait of those who are converted, and by implication, those who are not. Those with circumcised hearts will have their praise from God. By contrast, those with uncircumcised hearts will seek the praise of men, and what God thinks is an afterthought (see John 12:43). The unconverted are more concerned with the *appearance* of righteousness before other *men* than they are with *true* righteousness before God.

The Pharisees are a good example of this. They made sure that people knew when they were fasting, the frequency and amount of their offerings, and all of their good deeds. They were quite concerned about prestige, honor before men, and the social pecking order. Much of their reasoning process revolved around how things would look or what other people would think. Obviously, these thoughts are not inherently wrong and are often good things to ponder. However, they *become* wrong when appearance rises higher in priority than righteousness and truthfulness—when it becomes a façade or a pretense.

The members of the Smyrna church, though, are facing persecution because they are more focused on what God thinks than what man thinks. If they sought praise from men—if they wanted to please the people around them—they would not be so readily targeted for persecution. Their beliefs, however, are solid convictions rather than mere preferences, and because carnal man despises the things of God (Romans 8:7), carnal men within—and without—the fellowship persecute them. These pseudo-Jews, as it were, seeking the praise of men rather than God, are verbally cutting down the converted members. Jesus says that He is aware of it—He sees what His people suffer—and He will make it right in His own time.

PERSECUTION COMING

In Revelation 2:10, He begins instructing them. First, He encourages, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.” He does not say He will take away the suffering, tacitly acknowledging that they *will* suffer. He is admonishing them to reorient their focus so that they

fear *Him* rather than their circumstances. Revelation 21:8 says that the fearful and the unbelieving will go into the Lake of Fire, and this happens because they fear the wrong things. Thus, they have no part with God.

As mentioned earlier, in many ways, what Revelation 2:10 describes is entirely foreign to us, yet many passages warn us that God's people will face tribulation. Peter writes, “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (I Peter 4:12). We are so unaccustomed to persecution that we do indeed think it strange, but Paul tells Timothy, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12).

Jesus warns us that we will be hated by all for His name's sake (Matthew 10:22), even delivered up to tribulation and death (Matthew 24:9). He prophesies that the time will come when whoever kills God's people will think he does God a service (John 16:2). John 16:33 is both cautionary and encouraging: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus says that the Devil is about to throw some of them into prison to test them. A test perpetrated by Satan may not make much sense to men. It may not be over anything as dramatic as keeping the Sabbath or holy days or refusing the Mark of the Beast. It could simply be that, because the society has become so litigious and the civil law so overbearing, these saints become entangled without actually having done anything wrong. Nevertheless, as a test of their faith, God will allow Satan to jail them, for whatever reason—legitimate or not. God does this so that He and they know where their convictions stand—to see if they will compromise to ease their captivity, to see if they will remain faithful to God and His truth, and to see if they will trust Him even in tough times. It is during tumultuous times like the present that a person's character is revealed.

However, God is also merciful, telling Smyrna that its tribulation will be of limited duration. The church there can expect persecution and tribulation, but God has set limits on it, just as He did for Job (Job 2:6). He will not allow His saints to be tempted—proved, tried—beyond what they can bear (I Corinthians 10:13).

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,” He says to conclude Revelation 2:10. Because this follows right on the heels of the Devil throwing some of them into prison, it almost sounds as if they will be in prison for ten days and then die, but it need not mean this at all. His exhortation to be faithful until death is universal, not just applicable for those thrown into prison. Whether we, like the apostle John, are allowed to die a natural death at an advanced age or, like Stephen, suffer martyrdom shortly after conversion, the command is the same: We must be faithful to our last breath. We cannot rest on the

(continued on page 18)

THE SACREDNESS

How many more years do we have before the return of Christ? Let none of us deceive ourselves: The time of God's wrath upon this world is drawing closer with each passing day. Even with our limited view of the world, we can see America's social fabric—the traditional lifestyle that takes God into consideration—being turned upside down.

A clear example of this is marriage and its sacredness. The old values are swiftly being replaced by the new, and the new does not look very good.

Psalm 94:20 asks, concerning God's involvement with worldly governments who decree laws that shape our social fabric: "Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You?" Of course, we know the answer. God cannot abide iniquity.

In the state of California, Proposition 8, a ballot initiative declaring marriage to be only between a man and a woman, recently passed. Just before the election, polls showed that a majority of voters did not favor it, yet those polls proved wrong by a margin of 4.6 percent. However, in two other states—Massachusetts and Connecticut—the institution of marriage is no longer considered a sacred covenant between a man and a woman and God, but merely a contract between any two persons wanting legal rights. These states sanction homosexuality, throwing a legal covering over it and calling it a "marriage" to hide its wickedness.

In no way has God been caught off-guard on this, yet we can be sure that He is disgusted with it. Not only does He condemn homosexuality in His Word, but He also created and blessed the institution of marriage to be a sacred bond between a man and a woman. To see it unravel is a sure sign of the decay of our culture.

God Institutes Marriage

In an old *World Tomorrow* telecast, Herbert Armstrong commented that he did not need newspapers to show him where things are headed. The Bible, he declared, is just as current as today's headlines, foretelling future events as if they were written today. A portion of Paul's letter to the Romans is just such an example. The apostle's words in Romans 1:18-32 are playing out openly in our daily news as marriage loses its traditional value in this society.

