

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Beating to Windward

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Christians are often depicted in Scripture as on a journey through the wilderness of this world to the Kingdom of God. In Ephesians 4:14, the apostle Paul places this journey on the turbulent waters of a sea, where the winds can rise to blow us off course. However, contrary winds can be weathered by tacking against them, allowing us to make forward progress toward our destination despite the opposition.

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**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
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**CIRCULATION**  
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**PROOFREADERS**  
PHYLLIS FORD  
CINDY HINDS  
DIANE MCIVER

## CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

MARK BAKER  
JAMES BEAUBELLE  
TED E. BOWLING  
BILL CHERRY  
DAN ELMORE  
CLYDE FINKLEA  
MIKE FORD  
RONNY H. GRAHAM

WILLIAM GRAY  
PAT HIGGINS  
DAVID F. MAAS  
GARY MONTGOMERY  
BILL ONISICK  
GEOFF PRESTON  
JOHN REID  
MARK SCHINDLER  
CHARLES WHITAKER

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## contact

**UNITED STATES:** P.O. Box 471846, Charlotte, NC 28247-1846 U.S.A.  
803.802.7075 / 803.802.7089 FAX

**CARIBBEAN:** P.O. Box 7004, St. Anns Post Office, St. Anns Rd, St. Anns, Trinidad, West Indies

**FRANCE:** Amicale Ruben, 370 Hameau du Bourg L'Abbé, La Mailleraye-sur-Seine, 76940 France

**THE PHILIPPINES:** No. 13 Mt. Daho, Amityville, Rodriguez, Rizal 1860 The Philippines

## web

<http://www.cgg.org>  
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# Living by Faith and Humility

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The author of Hebrews writes:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:12-13)

In this series, which is covering elements necessary to provide a firm foundation for consistently living by faith, we have seen that, first and foremost, we must have a solid perception that, not only does God exist, but He is absolutely supreme in ruling over His creation. Not only is He supreme in power, authority, and intelligence, but He is also supreme in all the attributes of His character: in love, wisdom, mercy, kindness, patience, goodness, purpose, etc. Finally, He is supreme in His plan for working it all out, even to the point that His awareness of each of us is also supreme.

The book of Hebrews focuses on Christ’s greatness. For example, it shows that He is greater than Moses, Joshua, and Aaron. The comparisons with these great figures from the past are drawn in part to enable us to compare His greatness with our

deficiencies and needs. This is important because, from these comparisons, we receive guidance in locating our proper place in our relationship with Him.

We must answer to Him for our conduct. In the previous article, we found that, in attempting to meet that responsibility, we are by nature resistant to Him. We resist submission to Him, and this resistance is generated by our pride. The Bible has much to say about pride, and it is almost totally bad.

Psalm 73 associates pride and evil as so closely related that they go together like hand and glove. In fact, it uses the illustration that pride is like an ornament around the wicked person’s neck, as though he wears it proudly. The Bible says so much about the connection between pride and evil that overcoming it seems to be an impossible task.

Pride’s influence is in us because of contact with the evil spirits inhabiting this world and with the systems that they have created. Nevertheless, as the previous article concluded, we began to see that pride is neutralized by humility. Yet, unlike pride, humility does not come naturally; it must, in the Bible’s terminology, be “put on” (Colossians 3:12). It must be added to our character by means of God’s Spirit and *consistent, conscious decisions* to submit to God because we love Him, because we are sincerely seeking to be like Him, and because we greatly desire to glorify Him.

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In this manner, by God's power and our cooperation, humility is *created* as part of our character, enabling us to grow stronger toward overcoming pride's evil influences. In this article, we will explore humility as part of the chain of elements necessary to supply support for us to live by faith.

## One Is Absorbed, One Is Created

Because of exposure to Satan and this world, pride is within us almost from birth. Humility is most definitely not that way but is a created attribute of character. A carnal humility can be created within a child living under the supervision of loving parents who making the effort to train their children in good character qualities. In like manner, spiritual humility is most definitely a developed characteristic because of contact with God and our willing cooperation. James 4:6-10 asserts:

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Once we understand some of the Bible's instruction regarding spiritual humility, this clear series of *commands* becomes important. They must be commanded because these actions are not natural to human nature and because the pride dwelling within us is so strong and influential.

