

A photograph of a man in a red shirt and dark suit jacket. A hand is shown in his pocket, holding a stack of US dollar bills. The man's hand is on his hip, and the other hand is in his pocket. The background is white.

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Human beings seem to be inclined to acquire things—and too many of them have little compunction about taking them from others. Stealing of all sorts is so widespread that, in America, a stealing crime occurs every three seconds! All of the thievery destroys morality and erodes trust, but there is a workable, biblical solution.

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The Eighth Commandment

Exodus 20:15 commands everybody on earth simply and bluntly, “You shall not steal.” By itself, it seems clear enough, but it has important ramifications to life. It affirms God’s mind regarding a right Americans may take for granted because we live with this right without thinking about it very much—until someone steals from us. This commandment is God’s affirmation that every human being has the right to private property and that others have no right granted by God to take that property from them without lawful permission.

In contrast, communists tell the world that owning property *is* theft. In other words, everything belongs to everybody! Not so by a long shot. The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness (Psalm 24:1), and He gives it to whoever He pleases. In addition, He extends the right to all men to work *lawfully* to pursue ownership of their own private property. Once we understand this commandment, it removes all doubt that communism, in which all property is actually owned collectively by the state, is a form of government that does not have God’s approval.

In every nation on earth, in every village, the possession of property is proof of a person’s material worth. Whether the property is wives, cattle, chickens, sheep, autos, houses, land, or businesses, people can see the property and say, “He must be somebody—look at what he owns.”

In every community, there are those who are clever, industrious, and careful, and due to these qualities, they always seem to be on top of things and at the right place at the right time. Sometimes they become owners of substantial amounts of property. In the same community at the same time, others are disadvantaged for whatever reasons; they are lazy, unintelligent, undisciplined, or “turned off,” and rarely ever possess, let alone accumulate, substantial amounts of property.

In his heart of hearts, everybody wants property, but how to get property is all too often a critical issue. Those who have little or no property do not generally deny the rights of those who have property to possess it. However, they may seriously question how or by what means the property holder came into possession of it in the first place. Serious, deeply emotional, and bloody national revolutions have been waged over such matters.

In such cases, the disadvantaged accuse the advantaged property holder of acquiring his property using questionable “legal” means to gain it. The disadvantaged then feel justified to use any means at their disposal to take property from the advantaged. Yet, in Exodus 20:15 and Deuteronomy 5:19, God says, “You shall not steal”—the commandment contains no “ifs,” “ands,” “buts,” or “maybe under certain conditions.”

personal *The Eighth Commandment*

Broad Application

In addition to affirming the right to own property, this commandment, in its spirit, also covers the principle of generosity more directly than any other, and it does this by condemning its opposite. From this commandment therefore arises the principles of the *give* and *get* ways of living life. Which will we follow in our lives?

This commandment covers much more than mere thievery. It includes deliberate and accidental damage done to another's property, as well as fraudulent retention of it through carelessness or indifference. It also delves into the questions of whether wealth was acquired fairly in business and whether people are getting a fair share of the good things of life. In addition, it poses the question: Is the rich man wealthy due to merit, or have the rules of the game been cleverly, avariciously, and unlawfully tilted in his favor so that the few privileged can continuously steal from the powerless? This latter principle is a central theme of the book of Amos, showing that abuse of this commandment is a major reason God's wrath is falling on the people of Israel.

Leviticus 25:23 clearly establishes who the ultimate Owner of all land is: "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine." However, Numbers 33:53-54 reveals His will more specifically, showing that He fully intends that we share ownership with Him: "You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families." God fully intended that each family own property, especially land. He consistently shows that land is fundamentally the basis of material wealth. Further, Numbers 27 shows that private ownership of land, and therefore wealth, is not restricted to males.

Leviticus 25:8-10 adds a vital factor concerning God's attitude toward the accumulation of wealth:

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

These verses define when a Jubilee year occurs. This law covers the restoration of land to its original family owners when it has been lost because of misfortune or mismanagement. It thus gives the original family the ability to accumulate wealth once again through disciplined work.

Some Categories of Thievery

In addition to the Jubilee, other laws scattered throughout Leviticus 23-27 cover specific situations in which property has been lost or sold, or even when it has been set apart to earn money for God (Leviticus 27:16-24). In this law, God warns against a landowner failing to follow through on his promise to devote to God the profits of a field.

In I Samuel 8:9-18, God strongly forewarns Israel about the painful future they were creating for themselves by desiring a king to rule over them. God had previously said in Deuteronomy 17 that the time would come when Israel would have a king, so their wanting a king is not the issue. The problem is that the Israelites desired a king who would be like the Gentile kings, not one whom God would appoint from among themselves.

God warns them that their request would open the door for their self-appointed king and his government's bureaucracy to steal their hard-earned wealth from them systematically. He tells them that it would be a curse beyond their imagination and that the king would take their wealth "legally" and then use it for his own political ends to extend his power.

Thus, at one extreme end of the thievery cycle, the state assumes the right to steal indirectly because it has taxing power to use anything and everything to its own ends. In the process, the government ceases to be the servant and instead becomes the master. Nowhere, under any circumstance, does God give either government, business, or individuals the right to steal another's property—regardless of how one feels the other came into possession of it or how greatly one feels justified in appropriating it.

The public attitude toward the keeping of the Ten Commandments is perhaps most clearly seen in the overwhelming disrespect for keeping this particular commandment. When I worked at the steel mill, thievery was a constant occurrence. It seems that most employees functioned under the assumption that anything not welded down was fair game. The most common justifications for this attitude were, "What difference does it make? If I don't take it, somebody else will"; and "The company is so rich it won't miss this little thing I'm taking." One standout example was a man everybody called "Brassy," a pipefitter's helper. Summer and winter, he wore an overcoat. He earned his nickname by stealing some small fitting made of brass virtually every day, carrying it out of the plant in his overcoat pockets.