In this passage, Paul describes the current generation—how men have rejected God's will and supplanted it with gross idolatry and how they have become lovers of themselves, exalting the creation and their desires above the Creator. With this foundation and with God allowing

mankind to pursue its own course for the present, human nature desires to remake all of God's institutions in its own image, and the marriage covenant is in its cross-hairs:

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:24-32)

Marriage and family are the foundations of any healthy society, and these two bedrocks of civilization are slowly being dismantled before our eyes. When these foundations, which God formed in righteousness, are weakened further, it will prepare for a different foundation—one formed in unrighteousness to support the coming of the lawless one, the son of perdition, as II Thessalonians 2:3-10 foretells.

Marriage and family were undefiled when God gave them as a gift to mankind before sin entered the world. In Genesis 2:18, God enacted the first social foundation for mankind: "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" Then, in verse 24, God sanctifies Adam's relationship with Eve by declaring that the two would be joined together as one flesh, that a man and his wife should leave mother and father, cling to each other, and become their own family unit. In other words, marriage was dignified and defined by God as a joining of one man and one woman.

S OF MARRIAGE

Why did God do it this way? He could have just kept on creating one man after another to populate the earth. It was unlikely that He would run out of the dust of the earth. However, He made them male and female for a reason.

God Wants Children!

Malachi reveals a major reason why God created man and woman to become one flesh. The answer is part of God's castigation of Judah for tolerating easy divorce laws. In Malachi 2:11, He says that by doing so, the Jews had profaned the holy institution of marriage that God so dearly loves.

Yet you say, "For what reason [are you angry]?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. (verses 14-16)

Because He wants godly children, God made humans male and female. Within the structure of a proper, married family life, strong in unity and free from worries of separation, it would produce the best results.

From this comes a second reason why God made them male and female. With the blessing of children, God has bestowed on mankind the gift of allowing parents to become His partners in His creative works by rearing children who are prepared to answer His calling. This spiritual reproductive process will one day bring many sons and daughters into God's Family. This realization places families and marriage far above what most in the world consider them to be. It elevates them to a moral level unrecognizable in this world of sin.

The wisdom and depths of love that God has for mankind are beyond our abilities to know fully, but it is clear that marriage and family are prominent in God's plan. Any changes to the divine structure are an affront to God and His plan. Marriage is of divine origin, and changes to it are nothing less than man's rebellion against his Creator.

Christ's instruction in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:27-32 is exactly what He gave to His servant

Moses for Israel. Both teach us that marriage is permanent, its ties so binding that they can be broken only by death—or something worse: physical infidelity, moral abandonment, or sustained abuse by either spouse, all of which Jesus encapsulates in the term *porneia*, translated as "sexual immorality."

The Pharisees tested our Lord on this point, but His response leaves no doubt on how binding the institution of marriage should be, a standard set from creation:

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

Because marriage is a creation of God, it possesses a sacredness that no man-devised institution can ever have. This world is trying to exchange the sanctity of marriage for its complete opposite, the profane, but this secular approach will never produce a healthy society.

Spiritual Implications

For God's people, marriage carries an even greater significance. God has elevated marriage beyond its original human purpose by using it as a symbol for the relationship between Christ and His church, which He signified in His relationship with the nation of Israel. In both the Old and New Testaments, Christ is represented as the Husband or Bridegroom, and the church, or Israel as its type, as either His wife or bride. The importance of marriage to God's spiritual purposes cannot be understated.

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel 16:8-14, Jeremiah 31:1-4, and Isaiah 54:5 show God as Husband to ancient Israel. In the New Testament, Paul writes in II Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." All of us look forward to the day when Christ comes to collect His bride, so we should be using our time wisely in preparation for it.

When my daughter was preparing for her wedding, she worked so hard on many different things. She spent many hours in sending invitations, planning meals, hiring a photographer, and choosing clothing, silverware and dishes, cake,

music—the list seemed endless. Her work in making these arrangements involved the whole family.

Can those who are preparing to be Christ's bride be any less busy? If this marriage is important to Him, it must be of great significance to each of us.

Consider this: Our baptism into the body of Christ means much more than being a part of His physical church. It is just as much a betrothal of marriage—and holds for us just as much intimacy in the relationship—as any betrothal between a man and a woman.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul draws a word picture showing the parallel between a married couple and Christ and His church, setting out the proper order for success, not only for physical marriage, but for our spiritual one too. Both the physical and the spiritual are rooted in the love God has for the marriage covenant. Just as a man and a woman are joined as one flesh, so too are Christ and His church joined in one Spirit.

Those in the world who ridicule the institution of marriage and declare it old-fashioned and unnecessary for modern society, who work to pass lax divorce laws and consider the binding claims of marriage to be trivial things that can be put aside, are workers of iniquity. Proper marriage and family values are the bedrock of all successful societies, and when these are torn down or even entered into lightly, a nation's self-destruction cannot be far away.

Rome fell, not because great armies came against her, but because her marriage and family values were undermined as divorce and deviant sexual practices became common. Her sure foundation was broken. America is swiftly following in her footsteps with so many marriages today ending in divorce, tearing families apart. As long as people refuse to comply with God's laws concerning marriage, the trend toward national ruin will continue.