Humbling ourselves is commanded just as surely as resisting the Devil, cleansing our hands, purifying our hearts, lamenting, mourning, and weeping. This means that humbling ourselves in submission to God is a choice that can—indeed, must—be exercised. Humility is important enough that God repeats this command briefly in Proverbs 3:34 and in I Peter 5:5-6.

Humility is dealt with somewhat differently in each testament, but at the same time, there is a tight similarity between the two treatments. In the Old Testament, it is shown less as a good quality of an honorable person's character than as a condition or situation an individual finds himself in because of poverty, affliction, or persecution. In this approach, a humble person is one in a humble circumstance.

In other words, the humble person has been brought low in a social sense. This perspective provides an understandable illustration that visibly portrays the

more important spiritual attitude of the heart. People in a humble circumstance project degrees of attitude and conduct that may even approach obsequiousness. Obsequiousness is portrayed to an extreme in the movie *Lord of the Rings*, when the conniving counselor, Wormtongue, is confronted and embarrassingly corrected by Gandalf.

To be obsequious is to be perceived as excessively obedient, servile, or even groveling, as illustrated in Proverbs 22:7: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." The borrower has put himself or has been put into a position of dependence upon the whims or good graces of the lender, so he must bend his will to the one with the power. Liberties that he formerly had are lost. He cannot act as he pleases. He now feels obligated and constrained to a degree that he was not before.

As his outlook on life narrows, the borrower makes sure he treats the lender with deference. He certainly does not want to ruffle the lender's feathers, as he wants to be able to retain what he still has left of his former dignity. Thus, as his circumstance diminishes, the borrower almost automatically becomes beggarly to some degree, perhaps even fawning in his mannerisms. In most cases, there is a loss of enthusiasm and confidence about life. Being humbled changes the way a person approaches life.

Thus, the manner in which the Old Testament illustrates humility provides a mental picture of what the term means to a Christian's approach to life. This is good. However, we must understand that the Old Testament in no way considers humility as weakness or bad. It just does not emphasize or portray it as the New Testament does.

## A Positive Matter of the Heart

How does the New Testament present humility? According to commentator William Barclay, the classical Greek language did not even have a word for humility that included no sense of shame. The root of the word the apostles used literally means "to depress," a very expressive word. To the Greeks, humility indicated servility and slavishness. This may have been because Greeks looked down upon anyone who acted in humility as not being an upstanding person of good character. Culturally, it was evil, shameful behavior, as to them it exhibited someone untrustworthy. At best, they would consider the person to be a wimp because they admired people who aggressively took charge, commanding others about.

The Christian approach is entirely different. We will consider a few scriptures that give a description of the way humility enhances one's character.

**Psalm 113:4-7:** “For He is high above the nations; His glory is far greater than the heavens. Who can be compared with God enthroned on high? Far below Him are heavens and the earth; He stoops to look, and lifts the poor from the dirt” (*The Living Bible*).

**Psalm 138:6:** “Yet though He is so great, He respects the humble, but proud men must keep their distance” (*The Living Bible*).

Both of these psalms picture God as being of awesome power, but He holds His power in check to achieve a greater good. Rather than destroy through imperious self-centeredness, He pities and builds with gentle, understanding kindness.

**Matthew 20:25-28** shows New Covenant leadership: “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

**Matthew 11:29** makes Jesus’ insistence on humility exceedingly clear: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Matthew 11:29 is a direct command from the same God described in Psalms, though here He is acting as a Man. His example and commands regarding this continues to be the way Christians are to follow.

Humility is not a weak, cringing approach to life. It is not a denial of power but the deliberate controlling of power to accomplish a greater good. It comes into proper use when a converted person deliberately utilizes a servant approach rather than a natural, proud, and carnal human-ruler approach. It is the attitude that best promotes good relationships because it neutralizes pride and the damage it can wreak. At the very least, it indicates modesty that grows from a genuine self-evaluation that concludes in the person deeming himself worthless in relation to God and His truth.