The statistics on this crime from *The FBI Uniform Crime Report* are appalling. These statistics can in no way be totally accurate, as it is estimated that no more than 50% of this type of crime is ever reported because of people's frustration with police and the courts. The FBI includes under the thievery heading robbery, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, fraud, and embezzlement:

Robbery is stealing or taking anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person by force, violence, or putting in fear. Robbery takes place in the presence of the victim.

Burglary is any breaking or entering of a structure with the intent of committing a theft. It includes housebreaking and safecracking.

Larceny is unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession of another without the use of force, fraud, or violence. Larceny includes shoplifting and pocket-picking, thefts from motor vehicles, and theft of motor vehicle parts and accessories.

Motor Vehicle Theft seems self-explanatory, but includes buses, trucks, motorcycles, motor scooters, and snowmobiles.

Fraud is the conversion and obtaining of money or property by false pretenses, including deliberately written bad checks and counterfeiting.

Embezzlement is the misappropriation or misapplication of money or goods entrusted.

Statistical Comparisons, 1960 and Today

The U.S. Justice Department's system making statistical comparisons per 100,000 inhabitants helps us get a better picture of the relative impact of various crimes. It takes population growth into consideration and gives a clearer picture of the intensity of criminal activity happening to us or around us. The ratings figure is national in scope, so any community's rating might be higher or lower.

- In 1960, the robbery rate was 60.1, while it was 147.6 in 2007, a 136% increase in 47 years.
- The burglary rate in 1960 was 508.6; in 2007, it had climbed to 722.5, reflecting a 42% increase since 1960.
- In 1960, the larceny rate was 1034.7; in 2007, it had more than doubled—a 110% increase—to 2177.8.
- In 1960, the motor vehicle thefts rate was 183; in 2007, the figure grew to 363.3, an increase of 98% since 1960.

Clearly, thievery crimes are not diminishing. Perhaps a different configuration of thievery totals will provide a better angle on these horrendous statistics:

- In 2006, the total number of robberies reported to police was 445,125, or one robbery committed every 69 seconds.

- Total burglaries in 2007 were 2,176,140, or one burglary every 14 seconds.
- Total larcenies were 6,568,572 in 2007, or one every 4.8 seconds.
- In 2007, motor vehicle thefts numbered 1,195,769, or one every 26.4 seconds.

In sum, a stealing crime occurs every three seconds, amounting to 20 every minute or 1,200 every hour or 28,800 every day! Do not forget that this figure may represent only 50% of what actually occurs!

According to the Justice Department, in 2003, the average loss to a private citizen during a burglary invasion of his home amounted to \$1626.00. In the same year, the average loss of a motor vehicle theft was \$6797.00. The total nationwide loss due to automobile theft, including such things as police costs and insurance company costs in addition to personal losses, was a staggering 8.6 billion dollars. As huge as this figure is, it represents a crime in which the overall numbers are in decline. Motor vehicle theft is by far a big city crime, as the rate is several times higher in major cities than in small towns.

In that vein, there are two-and-a-half times more burglaries in metropolitan areas as in rural ones, but rural law enforcement agencies in general—and the South as a region—have the best record for apprehending and convicting perpetrators of theft. The worst month for crimes of thievery is August, and the safest is February.

As mentioned earlier, these statistics are considered a conservative reflection of the actual impact of this sin because, of all crimes, stealing is least likely to be reported. Overall, the FBI reports that one index crime—this would also include acts like murder and aggravated assault—occurs every two seconds!

God, too, apparently categorizes at least to some extent. Notice I Corinthians 5:10: “Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.” An extortioner indicates a robber who steals by violence; the Greek word, *harpax*, means “to obtain by violence, threat, oppression, or abuse of authority.” It is an adjective that literally describes a grappling iron used in warfare, and so it means “grasping that to which one has no right.” It is also translated as “ravening” in Scripture.

I Corinthians 6:10 uses another Greek term: “. . . nor thieves . . . will inherit the kingdom of God.” “Thieves” is translated from *kleptes*, a stealer or one who uses stealth. *Kleptes* is the root of our word “kleptomaniac.” Interestingly, Jesus uses it metaphorically for false ministers, those who secretly steal away salvation from unsuspecting people.

A Sin and Crime of Opportunity

In God's scheme of things, though He wants us to have property, there are only two right ways to come into

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possession of anything: as a gift from God or man, or by honest labor. Any other means is sin.

People tend to commit crimes within the range of their opportunities. Bankers rarely rob banks at gunpoint but stealthily embezzle millions. The armed robber steals by violence; the banker, by clever intrigue and manipulative bookkeeping. However, one way is just as much a sin as the other. Thus, stealing can disguise itself in the respectabilities of a grand home in a gated neighborhood, fine clothing, and luxurious furniture of the corporate boardroom.

Such white-collar crime reveals the broad extent of social corrosion even more than crimes of violence. An example we recently witnessed through the news media was the case of Bernie Madoff. Many called him a genius, but through an elaborate Ponzi stock scheme, he bilked thousands of unwary investors of \$65 billion dollars! His victims were among those many would consider the best and brightest from the business world, charities, his own relatives, and celebrities from entertainment and athletics. He even bilked his own defense attorney! At 73 years of age, he received a 150-year jail sentence.

Embezzlement, stock manipulation, bribery, tax fraud, stealing business supplies from the company, consumer fraud, and the like *dwarfs* all crimes of a more violent nature combined. To put it bluntly, the *real* thief wears a white collar. For instance, one website primarily intended for lawyers listed 24 different kinds of fraud: telemarketing fraud, Internet fraud, identity theft, false advertising, false billings, pharmaceutical fraud, bankruptcy fraud, scams against business and against the elderly, insurance fraud, etc.

In one day, a white-collar criminal may bribe a policeman or a building inspector, short-weight his product, entertain his wife at company expense, receive a kickback in a business deal, buy personal gifts with company money, cheat on his income tax, fail to pay the maid's Social Security, do his personal shopping on company time, type a personal letter using company time and stationery, bribe a purchasing agent, email friends and surf the Internet for personal business, or overcharge on a government contract.