The Commandments and Marriage

No less than three of the Ten Commandments—the fifth, seventh, and tenth—directly involve strengthening marriages and families and preserving their unity and sacredness. Of course, all of God's commands, if followed, will work to strengthen man's relationship with God and fellow man, but these three are aimed directly at securing these sacred bonds. When considering any of God's commands, we find that they are broad in scope and ordained, not just to regulate our physical relationships, but also our spiritual one with Christ.

The fifth commandment speaks directly to parents and children, laying the foundation of responsibility that each has to the other. When children submit to their parents, and parents provide a loving environment to nurture their children in lawful living, the children and society directly benefit from this command. Home government is the cornerstone of national government, and when the home is right, the social structure follows. When marriage and family unity are held in high esteem

and a fear of violating God's standards is instilled, sin can be held in check. Hebrews 12:11 declares, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

The seventh commandment—prohibiting adultery, unfaithfulness by either spouse—stands against anyone who would defile the sanctity of the marriage covenant through sexual sins. Adultery is probably the most dishonest act against the binding contract of the marriage relationship; it is a betrayal of a most sacred trust. Not only is it a sin against one's companion, but as Paul teaches in I Corinthians 6:18, it is a sin against one's own flesh. It has destroyed many marriages and families. A marriage can stand against many adversities from without, but this sin destroys it from within, and few, if any, marriages can truly recover from such infidelity.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:28 that adultery begins in the heart. It is more than an outward action, but a lust that comes from within. Christ teaches us how broad the law is, and sexual acts outside of the marriage covenant—even just the desire for them—breaks this command. In other words, if the desire is there, yet only lack of opportunity has kept a person from this sin, the law has still been broken.

The tenth commandment—"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Deuteronomy 5:21)—is likely a precursor for warnings against many other sins. It defends against anyone who would come between a man and his wife, and like the seventh, its breaking also begins in the heart. Unlike the seventh commandment, which looks to protect the marriage from within, in the tenth commandment God protects it from without.

Strong marriages can stand up to outside pressures of this sort, but weak marriages that are battling other issues may not. How many marriages have been defiled or destroyed by the coveting of another cannot be known, but since God included it in the Ten Commandments, its potential harm against the sacred bond of marriage must be high.

When he coveted Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, King David assaulted the marriage covenant, and disaster soon followed. Breaking this commandment led to adultery and then to murder. In our society today, similar lusts are leaving destroyed families in their wake.

God's Word contains a great deal about marriage and the esteem He holds for it. From Adam's marriage to Eve in Genesis 2 to Christ's marriage to the church in Revelation 19, its importance in God's creative purpose and plan rings clear. Hebrews 13:4 teaches that marriage is to be honored by all and kept undefiled. Since we have been called out of this world, we can be certain that, to some degree, we have not kept God's standards as well as we should have. As this world degrades its care for the institution of marriage—and the times more closely resemble the days of Noah—each of us needs to hold tightly to the sacred values of marriage.

—James Beaubelle

ready answer

“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

The Jealousy of God

“For the
LORD your God
is a consuming fire,
a jealous God.”
—*Deuteronomy 4:24*

In Galatians 5:22-23 appears a list of what the apostle Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit.” The fruits of the Spirit also have counterparts, called the “works of the flesh,” which are listed in verses 19-21. We realize that, while striving to produce good fruit can be a constant challenge for us, we rarely have any problems perfecting the works of the flesh!

Have you ever wondered why the good traits are called “fruit” and the evil ones are “works”? A person can work all day, but that does not mean he is producing fruit because good character takes time and prolonged effort to grow. On the other hand, being carnal, we find that it takes little effort to produce—even perfect—the works of the flesh. It is not very hard at all to lust, to be envious, to create strife, or to harbor hatred.

How about holding jealousies? Paul tells us in Galatians 5:21 that those who practice the works of the flesh will not be in the Kingdom of God. Yet, Deuteronomy 4:24 says that “God is . . . a jealous God,” and Exodus 34:14 declares, “For the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” How can one of the works of the flesh, jealousy, be one of God’s names?

To most of us, jealousy has a negative connotation. We know that it can lead to such things as covetousness, bitter envy, and hatred. In the story of Cain, his jealousy grew until he rose up and murdered his brother, Abel (Genesis 4). Joseph’s brothers also exhibited jealousy to the point that they sold him into slavery (Genesis 37)! Perhaps the longest running bout of jealousy in the Bible is that of Saul against David in the book of I Samuel.

We have probably read these verses in Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 4 many times, and maybe even said to ourselves, “There’s no way that God can be associated with jealousy! Something must be missing in the translation.” But it turns out that it is our understanding of jealousy that is at fault.

What It Means to Be Jealous

That Jealous is one of God’s names—and He is thoroughly good—means that jealousy must have a good side, and in it is something for us to learn and appreciate. Since God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), He has always been jealous. However, can He be jealous to the point of envy? Can He be jealous of someone or something? Can He be bitter and selfishly

ready answer *The Jealousy of God*

possessive? Like many other attributes of God, Satan has tried his best to distort our understanding of jealousy and to make us believe the negative.

In its definition of *jealousy*, *The American Heritage Dictionary* reads, “fearful or wary of being supplanted; apprehensive of losing affection or position; resentful or bitter in rivalry; envious; inclined to suspect rivalry; having to do with or arising from feelings of envy, apprehension, or bitterness.” This sounds nothing like our God so far. The spirit of the definition seems to change direction at this point, as if the word has a positive side and a negative side: “Vigilant in guarding something; intolerant of disloyalty or infidelity, autocratic.” An example of this would be a father watching protectively over his children.

In order to distinguish the difference between the two sides of jealousy, we have to ask, “What is the motive and object of the jealousy?” We need to consider these definitions from this point of view. We see “fearful or wary of being supplanted or losing . . . position” all the time in the workplace. When a new employee is hired, almost immediately the older and longer-term employees make sure that the new guy knows his place on the company totem pole. Fearful of losing their positions, they jealously begin protecting their turf right away.

We also see “apprehensive of losing affection” in our everyday lives. People allow themselves to become bitter when they feel that they are not getting the attention that they deserve from a girlfriend or boyfriend or even from a spouse. This kind of jealousy can lead to harsh words, affairs, and even murder. How many murder mysteries are based on the actions of a jealous partner?

“Envious” is another descriptor of jealousy. People often react jealously when they see others prosper. A neighbor or coworker may buy a new car or a new house, or perhaps he or she finds a new job and now makes more money. Suddenly, human nature makes friends and others think, “Why doesn’t that happen to me?” Worse, a Christian might think, “Why doesn’t God bless me like that? I’m just as good as he is.”

Many years ago, a church member gave me a set of golf clubs, and I excitedly shared this news with a friend in the church—at least I thought he was a friend. Looking straight at me, he said, “Why did he give them to *you*? Why didn’t he give them to *me*?” I had never been confronted so directly with such an envious attitude in all of my life! Our relationship was never the same after that.

Of course, animals do not have carnal human nature, but we can certainly learn from some of their actions. My family used to have two basset hounds named Skipper and Gilligan. When it came to feeding time, I would separate their food onto two plates, one for each dog. Even if Gilligan had T-bone steak, he would always go over and try to take Skipper’s food! Did he think that Skipper was getting something more or better than he was?

After I finally broke Gilligan of trying to steal Skipper’s

food, he would still stand as close as he could to Skipper’s plate while he was eating and continuously bark in Skipper’s ear. Much to Skipper’s credit—if we can give a dog credit—he ignored Gilligan and just kept on eating. Our dogs did not have the spirit of man in them, but sometimes they acted like they did.

Close Calls

On some level, we all understand or have experienced human jealousy, but how about godly jealousy? How can something seemingly so negative be an attribute of God?

The second part of the definition of *jealousy* seems to lend itself to what we understand as godly jealousy: “Vigilant in guarding something; intolerant of disloyalty or infidelity, autocratic.” God is always watching and protecting us in ways we often fail to realize.

Job suffered one of the most difficult trials recorded in the Bible. In Job 29:2, he cries out to God, “Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God watched over me.” In this instance, Job had misjudged God, feeling that God had left him. Little did he know that, as his trial progressed, God was probably watching more intently than ever! He was jealous for Job and wanted to see him prevail over his ordeal.

A few years ago, my wife and I faced what we thought was a serious spiritual trial, and although we had been praying constantly, we felt as if God was ignoring us—or at least not moving fast enough in intervening. At the time, I had to haul a cargo van—weighing at least as much as the truck I was driving—down a two-lane road near Atlanta. As I drove, feeling somewhat like Job, I cried out to God, “Where are You?”

This is a prayer I do not recommend that anyone pray. Within an hour, I had been saved from two traffic accidents!

The first incident happened while I was driving down a hill around a curve to the left. As I rounded the bend, I saw a pickup truck heading straight toward me, trying to pass another vehicle in my lane. I hit the brakes, but the trailer started to jackknife. Easing up on the brakes, I moved over to the right as far as I could, but because of the hill, the road had very little shoulder. The truck was still coming at me, even seeming to accelerate to pass the other car. There being nowhere to go, I gripped the wheel with both hands and closed my eyes, expecting to crash head-on into the truck. When I opened my eyes again a second or two later, all I saw was a silver flash across my windshield. We never even touched!

Greatly relieved, I proceeded on, unloaded the van, and still pulling the trailer, began to return home along the same two-lane road. About five miles from home, an elderly woman pulled her car out across the road in front of me, hitting an oncoming car in the left rear wheel. This car then spun directly at me. I could see that my truck was going to

ram this car right in the door, so I snatched the wheel hard to the right. The truck and trailer veered off the road and down into the ditch. Looking up, I realized I was headed straight for several telephone poles, so I jerked the wheel back to the left. The truck came up out of the ditch, darted across the road into the other lane, and finally moved back to the right, sliding sideways and blocking the whole road as it came to a stop.

I had not hit anything. Two cars had spun wildly, and my truck and trailer, like threading a needle, passed between both of them. The only sign of an accident on my truck was a wedged-in clump of grass. Just after I stepped out of my truck, a man came up to me saying he could not believe that I had not hit that car. He said that the trailer flew so high off the ground that it looked as if the car passed under it! Incidentally, very soon after this both of these areas had accidents involving fatalities. God is vigilantly watching and jealously protecting His people.