Embezzlement is technically a fraud. A fraud committed by a person in a position of trust who takes—usually money—from his employer for his own use. It is a more sophisticated employee theft.

To give an idea of how huge the losses can be, consider that in January 2008, it was discovered that a young hedge-fund trader working for a French bank, Société Générale, defrauded the bank and its customers of \$7.2 billion through a scheme he concocted. According to 1984 U.S. government statistics, white-collar embezzling amounted to in excess of \$5 million dollars *per day* ("White Collar Crime is Big Business," *The Nation*, June 8, 1985, p. 703)! The same source stated that employee theft alone in 1984 amounted to about \$30 billion; by 1990, it was in excess of \$50 billion.

In addition, employee theft is responsible for 30% of all

business failures and about 15% of the retail costs the consumer pays for manufactured goods. Fifty percent of all inventory shortages is due to employee theft. Banks consistently lose over twice as much to employees internally as to robbers and burglars. The IRS estimates that currently in excess of \$50 billion per year of taxable income goes unreported.

Americans have a tendency to look at this crime in a strange way. Regarding fraud, many people look at this sin as, if the guy got away with it, good for him for being so clever. We seem to have a twisted admiration for crooks of this sort—until one targets us directly. Our judicial practices support this: In 1985, the average shoplifter stole \$17 per year and the average embezzler, \$1,500, yet they both received the same sentence! Also, a convicted embezzler receives an average of 1.58 years in prison for a first offense. However, his second offense he receives 1.16 years. The average sentence is reduced!

This exposes a rather cavalier attitude toward theft. In a previous article, we saw in the book of Amos that, though God accuses the Gentile nations of violence, He illustrates Israelites as being irresponsible, unwilling to keep their word but very quick to take advantage of fellow Israelites, especially those without the power to defend themselves (Amos 2:6-8). The historical record in the Bible shows that being trustworthy and loyal to God and to each other is quite difficult for Israelites. We can be glad that God is loyal to us and His purpose despite our many flaws.

A recent statistic revealed that over one billion people worldwide access the Internet, and so Internet fraud has become a huge business. Interestingly, according to the FBI, those who have a college degree, as well as those who have some college-level education, are the most vulnerable to it. Internet scams alone amount to a reported \$40 billion a year. However, according to the FBI, 71% of that fraud originates in the United States. This seems to fit right into the book of Amos and our national character.

Just Weights and Measures

God says in Leviticus 19:35-37:

You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weight, and honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am the LORD.

Deuteronomy 25:13-16 puts God's standards in slightly different words:

You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a

(continued on page 12)

ready answer

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

To Live, We Must Die

“He who finds his life
will lose it,
and he who loses
his life for My sake
will find it.”
—Matthew 10:39

I must confess that my busy life does not provide me a great deal of time to read for leisure. It has been this way for years. Through high school and college, I can probably count on one hand the number of books I read that were not for class. Perhaps it was because this particular book would not take too long to read, or maybe it was because my wife told me that she enjoyed it and that I should read it—whatever the reason, I did the unthinkable: I opened the book.

I remember that the title grabbed me: *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life’s Greatest Lesson*. Intrigued to learn life’s greatest lesson, I plunged into the book to learn what this lesson was.

Many of us can think of a role model or mentor who inspired and helped us get through difficult times. Usually, it is someone who is a bit older and wiser, who had more experience in life and an ability to pass some wisdom on to us.

For the author, Mitch Albom, that person was Morrie Schwartz, a professor who had taught him in college some twenty years earlier. Through Mitch’s four years of school, Morrie became much more than a teacher; he was a trusted friend and advisor. On the day of his graduation, with tears of thanks in his eyes, Mitch had promised to stay in touch with his mentor, but somehow, the business of life took all his time, and he lost contact with Morrie.

Mitch became a highly successful writer, engulfed with work. Years of his busy life passed by in which he hardly had time to notice even his wife and family. Shortly after his wedding, Mitch had promised to start a family with his wife, but in all his accomplishments, that day never came. He also lost contact with many of his friends and family members. To him, there simply was not enough time for both success and relationships.

He had occasionally thought about his old mentor and his many lessons on life, but an occasional thought was all the time he had. Then, some twenty years later, by sheer chance, he was reconnected.

A Final Course

As for Morrie, he was in his 70s when he was diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. ALS eats the body's nerves from the inside out, starting with a person's legs and working up. As the disease takes hold, the victim becomes frozen inside the lifeless cocoon of his body, while his mind is perfectly awake and aware. After just a few years, even the help of an oxygen machine cannot thwart mortality, as the lungs fill with poisonous phlegm and breathing becomes impossible. A diagnosis of ALS is a certain death sentence.

As his health deteriorated, Morrie wrote short articles about living in death's shadow. A feature story appeared in the *Boston Globe*, "A Professor's Final Course: His Own Death," which caught the eye of Ted Koppel, who featured Morrie on "Nightline." By chance, Mitch was flipping channels more than a thousand miles away when he went numb as he saw his old professor on television. He watched in horror as Morrie—his friend and mentor—explained what it was like to know that he was dying.

For the next fourteen weeks, Mitch flew into town and attended his final course from his old professor. "Lessons on How to Live" was taught each Tuesday afternoon in Morrie's home. The class consisted of one professor and one student. Each week brought a new topic under a common theme. They talked about the world, about feeling sorry for oneself, about regrets, about death, about family, about the fear of dying, about money and love and culture and forgiveness.

Each week Morrie's life-devouring disease took more of the freedoms of life that are so easy to take for granted. Finally, after losing all ability to care for himself, on the fourteenth week after the fourteenth class, Morrie died.

While battling to make the most of his remaining time, Morrie had developed many sayings:

- Accept what you are able to do and what you are not able to do.
- Accept the past as past without denying it or discarding it.
- Learn to forgive yourself and to forgive others.
- Do not assume that it is too late to get involved.
- In order to live, we must first learn to die.

This final saying is the focus of this article.

Losing and Finding

We all know that we will die, but we do not believe it, Morrie said. If we believed it, we would do things differently. So, we kid ourselves about death, Mitch said. Yes, Morrie replied, but there is a better approach: to know that we are going to die and to be prepared for it at any time. That is better. That way we can actually be more involved in our lives while we are living.