Godly Jealousy

In II Corinthians 11:2, Paul writes, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Being the one who wrote about the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh, Paul understood the difference between carnal and godly jealousy.

What was Paul’s motive for teaching and guiding the church? What was the object of his jealousy? Was he hoarding this little group for himself or keeping enough people in his group to support his lifestyle and agenda? The various definitions of the Greek word *zeloo* (often translated as “affect,” “covet,” “desire,” “envy,” “jealous,” or “zealous”) provided by *Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words* give us some insights: “to seek or desire eagerly,” “to desire to have,” “to take a warm interest in,” “to seek zealously.” From this perspective, we see that Paul’s motives were virtuous. He was eagerly desirous to do everything in his God-given power to present the church to Christ as a chaste virgin! He was closely watching over these people with godly jealousy.

Notice, Paul was not jealous *of* these people but *for* them, and maybe that is part of our misunderstanding of godly jealousy. God has no reason to be jealous of us or anything else, but He certainly has a burning desire *for* us!

Has something ever caught our interest so much and fired a yearning for it that we could not rest until that desire was satisfied? These two ideas, jealousy and consuming fire, have something in common, as Deuteronomy 4:24 suggests: Our jealous God is a consuming fire!

This is one of God’s attributes of which we might at first be afraid, as the author of Hebrews points out (Hebrews 12:29). When we think of fire, chances are we first think of being burned or consumed. Yet, fire can also be used as a purifier, and it can sure feel good on a cold winter

morning. Many people can sit and watch a fire in the hearth for hours, listening to the soothing crackle and pop of the wood and enjoying its warmth.

A fire is a beautiful sight. It contains many different shades of red, orange, and yellow flowing together, and if it gets hot enough, one can see deep shades of blue in it as well. The coals or the burning embers seem as if they are pulsating with heat and energy all the while they are slowly being consumed and their energy dissipating.

Yet, recall the burning bush where God commissioned Moses to lead His people out of bondage (Exodus 3:2). It was totally enveloped in fire, yet it was not destroyed. As long as God was in it, the energy never diminished! The sight was so brilliant in depicting God’s glory that Moses dropped to his knees and bowed to the ground. This event demonstrates that godly jealousy comes first, and it issues in fire!

What, then, is the motive and object of God’s jealousy? In seeking to reproduce Himself, God is preparing a bride for His Son. The practice of parents’ choosing their children’s spouses is not common in our Western world, but many of us wish our children were so likeminded with us that they would totally trust us with their happiness for the rest of their lives.

Jesus trusts His Father because He knows that He is a jealous God, and His jealousy is directed toward Him and the perfecting of His bride, the church. The Father desires that we be given a spirit body and be filled with His mind and power. He is eager to give us His only companion in wedlock, bestowing on us His Family name and making us heirs of His mighty Kingdom!

On the other hand, Satan begins very early in our lives to plant seeds of carnal jealousy, never missing a chance to tempt us to react according to his evil spirit. The sin of jealousy begins in our minds, and if it is not eliminated, it will inhibit God’s Spirit from dominating our thinking. The two cannot dwell together.

In Joshua 1:5, God encourages Joshua, “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.” Much as He does in the promises of Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 and Hebrews 13:5, God is letting him know that He will always be there for him. Though Moses was dead and all of the responsibility of leading Israel into the Promised Land was on Joshua’s shoulders, God reassures him that He would always jealously watch over him.

God truly is a jealous God, for which we can be thankful because His jealousy is divine and righteous. God’s jealousy is the perfect example of fatherly love for His children, and as such, we cannot survive in Satan’s world without it. God is always closely watching over and protecting us to preserve us for His Kingdom. In turn, we can learn godly jealousy by watching out and caring for each other.

—Ronny H. Graham

personal *The Third Commandment*

(continued from page 6)

He is “the way” (John 14:6) because only He of all mankind, unmarred by sin, has intimate knowledge of God. He shows us the way men *must* live, including the direction, manner, and method of doing things. The way to God and His Kingdom lies in the knowledge of the truth about Him and that knowledge put to use in one’s life. This is precisely the knowledge Christ gives. To illustrate this, if we are in a strange city and ask directions to a place, confusion is the likely result. Yet, when we ask Christ for direction, He says in effect, “Come, follow Me. I’ll take you there.”

Some people may teach truth, but He embodies it; He personifies truth. A person may teach geometry, and his character does not affect his teaching. However, if one teaches moral truth, his character is all-important because it colors what he teaches. Colossians 1:15-16 and 2:9 provide a clear statement of Jesus’ nature:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. . . . For in Him dwells all the fullness of the [divine nature] bodily.

He does not merely reflect godliness or simply reveal God in His teaching—He was God in the flesh. He was and is completely holy, having the authority to judge the world. We can have no clearer view of God than by observing Him.

He is the full revelation of God in the flesh, the complete and unique expression of God in a human body. God became a man, and the Father imposed on Him the same time-space limitations He imposes on other men. He had every opportunity to waste time, fall ill, be a glutton, get drunk, suffer headaches, become angry, strike out at others, become bitter or depressed, work, play, face the deaths of loved ones, and His own as well. In the gospels, we see God coping with life on the same terms as other men.

Now we can see what kind of character God possesses, giving us firsthand information on what life is about so that we can cooperate with Him in His purpose. We see God teaching, healing, laying down His life, correcting in love, and patiently counseling.

Bearing the Family Name

Jesus says in His prayer in John 17:3, 11:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. . . . Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.

For the purposes of this article, of primary importance is that the term “know” has sexual connotations. It implies intimate, experiential knowledge, not merely bookish or theoretical knowledge. He suggests that having an intimate relationship with the Father and Son causes us to become one with them. The only way we can do that is by living the way God does by faith. He walks—lives life—with those who agree with Him. The One who already had this unique relationship with God reveals to us the knowledge of how to do that.

Originally given to a spiritually faltering people, Amos 5:4 adds a vital command: “For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: ‘Seek Me and live.’” The word “seek” is not being used in the sense of “search” because God had already revealed Himself to them. Instead, it conveys the sense of “turn to Me,” “seek to live as I do,” “turn to My way of life,” “seek to know Me in intimate detail.”

In John 17:3, “eternal” is translated from the Greek *aiōnis*. Here, it deals not so much with duration of life, since by itself living forever would not necessarily be good. Rather, it implies “quality.” Eternal life is the life of God, the way He lives life. To possess it is to experience a small measure of its splendor now.

Four times in this one prayer, Jesus uses the word “name” in reference to God. “Name” represents, identifies, signifies, and encompasses what He is revealing to us about God. It includes what He is in His Person, His attributes, and His purpose. God’s name keeps, guards, and sustains us, both by our trusting what it signifies and then, through obedience, expressing what it means.

Psalms 9:2, 10 declares, “I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. . . . And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.” “Name” does not refer to what He is called or the sound of that name, but to what He is like in His nature and character. We can trust what He *is*. This has marvelous implications for us. Matthew 28:19-20 says:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The word “in” in verse 19 can just as correctly be translated as “into,” meaning that we are immersed into the name of the Father and Son. We now bear that name! They are God, and we are children of God. Baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit are the entrance into that name and all it implies! We have entered into the Family of God! Just as a son bears his father’s name, God’s name is our spiritual family name.

The Importance of One's Names

A brief review: The first commandment deals with *what* we worship—the Almighty Creator God. The second commandment deals with *how* we worship—in spirit and truth. The third commandment deals with the *quality* of our personal witness to everything that name, which we now bear, implies as it applies to a human son of God.

Proverbs 22:1 instructs us about the importance of one's name: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold." A person's name, which holds his reputation, could be considered his most valuable asset. How many times does God say, "For My name's sake"?

Edgar Guest wrote a poem, *Your Name*, on the importance of one's name.

You got it from your father,
'twas the best he had to give.
And right gladly he bestowed it,
it's yours the while you live.

You may lose the watch he gave you
and another you may claim,
But remember, when you're tempted,
to be careful of his name.

It was fair the day you got it,
and a worthy name to bear.
When he took it from his father
there was no dishonor there.

Through the years he proudly wore it,
to his father he was true,
And that name was clean and spotless
when he passed it on to you.

Oh there's much that he has given
that he values not at all.
He has watched you break your playthings
in the days when you were small.

You have lost the knife he gave you
and you've scattered many a game,
But you'll never hurt your father
if you're careful with his name.

It's yours to wear forever,
yours to wear the while you live.
Yours, perhaps some distant morn,
to another boy to give.

And you'll smile as did your father,
with a smile that all can share,
If a clean name and a good name
you are giving him to wear.

Isaiah 43:10-12 bears on our responsibility to uphold God's name:

"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God."

Since we, as sons of God, now bear His name, we witness for God both as an individual, leading our lives, and as a body, preaching the gospel.

Magnifying His Name by Faith

In Romans 2:17-24, Paul provides a distressing contrast to a right example:

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

By our conduct, we hallow or profane God's name. We keep or break the third commandment the same way. This commandment sets the standard for our witness and tests its quality. God's name is the standard. If we take the name of God and use it in any way that denies its true meaning and God's character, we are either breaking this commandment or are on the way to doing so.

People can judge and accuse, saying, "This is God's church, and they do such things? If this is the true church, why doesn't God do something about it?" He is patient and longsuffering, and He *will* do something about it. He will save His people for His name's sake, but it will hurt.

The apostle John writes in I John 3:1-3:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did

personal *The Third Commandment*

not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure.

People spend their lives chasing after a name that will bring them a measure of honor or notoriety. They want to be associated with a “name” university, a “name” team, a “name” company; wear clothing with a certain “name” label; drive a “name” automobile; or marry into a certain family “name.” Yet, the greatest name that anyone could possibly bear has come to us unbidden. Thus, John is exhorting his readers to remember their privileges in bearing that awesome name. Chrysostom, a fourth-century Catholic archbishop, counseled parents to give children scriptural names, urging them to tell the children stories about the person who bore that name so that, as they matured, they would have something to live up to.

Is there a paradox in what John writes? We know that in order to see God, we need to be like Him. Carnally, we think that to be like Him, we need to see Him. God says that seeing Him is not necessary, as He has chosen to conduct His purposes for man through faith in His Word. He has revealed what He is by His names and by the life of Jesus

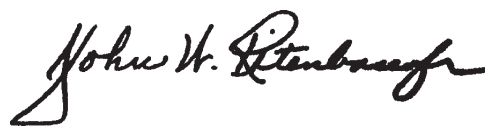
Christ. By faith, we can emulate Him through His Spirit. If we saw Him in the flesh, our curiosity would likely be satisfied, or we would be so overwhelmed by His perfection that we would give up. That is how human nature works. God’s way of faith is better.