Morrie advised Mitch to imagine a little bird on his shoulder each day—a little bird that asks, "Is today the day?" We need to ask ourselves, "Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?"

Morrie never thought about death before he became ill. He admitted that he was like everyone else, not believing that he would die. While we have all known someone who has died, most of us separate ourselves from that experience. We just do not like to think about it. After all, it is a long way off, right? So we walk around on autopilot, caught up in the busyness—the busyness—of life. However, when we finally believe that we are going to die, we see things much differently. Like Morrie, our perspective changes and with it, our priorities.

Morrie did not know God's truth. As Mitch states, he borrowed freely from all religions. But there is some real wisdom in his words. When we learn how to die, we learn how to live.

When we really think about it, we spend so much of our time on things of low importance. When we realize that our time is limited and quickly running out, a sense of urgency overtakes us, and we make changes. Our new perspective changes our attitude and our actions. Jesus says in Matthew 10:39, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Commentator Albert Barnes explains:

The word "life" in this passage is used evidently in two senses. The meaning may be expressed thus: He that is anxious to save his "temporal" life, or his comfort and security here, shall lose "eternal" life. . . . He that is willing to risk or lose his comfort and "life" here for my sake, shall find "life" everlasting, or shall be saved.

This scripture is one of six similar scriptures scattered through all four gospels (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25).

Jesus attaches a double meaning to the word "life": a lower, physical, and temporal meaning and a higher, spiritual, eternal meaning. Christ warns us that we must make an entire sacrifice of the lower for the higher. For if we do not completely and wholeheartedly surrender the lower for the higher, we will lose both. "When we learn how to die, we learn how to live." Indeed, to learn how to die physically is to learn how to live spiritually (Romans 6:6; II Corinthians 5:17).

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

As Christ tells us, if we want to seek Him, we must follow Him and surrender to God everything—our wills, our bodies, and our lives. The self must be denied because our carnal mind is driven by pride and an underlying belief and desire that we must get things for ourselves. We must subsequently live our lives as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), following Christ’s example of complete submission to the Father’s will. If we are anxious to save, to preserve, our physical lives and/or to put our security in physical things, we will lose our spiritual lives.

Those who seek to gain the world’s physical treasures (Matthew 6:19-21) will lose the Father’s spiritual treasures. All of the world’s physical treasures are not enough to purchase one eternal life, but if we are willing to sacrifice everything—and it takes everything—if we, with complete trust in Him, put everything in our faithful Creator’s hands, we will find everlasting life.

“Get” or “Give”?

Herbert Armstrong once wrote in a personal letter to another minister:

. . . I simmer down the WAY OF GOD and the WAY OF THE WORLD in two very small words—“GET” and “GIVE.” This world is geared to the way of “GET.” That is the way of VANITY, SELF-centeredness, coveting, lust and greed, jealousy and envy, rebellion against authority, competition which leads to strife, violence and war. The way of “GIVE” is OUT-flowing LOVE, harmonious co-operation, serving, helping, sharing, giving.

In spiritual PRINCIPLE, the latter is the way of God’s Law, the Ten Commandments—the former the way of Satan. . . . ALL the unsolvable problems, troubles and evils in the world are caused by the fact the world lives by the “GET” principle.

How plain and simple. In order to live, we must learn how to die. We must put to death our carnal, selfish minds and the way of the world—the way of “get”—and we must replace it with the way of God—the way of “give.”

Mitch Albom concludes his book by stating how much he would like to go back and talk to the person he was twenty years earlier. He wanted to tell him to

ignore the lure of advertised values and to pay attention when loved ones speak, as if it were the last time he might hear them. He wished he had gotten on an airplane twenty years earlier and regularly visited the man and his family who had made such a difference in his life.

None of us can undo what we have already done, but as Morrie said, it is never too late to make a difference. Morrie never had the benefit of God’s truth, but he seemed to know the difference between the way of get and the way of give. He knew that the way of get—no matter how outwardly successful—never satisfies.

In order to live, we must first learn to die. We all know that we are going to die, but do we really believe it? The fruit of belief is action. And the benefit of learning how to die physically is to learn how to live spiritually.

As Christ tells us in Matthew 10:39 and its parallel scriptures, if we want to know Him, we must surrender everything to God. He instructs us to follow His giving example of total self-sacrifice in devotion to God’s will. He teaches us to deny the self because our carnal mind is driven by the way of get, which always forces us off the right path. Finally, He advises us to sacrifice entirely the lower, physical, temporal life for the higher, spiritual, eternal life. For if we do not completely and wholeheartedly surrender the lower for the higher, we will lose both.

In our daily prayer and self-evaluation, we should ask ourselves, “Is today the day? Have I surrendered everything to God and am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person that God wants me to be?” We must remember that life can end in an instant, but we are to live in the fear of God, not in the fear of death. In order to live, we must first learn to die.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 1:20-21:

. . . according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul’s earnest desire was to glorify Christ in all circumstances. His desire to glorify Christ superseded all personal interests, including being released from prison and spared from death. Paul intensely hoped and trusted that, despite the severe trials he was undergoing, he would persevere with boldness—even to death—to the glory of God.

He declares that his sole purpose for living was to glorify Christ. Paul’s aim was not *get*. His purpose, to which he devoted himself with passion and zeal, was to *give* everything to glorify God. He understood that, if it was God’s will, there was great advantage in dying above that of living.

—Bill Onisick

WHO WILL BE KEPT FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL?

As human beings we have an aversion to pain.

We try to avoid the uncomfortable, the unpleasant, and the hurtful. Equipped with the capacity to feel both physically and emotionally, we are continually taking stock of what could injure us in our environment. When we know something painful is approaching, our natural tendency is to draw back, skirt around, or run past it—to do almost anything to avoid it.

When we look at the state of the world, considering what is prophesied to happen during the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, our minds quickly become occupied with thoughts of how we might avoid having to experience those things. Protestantism comforts itself with the myth of a secret rapture—the idea that everyone who has professed Jesus Christ will be spirited away before things grow too bad. Knowing what the Bible says, however, to us that notion is an empty one.

Yet God does make promises of physical protection, so we do have hope. The letter to the church of Philadelphia contains one of the best known: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

Before examining this promise, it may be helpful to understand what it does *not* say. Note how conventional wisdom would paraphrase this verse:

Because you consider yourself to be a Philadelphian, and because you are with the church organization that is doing the most to preach the gospel to the world, I will keep you from the hour of trial and will take you to the Place of Safety where you will be protected while all those who disagree with you will go through the Tribulation.

“Conventional wisdom” is not actually wisdom but what is generally held to be true by many, yet it may, in fact, be fallacious. This rendering of Revelation 3:10 is the conventional wisdom in some circles, illustrating how many take narcissistic liberties with this verse. It also shows why there is such an emphasis today on which church group is the best: because we are averse to pain and tend to try to avoid it. Thus, some convince themselves that they will be safe from what lies ahead because they are with the right *church*—rather than being right with *God*. This is extremely dangerous, as it indicates that they trust in the wrong thing.

PATIENT ENDURANCE

The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are written in large part from a perspective of “if the shoe fits, wear it.” In each, Jesus concludes with “he who has an ear, let

him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”—plural—meaning we should glean all that we can from *each* letter rather than focus on our favorite one.

In this light, a way to approach Revelation 3:10 is that *perseverance* is part of what Christ uses to define who a Philadelphian is. Thus, an individual is a Philadelphian *because* he keeps His command to persevere, in addition to exemplifying the other things He says, such as keeping His Word and not denying His name (Revelation 3:8). In short, a person cannot conclude that, just because he is fellowshipping with a particularly faithful group, he will be carried along in its positive momentum and benefit from the promise of protection and other blessings. An unfaithful individual in an overall faithful group will reap what *he* sows, not what the rest of the group sows.

Christ says similar things in other places, as in Matthew 10:22: “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But *he who endures to the end will be saved*” (emphasis ours throughout). He makes no mention of group membership but addresses the enduring individual. Similarly, in Matthew 24:12-13 and Luke 21:36, He emphasizes what we do as *individuals*—our personal faithfulness and endurance—rather than the merits of a particular group. Just as Laodiceanism can be found in each of us regardless

of the church we attend, so each of us can persevere and courageously endure no matter where we fellowship.

Revelation mentions patient endurance seven times. At the book's beginning, John sets the tone by introducing himself as "I, John, your brother and companion (sharer and participator) with you in the tribulation and kingdom and *patient endurance* [which are] in Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9, *Amplified Bible*). The construction here is peculiar, but John uses three words to describe one thing—namely, the tribulation that is connected with the Kingdom and which requires patient endurance (see Acts 14:22; II Timothy 2:11-12).

In the letters to the seven churches, several recurring phrases or themes appear. They all contain "I know your works" and "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Five letters contain the command to repent, and "patience" appears four times in three of them, a good indicator of the importance of patience to God's church, especially at the end time.

In addition to the mention in Revelation 3:10, Christ commends the church at Ephesus for its patience:

I know your works, your labor, *your patience*, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and *have patience*, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. (Revelation 2:2-3)

Perseverance—patient endurance—is also a part of the praise that Christ gives to the Thyatiran church: "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your *patience*" (Revelation 2:19).

PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

As the prophecies of the end time unfold, the patience of the saints is highlighted twice more. The first is in Revelation 13:9-10: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he

who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

In the preceding verses, John describes the Beast, his power, and his blasphemy. God allows him to make war with the saints and overcome them. This is part of what the saints will have to endure. Some translations, like *The Amplified Bible* and the *English Standard Version* (ESV), end verse 10 with "Here is a *call* for the endurance and faith of the saints," which fits exactly with Christ's "command to persevere" (NKJV) or "[keeping] the word of [His] patience."

The first part of verse 10 can be confusing because, even though the book was written in Greek, John is actually using a Hebrew idiom that signifies the *certainty of approaching judgment*. This can be seen in Jeremiah 43:11; 15:2.

This Hebraism means that it is *so certain* that the Beast will carry out these things that none will escape being involved in some way. Thus, God calls for endurance and faith.

Revelation 14:12 contains another reference to the perseverance of the saints: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

The saints are defined as those who keep God's law *and* maintain and give attention to the faith of Jesus. Again, the context is the time when the world will worship the Beast and receive his mark. As in Revelation 13:10, translations such as the ESV render the first part as "Here is a *call* for the endurance of the saints," meaning that, when the saints see this occurring, their endurance and perseverance will be in greatest need.

In Jesus Christ's promise in Revelation 3:10, the core issue is perseverance. The King James reads, "Because you have kept the word of My *patience*," and "patience" is likewise used in the other verses in Revelation. But "patience" tends to make us think of passive activity, which is not what the underlying Greek word, *hupomoné*, actually means. Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates describes it as "constancy under suffering in faith

and duty," and commentator William Barclay defines *hupomoné* as "having the quality to stand, facing the storm, struggling against difficulty and opposition."

Obviously, *activity* is involved; it is not just passively waiting. It describes active, spiritual *resistance*—against Satan, this world, and our own carnality. The most succinct rendering of *hupomoné* may be "courageous endurance." "Cheerful or hopeful endurance" is another good rendering, as it includes a degree of optimism—and when we remember Who is on our side and how this story ends, we have every reason to be optimistic while persevering.

THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION

To put this command into perspective, we must imagine what the world will be like at the time when this letter will be most applicable. A great false prophet will be active, and deception will be so widespread that it will threaten even God's elect. A powerful and blasphemous tyrant will encourage or even command worship of himself, and he will institute financial controls, such that commerce will be essentially impossible without paying homage to him. Yet, it will be our responsibility to be constant and unwavering under the suffering imposed by that system.