Malachi 3:16 provides wise counsel befitting the times in which we live: “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.” The people described here are pictured as meditating for the purpose of praising, imitating, and passing on their thoughts to each other. They looked for God’s good hand in every area of their lives.

David exclaims in Psalm 34:1-3: “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

Hallowed be Thy name!

In Christian love,



SMYRNA: FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH

(continued from page 9)

fact that we were faithful last year or last decade. Our faithfulness should be strong right to the finish line.

If we maintain our faithfulness, Christ gives us a crown of life. He similarly admonishes the church at Philadelphia to “hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11). Paul calls it an “imperishable crown” (I Corinthians 9:25) and a “crown of righteousness” given “to all those who have loved and yearned for and welcomed His appearing (His return)” (II Timothy 4:8, *Amplified Bible*). James adds, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, *English Standard Version*).

SECOND DEATH POWERLESS

Jesus adds that, if we are overcoming—overcoming the pulls of the flesh, overcoming the temptations of this world, overcoming the influence of Satan—the second death will have no power over us (Revelation 2:11). The second death is the final fate of those who have died once, been resurrected in the second resurrection, and given the opportunity to know the Father and the Son, but who then

demonstrate through their decisions and conduct that they do not want to live eternally with them.

Faithful members of God’s church may experience the first death—even violently—but the second death will not harm them because they will be given immortality, which God alone has at this point (see I Corinthians 15:53-54, I Timothy 6:15-16, II Timothy 1:10). This promise corresponds to Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (see also Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:7-8 for more details about the second death). Thus, a letter with the theme of death ends with the promise of life.

The letter to Smyrna is a short and concise line in the sand for all of us. It should move us to evaluate where our convictions truly lie and to question whether we are prone to compromise. It should remind us that God does not guarantee us an easy life, no matter how righteous we are—look at what happened to God Himself when He became a Man. This letter should stir us to reexamine our priorities and to set our wills to remain faithful to the very end, no matter what form it may take and what it might cost.

—David C. Grabbe

The Rise (Again) of Nations

British Prime Minister Henry Temple (1784-1865), known as Lord Palmerston, remarked in the House of Commons on March 1, 1848: “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” In so many words, his statement encapsulates the age-old concept of the nation-state in relation to other nation-states. Nations are composed of large populations living within definable borders and having common governance, aims, and interests. Nations exist because humanity has splintered into hundreds of massive interest groups, each with its own idea of what is best for it.

However, since at least the Tower of Babel, it has been a dream of mankind to erase the lines that divide these human groups and create a one-world order. Empires—from Babylon to the Third Reich—have tried to impose worldwide rule and usher in a utopian Golden Age. In the last century, the idea of a new international system rose again in the League of Nations, in the United Nations, and finally in the post-Cold War New World Order, but each time an international union has been tried, those pesky nations and their interests have dashed it all to pieces.

And it is happening again.

Since the Cold War’s end, globalism has been the watchword of international relations and economics. This has been made possible in part by the fact that, with the Soviet Union consigned to history’s recycle bin, the United States has emerged as the lone superpower in the world. Being an economic powerhouse and in most cases benign in its foreign ambitions, America has created and fostered an environment of international amity and cooperation. To be sure, not all has been the proverbial sunshine and roses, but the U.S. has pushed and presided over many international institutions and initiatives, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, NATO, the G7, various military coalitions, and countless U.N. agencies.

Yet, cracks are appearing in the foundations of the present international system. Both of its main pilings—economic prosperity and peaceful relations—have been undermined to the point that the whole structure faces collapse. As Lord Palmerston clearly implied, when national interests are at stake, nations have a solemn duty to see to their own first—and both their allies and enemies be hanged!

The current economic woes and a handful of conflicts and foreign policy maneuvers reveal the instabilities of today’s globalism. On the financial side, even with all the meetings of world leaders and the tremendous media coverage of the international economy, in reality only a rudimentary framework of a truly global system exists. While there is interconnectivity and cooperation, the world’s sovereign nations are the system’s players, each looking out for their own interests, using their own currencies, levying their own taxes, charging their own tariffs, and making their own deals.

In the current world credit crunch, each nation will act in its own best interests, and if, for instance, the cooperative efforts of the G20 put it at a disadvantage, it will simply not comply with and/or withdraw from the regime. No sovereign nation will take the chance of acting for the good of the world if it will be hurt by such altruism.

Something like this occurred in Europe when the credit crisis broke in early October. On October 12, the eurozone nations held a summit to coordinate their efforts to combat the swiftly developing financial disaster. Brussels, the hub of EU bureaucracy, did little but wring its hands and say that it lacked the power to make any significant moves. Picking up the slack were the finance ministries of the individual nations in Paris, Berlin, London, Rome, and the capitals of other sovereign states. They used the resources at their disposal to shore up their own lending institutions, protecting their own national interests. In other words, even within the EU, the international system began to splinter along nationalistic lines.