Further, it does not appear that the church of God will be unified at that time. Given the various prophecies that describe seven lampstands and seven letters to seven churches, it seems that division will be the norm within the church. Some of the letters in Revelation 2 and 3 indicate a low level of faith and a high level of carnality.

As Jesus says in Matthew 24:12, "Because lawlessness will abound, the love [*agapé*] of many will grow cold." The world does not have any *agapé*, so He must be speaking of the church! True Christians will have to persevere through encroaching sin and dying love *within the church*. The temptation may be great to throw in the towel, to withdraw, to separate from the breth-

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personal *The Eighth Commandment*

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heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God.

God states things so simply. Manufacturers have the responsibility to produce high quality, fairly priced products. According to a report from the *National Journal*, dangerous or misused products result in 28,000 deaths and 130,000 serious injuries each year. Certainly, the manufacturer has a rightful claim to a profit, but he should not attempt to increase his profits improperly at the expense of the consumer, the public at large, or nature.

Many will recall what happened at the Ford Motor Company several years ago. Even after fairly low-speed rear-end crashes, the Ford Pinto was known to burst into flames. Internal memos showed that Ford knew of the danger yet refused to recall the cars and install a \$10 shield because the total fleet-wide cost would exceed the cost of an occasional lawsuit. However, between 500 and 900 people died in rear-end crashes involving the Pinto. Many lives were stolen away!

Notice how clear and insistent God is that businessmen deal fairly with the public: “Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the LORD. . . . Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, and dishonest scales are not good” (Proverbs 20:10, 23). Proverbs 16:11 adds, “Honest weight and scales are the LORD’S; all the weights in the bag are His work [margin, *concern*].” Why are they His concern? Because the sin of stealing is involved, and as we have just seen, even death can result.

Micah 6:10-12 sets this sin in a historical context, showing that sly cheating by businessmen is no minor affair to Him:

Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination? Shall I count pure those with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

Amos 8:5-7 adds further evidence that, in His judgment, secretive business thievery that takes advantage of the unwary is in no way beneath His notice:

[The people say,] “When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the balances by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—even sell the bad wheat?” The LORD

has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “Surely I will never forget any of their works.”

Ezekiel 45:9-12 extends the sin of thievery into the realm of religion as God makes charges against those involved:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “Enough, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plundering, execute justice and righteousness, and stop dispossessing My people,” says the Lord GOD. “You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath. The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, so that the bath contains one-tenth of a homer; their measure shall be according to the homer. The shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your mina.”

God demands clearly set and well-advertised standards, and He expects people to conform to them. We must understand, too, that the spirit of the principles involved in dealing fairly with one’s neighbor reach out to include things like false advertising, doctors who perform unnecessary operations (a third are unnecessary, according to the American Medical Association), and lawyers who enter into unnecessary, and in many cases, frivolous litigation in behalf of a client.

In a New Testament setting, James 5:1-6 voices God’s condemnation of wealthy, grasping employers who take advantage of powerless employees through various forms of robbery:

Come, now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

All of this sneaky thievery adds to the destruction of the nation’s morality. Stability and peace in a family or nation are founded in reciprocal trust. The consistent breaking of the last six commandments—upon which community trust is founded—has eroded mutual reliance, creating cynicism and leaving fear in its wake. Hosea 4:1-3 notes what occurred in his day, a parallel to our own:

Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of

the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away.”

All of this mounting sin is common knowledge in our day. Regarding thievery, the warning *caveat emptor*, “Let the buyer beware,” is a common watchword. We are experiencing living within an atmosphere of cynicism and distrust.

Work, Wealth, Sharing, and Stealing

Ephesians 4:28 charges, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” Paul’s command is clear and straightforward. We are to gain property and possessions by honest work—hard work, as the verb “labor” indicates exertion to the point of exhaustion. In addition, we are not to work merely to satisfy our personal desires and needs, but that we can freely give any excess to the needy.

Besides mere survival, Acts 20:35 reveals an additional reason for working: “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Stealing runs totally against the grain of God’s way of life. In the spirit of God’s law, a person not only steals by taking another’s possessions, but by the refusal to work hard and honestly in order to share and give to others in need.

Romans 12:10, 13 helps to clarify this purpose: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; . . . distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” Love has no meaning unless it is demonstrated by giving, and having the ability to give in this manner comes from sacrifice and labor. Paul is writing about total commitment to what is good, an undiminished devotion to kindness regardless of the recipient’s response.

Our God sets the example for us. Jesus says in John 5:17, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” We are driven by self-concern, and all too often, that concern degenerates into greed. That desire, however, must be overcome. We are to become like God. He is a Creator, and He works. A major characteristic of His Kingdom is that it is producing, working, creating Family that sacrifices itself to give and to share.

Using Christ’s example, Philippians 2:4-8 urges us to become like Him:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation,

taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

God warns in Proverbs 28:20-22 that stealing, which appears so tempting and easy to do, actually produces the opposite of what the thief hopes for:

A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress. A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him.

An important lesson of life to learn is that wealth is a means, not an end in itself. Get-rich-quick schemes, cutting corners to get more for the self, and taking unfair advantage of another’s ignorance will in the end destroy the perpetrator. Those who do these things to get rich are in reality seeking death because they are breaking the spirit of the eighth commandment.

God admonishes those who resort to violence in order to steal that they will be caught in the net of their own evil schemes. Their deliberate choice of evil means to achieve wealth saps their willpower to live honestly. A person who sets his will to work patiently and steadily will find his prosperity steadily increasing because God oversees the well-being of those who keep His commandments. This proverb is not a deprecation of the value of wealth but an exhortation to appreciate its proper value and to share it as God instructs.

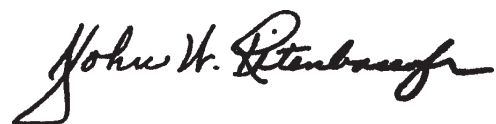
Proverbs 30:7-9 contains excellent advice for the sons of God:

Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die); remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

Stealing, like idolatry, murder, and lying, profanes God’s name. As His children, we bear His name—we must bring honor upon it! The author requests of God that He keep him at an even keel, lest he either deny his dependence on God or steal and justify himself by blaming God for not supplying his need.

Proverbs 14:23 provides a succinct and fitting reminder for those tempted to pursue thievery as a shortcut to prosperity: “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty.” It is work—not words or lustful dreams—that builds prosperity. Thievery leads only to despair and death.

In Christian love,



prophecy watch *Who Will Be Kept from the Hour of Trial?*

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ren because of offenses, but doing so would be the opposite of *hupomoné*—of courageously enduring.

The New King James speaks of “the hour of trial,” but the King James calls it “the hour of temptation.” This is a fitting rendition because during that time it will be tremendously tempting to give up, to give in, to compromise, to let down just a little, to sin (just a little!) in order to make life easier. It will be a time of pressure like never before and thus very easy to become distracted, not just because of the blatant idolatry and religious deception, but also because of the world’s increasing attractiveness and pervasiveness.

It does not have to be just a time of fascism and concentration camps. People will be eating and drinking and marrying—having a great time. Revelation 18’s description of Babylon focuses on luxury and ease and the avoidance of suffering. Jesus warns in Luke 21:34, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and *cares of this life*, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” Distraction leads to idolatry.

Whatever the reality of that time, “persevering” or “courageously enduring” without compromising will certainly be no small accomplishment. Yet Christ says that because some of His people *have been keeping* His command to persevere, He will keep them from the worst of it. They have already proved their faithfulness to Him; He knows where they stand, He sees their track record with Him, and He will not require them to experience *everything* that the rest of humanity will suffer.

In colleges and universities, some professors make the final exam at the end of a semester optional. This means that students take the final only if they need to bring their overall average up. But if a student already has an A from other tests and class work, the professor figures the student has already proved himself, and does not require him to take the final exam.

This approach is analogous to Revelation 3:10. If the Christian is already faithfully persevering and resisting the spiritual foes, God may not require that he endure the very hardest test to prove what is in his heart. He has *already* proved it consistently through the course of his life. However, if, like a stereotypical first-year college student, he has frittered away his time, becoming involved in matters having nothing to do with college (even if they are not altogether bad things), he will have to prove where he stands. The final exam in this case is the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord, so it is in our best interest that we students demonstrate to the Teacher that we are serious *before* the end of the semester.

PERFECT AND COMPLETE

The word translated “kept” or “keep,” used twice, plays into this. This word means “to attend to carefully; to maintain; to guard; to hold fast,” and the way that it is used indicates reciprocity. We certainly want *God* to guard, hold fast, and carefully attend *to us*. We would prefer that He guard us and hold us fast *far away* from the destruction and torment that will come upon the world! But the flipside is that He wants *us* to do the same thing—keep, guard, hold fast—with regard to our responsibilities to the covenant.

In other words, if we want God to take an active interest in our well-being during that time, we should understand the principle of reciprocity and take an active interest in Him at *this* time. If we diligently guard the things He has committed to our trust, He will do the same for us.

Jesus’ brother, James, provides insight into the perseverance that Christ wants us to have: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

The perseverance that we will in-

creasingly need as the end approaches cannot be developed all at once. Goofing off all semester and then cramming for the final exam rarely works in college, and it certainly will not work where our covenant and relationship with God is concerned. James counsels us to be thankful when our faith is tested, because all of those little exercises of faith not only prepare us for substantial trials, but also make us spiritually complete.

The upshot is that no man has the strength to endure and persevere through what lies ahead. Without God, we are all dead men, physically and spiritually, but because “power belongs to God” (Psalm 62:11), we can tap into the source of true strength through our relationship with Him. He decides the circumstances of our lives. He alone knows what we need to survive the trials and temptations at the end. More importantly, He knows what we need to be prepared for eternal life.

Remember that God desires godly offspring (Malachi 2:15). He is creating sons and daughters in His image (Genesis 1:26; Romans 8:29). He is using His perfect creative genius to engineer the experiences and circumstances that we need to take on His image and have His eternal character formed in us.

For some, walking with God through the very depths of the end time is what they will need to become “perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” A large part of that may be a result of the choices that they make now, and their tendencies toward apathy, complacency, or compromise.

For others who are already keeping His command to persevere, He will keep them from the hour of trial. It does not mean they will not see hardship: They *must* see hardship to endure courageously. But because of their constancy under duress—because God is not a stranger, and they are *already* accustomed to walking through life with Him and drawing upon His strength—they will be given a blessing of protection.

—David C. Grabbe

The Pope's "World Political Authority"

On July 7, 2009, the Vatican released Pope Benedict XVI's latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth"), his third, in which he writes of his desire that the world radically rethink the global economy in light of growing disparity between rich and poor, and establish a "true world political authority" to work for the "common good." Under current economic conditions, few question the need for a thorough review and alteration of the way the world handles its wealth, but his insistence on an international authoritative political body taking up this responsibility caught many pundits off-guard.

Among the churches of God—and among Protestant prophecy watchers, too—there were raised eyebrows and wondering commentaries regarding the imminent fulfillment of Revelation 13:11-18. Of course, whether this Pope is the "beast from the earth," better known as the False Prophet (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), remains to be seen. Benedict's age and relatively low-key international profile tend to argue against it. In fact, whether this or any Pope will be the False Prophet is still an unanswered question; he could just as easily be a non-Christian advocate of a one-world religion.

Be that as it may, after reading or hearing the Pope's seeming proposal of one-world government, many people have questioned whether he was actually doing that. Perhaps to allow us to judge for ourselves, we should see his words in context:

In the face of the unrelenting growth of global interdependence, there is a strongly felt need, even in the midst of a global recession, for a reform of the United Nations Organization, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth. One also senses the urgent need to find innovative ways of implementing the principle of the responsibility to protect and of giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making. This seems necessary in order to arrive at a political, juridical and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity. To manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result; to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority. . . ."

On its face, this paragraph appears to advocate a planetary government with the "real teeth" to implement sweeping and effective changes to the global economy, as well as to disarm bellicose states, distribute food evenly, keep the peace, protect the environment, and control migration. If so, it is an alarming prospect indeed, considering human corruption and fallibility over the course of history!