In terms of foreign policy, nationalism is also making a comeback. This can be seen most easily, perhaps, in Russia’s recent maneuverings under Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. He and President Dmitri Medvedev are rebuilding an anti-U.S. bloc from the handful of non-aligned socialist governments around the world, particularly Venezuela and Cuba. The Kremlin is heralding Medvedev’s upcoming trip to Latin America as a means for Russia to expand its economic markets in the region, but it is an open secret that his stops in Havana and Caracas will seek to coordinate the three nations’ military and political alliance. It is no coincidence that Russia and Venezuela recently announced a joint naval exercise in Caribbean waters, a gesture of defiance toward U.S. hegemony.

In August, Russia invaded Georgia’s sovereign territory, quickly overcoming the smaller nation’s defenses and demanding that Georgia allow its breakaway province of South Ossetia to go its own way—that is, into Russia’s embrace. Beyond rhetoric, the U.S. and NATO did nothing material to help their ally in the Caucasus region, revealing themselves to be practically incapable of unified action. Each member state criticized or mollified Russia in accordance with its own interests.

If we add into the mix Iran’s belligerence, India’s increasing confidence and autonomy, and China’s expanding power, the world is devolving, as it were, into a dangerous, multi-polar configuration. A new Cold War—head-to-head, non-military confrontation among the world’s most powerful nations—seems to be brewing. Hostilities of this kind can quickly turn into shooting wars.

In this vein, we would do well to remember Revelation 17 and 18, which contain several references to kings and nations, not cooperative international bodies. Perhaps the world is shaping up to fulfill these long-awaited prophecies.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Withered Hand (Part Two)

Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11) reveals that wherever we go and whatever we do, like Christ, we are "under surveillance." This should spur us to exercise added control over our conduct so we may be true witnesses of God's way of life and not give cause for others to blaspheme Him. Although neither Jesus nor the healed man present any cause for accusation against them, the Pharisees need no reason—they are poised to strike.

Eventually, the conniving religious leaders join hands with the political leaders, including the Herodians, and their hatred rises to a fever pitch of intended violence against Jesus. The Herodians, the party of Herod, answer to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee who beheaded John the Baptist. His father was the Herod who, in an earlier attempt to kill the Christ, ordered the children of Bethlehem to be slain (Matthew 2:16-18).



1. Jesus has the power to heal, but what does He require of the deformed man? Matthew 12:13; Mark 3:3, 5; Luke 6:8, 10.

COMMENT: Jesus asks the man to do what had seemed impossible a moment before. At His command, the man places himself in full view of the synagogue's audience so that everyone present can witness it, and without even touching him, Jesus immediately heals him. When the man stretches out his hand for all to see, the crowd witnesses positive proof of Christ's power and holiness.

Despite the shame of his withered hand, the man still attends Sabbath services at the synagogue. He places a higher priority on worshipping God than on his personal discomfort. The principle illustrated here is that people should not use physical problems as an excuse for not going to church. A person should attend services when able.

The downside of missing services is that, eventually, spiritual problems with far more serious consequences will develop. No one can do much in service to God if he allows physical problems or handicaps to impede his worship and service of his Creator. In a sense, many of us suffer from withered hands. Sin so paralyzes us that we cannot serve God as we would like. Yet, anyone in God's church can be empowered to do the needed things for our Healer.

The real issue is *faith*. Jesus fulfills God's intention for the Sabbath day by restoring this man to health and strength. In answering Christ's call to step forward, the man shows what a little faith and obedience can do. This tests his courage and faith as he rises above his human fears. He entirely trusts Christ, and his healing is God's response.

2. How does Jesus' anger differ from that of the Pharisees? Mark 3:5.

COMMENT: Mark records that Jesus, as He enters the synagogue, angrily gazes at the Pharisees in their sin of callousness toward human suffering. Having a full measure of the Holy Spirit, He can discern their evil hearts. With severe and stern indignation, He reacts to their hypocrisy and hardness of heart.

However, His is not a spiteful or revengeful reaction but intense sorrow at their state of mind. Mark phrases it as "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." It is not hatred of men but anger at the sin they exhibited combined

with the passionate sadness that not even His teaching, God's law, or any other means could overcome their confirmed wickedness.

This type of anger is not sin because it is controlled, without hatred, short-lived, and justified due to their defiance of God. Anger is lawful only when it is tempered with sorrow for those who have offended. Paul warns, "Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

3. What is wrong with the Pharisees' anger? Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6; Luke 6:11.

COMMENT: The heart represents the seat of feeling and affection. For instance, one is said to be tenderhearted when easily affected by others' sufferings. A person may be affected by his own sin or, in contrast, by the love and commands of God. The Pharisees act, not with sorrowful indignation, but with ruthless, murderous hearts (Mark 3:6). While theirs were hardened, Jesus' heart ached. What a contrast!

Here is illustrated the nadir of the Pharisees' hypocrisy. They policed Sabbath activities to ensure no one broke their human rules for keeping it, condemning those who did, while having no qualms about plotting Jesus' murder! They would allow the rescue of a sheep on the Sabbath but not the rescue—through healing—of a human being.

God prophesies about the church:

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

The day will come when we will all have "a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). As the next verse encourages, "He who promised is faithful." He will create this clean heart in us as we follow the righteous example of His Son.

—Martin G. Collins