However, in "Is Benedict in Favor of World Government?" (*First Things*, August 20, 2009), Douglas A. Sylva, Senior Fellow at the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, argues that Benedict's call for "world political authority" presupposes the failure of the present attempt at world governance—the United Nations—and advocates a new one based on Christian principles. He quotes the end of the above paragraph from the encyclical:

The integral development of peoples and international cooperation require the establishment of a greater international ordering, marked by subsidiarity [giving subordinate governments the authority to oversee functions that they perform more effectively], for the management of globalization. They also require the construction of a social order that at last conforms to the moral order. . . ."

As Sylva puts it, "[His proposal] is in reality a profound challenge to the UN, and the other international organizations, to make themselves worthy of authority, of the authority that they already possess, and worthy of the expansion of authority that appears to be necessary in light of the accelerated pace of globalization." What would make such an international organization worthy of such heavy responsibility is, according to Benedict, "a commitment to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth." In other words, as the Pope makes clear in the remainder of the encyclical, a world government up to the task would have to respect the right to life of every individual and promote virtuous, morally sound actions.

The current "world order" fails on both counts. The UN, despite granting every sort of humanistic "right," leads the way in promoting abortion, population control, liberal bioethics, and euthanasia. It advances a culture of death, not one of life. In addition, in its missions and administration it has shown itself to be utterly corrupt from top to bottom. It is not worthy of the world's trust, which any government needs to function effectively.

In his own way, Benedict is calling for a moral, social, and political order that can only be fulfilled by the Kingdom of God, the only world government that has the moral authority and power to make the necessary changes that will bring about peace, prosperity, and life. As Sylva explains, "Now, in his teaching role as pope, Benedict is not simply protesting but offering the Christian alternative. . . ." The Catholic Church and the churches of God certainly have differing views on how it will come about, but at least in theory we agree that the only acceptable and workable world government is a truly moral and righteous one.

We can all be thankful that that government is coming soon (Revelation 22:20). This world certainly needs it.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Stilling a Storm

Two miracles of Jesus Christ recorded in Scripture tell of Him calming storms on the Sea of Galilee. The first miracle of this type appears in Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; and Luke 8:22-25. For Jesus, this is a day of both significant teaching, including the seven parables of Matthew 13, and considerable testing. He is sought by concerned friends, His mother, and half-brothers, and is accused of being demon-possessed by some who think that He is not in His right mind.

These things, along with performing this miracle, leave Jesus physically and mentally tired. Mark indicates that He shows signs of fatigue from incessant interruptions and distractions by the people pursuing Him. Yet, He unselfishly gives Himself to serve others. Because of the large crowds still gathering around Him, He tells His disciples to take Him in their small boat to the quieter region of Perea across the Sea of Galilee.

Once on board, Jesus falls asleep on a pillow, an item normally found among the sparse furnishings of that type of boat. A storm rises suddenly, terrifying the disciples. Mark describes the waves beating into the boat and filling it. Luke expresses the disciples' urgency by repeating the Greek word *epistates*, which means "Master, Master!" or "Rabbi, Rabbi!" However, because of His complete trust in His Almighty Father's care and protection, and His knowledge that He had God-given power over the winds and the sea, Jesus remains peacefully asleep.



1. Why is Jesus irritated with His disciples? Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25.

COMMENT: Jesus rebukes His disciples for fearfulness and little faith. They have not lost complete confidence in Christ, but neither have they learned nor fully developed trust in Him. They are at ease only when they hear Him speak and see Him taking care of them. They have so little faith that, when the moment of need comes, it is not enough to give them peace and calm.

The disciples are not totally faithless in this incident, as they called for Christ to save them. They know from what they had seen of His supernatural power that He is able to calm the storm, but they fall short in failing to realize and fully believe that it makes no difference whether Christ is asleep or awake—He is still the Son of God. They should have considered that the Father would not allow His faithful Son to drown in a sinking boat. After all, He is the One who, ages before, had "shut in the sea with doors, . . . [and] said, 'This far you may come but no farther'" (Job 38:8, 11). His followers do not apply their little faith. Faith and fear cannot exist together, for fear paralyzes faith.

2. What is Christ's reaction to the storm and sea? Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24.

COMMENT: As the Son of God and with only the power of His word, Christ speaks, and the wind ceases. After the fierce storm relents, a great calm descends. This miracle over the environment contrasts the disharmony, disorder, and confusion of nature against the power, order, and peace of the Creator (Psalm 89:9).

Christ treats this storm and the sea as if they were antagonistic and rebelling forces under a dominating, unrestrained power, but His word is sufficient to calm them, just as it commands demons to leave those who are possessed. Conflicts and rebellions have their source in Satan, the author of confusion in both the physical and spiritual

worlds. Physical evils in nature and among mankind are among Satan's works that Jesus came to overcome and destroy.

When Jesus speaks to calm the storm, Mark indicates that He addresses more than a meteorological force but a being behind it. When He commands the sea, "Peace, be still!" the Greek phrase means "be muzzled or gagged," as though the storm were a maniac that had to be bound and restrained.

The waves of the world still rage against Christ's disciples, yet they will never be overwhelmed because Christ is in them (Psalm 46:1-3; 93:3-4).

3. What is the result of this miracle? Matthew 8:26-27; Mark 4:39, 41; Luke 8:25.

COMMENT: Jesus' awestruck disciples receive newfound understanding of the power and glory of their Lord and Master. His power definitely impresses them, but His faithfulness, peace, and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) are what truly awed them. This miracle brings them in reverence, wonder, and godly fear before Him. Christ shows that the power of the earthly elements is dwarfed by the mighty word of the Lord, and it stirs them deeply.

This reveals what the full measure of God's Spirit can accomplish through a faithful human being. Jesus explains to His disciples in Mark 11:23-24:

For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

We should understand that this promise stands firm for us too, if we ask according to the will of God (1 John 5:14-15).

—Martin G. Collins