## An Important Self-Evaluation

It is important that we understand self-evaluation better. In the Christian sense of humility, the person is not deeming himself worthless because he sees himself as a vile creature full of sin—though to some degree this is true in comparison to God—but because he is merely a creature, absolutely dependent upon God even for every

breath of air. Further, he views himself as possessing nothing intrinsically good, having to receive all good, spiritual things from God as well. Even Jesus had this attitude, and He is our model.

In Matthew 5:3, He states, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” We can gauge how important this quality is to our relationship with God by considering its setting. It appears in the Sermon on the Mount, three whole chapters in which Jesus lays out before His followers the foundational teaching that, if followed, will work to produce a good relationship with God. The foundation of the foundation, we might say, is the Beatitudes, and the very first quality He presents, implying its prime necessity, is poverty of spirit.

Poverty of spirit is the diametric opposite of the haughty, competitive, self-assertive, self-sufficient arrogance of pride that says, “This is the way *I* see it.” Being poor in spirit has absolutely nothing to do with being hard up in one’s circumstances—in fact, it has nothing to do with the physical realm. It is a fundamental part of the spiritual realm, of which God and the purity of His attitudes, character, and truths are the central elements.

“Poor in spirit” is poverty as compared to God’s qualities. It is poverty in terms of Holy Spirit. It is to be destitute in regard to the fruit and power of God’s Holy Spirit of which we all desperately need. This attitude is the product of self-evaluation in which a person, comparing his own to God’s spiritual qualities, finds himself utterly impoverished of any virtue of value to eternal life. Not only that, he finds himself utterly unable, powerless, to help himself to become like God.

Thus, a person who is poor of spirit clearly sees and appreciates his dependence on God both physically and spiritually. Humility is a fruit of the realization of his complete dependence. He is nothing in his own eyes and knows that his proper place is face down in the dust before God.

The apostle John writes in I John 5:4-5, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” The honest recognition of need, the desire to glorify God, and the practice of overcoming leads a called-out one to live by faith.

Jesus Christ is the One that God has assigned to oversee and empower us. He is the Helper and Advocate (I John 2:1) who goes alongside, enabling us to be created in His image. From Him, we draw spiritual strength, and He gives grace to the humble.

King David writes in Psalm 39:5, “. . . every man at his best state is but vapor.” This certainly confirms our spiritual need, but notice what he writes in Psalm 40:16-17 so that we can more clearly see our need:

Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in

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You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, “The LORD be magnified!” But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.

Why is this so important? Remember the borrower standing, hat in hand, before the lender. Can we see the dependence expressed in David’s words, that he is “poor and needy”? A person of this spiritual attitude will seriously and soberly listen to our great Creator and Benefactor, submit to Him, and benefit from so doing.

## Examples of Self-Evaluation

A large number of pointed examples in Scripture will help us evaluate our attitude and character flaws, if we do it honestly. Carefully examine the following:

**Luke 18:13-14:** “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This episode reveals the importance of an honest awareness and admission of one’s flaws.

**Luke 15:18-19:** “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

The prodigal son confesses his worthlessness and willingness to take his punishment.

**I Kings 3:7-8:** “Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.”

At this time in his life, Solomon clearly understood his limitations.

**Isaiah 6:5-7:** “Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it,

and said; ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.’”

Isaiah clearly compared his foul humanity against God’s pure holiness and confessed his desperate need.

**Philippians 3:8-9:** “But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

Paul’s evaluation of his own righteousness against Christ’s left him spiritually poverty-stricken.

**Deuteronomy 8:3:** “So I humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

God clearly declares that He sometimes puts His children through difficult and unfamiliar afflictions to make plain to us what we need from Him.

**II Chronicles 12:11-12:** “And whenever the king entered the house of the LORD, the guard would go and bring them out; then they would take them back to the guardroom. When he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah.”

Many kings of Israel and Judah failed to perceive the connection between humility before God and His blessing. In this episode, Rehoboam reacted well enough to please God, but all too often, other kings failed to perceive their impending doom in warfare and did not humble themselves to call on Him in their need.

## Jesus Shows His Dependence

Despite His great gifting as revealed by the many miracles He performed for people’s benefit, Jesus openly expressed His dependence on God several times. He often deferred to the Father, making clear to those truly following Him that God was supplying the power. John 5:18-19, 30 records an instance of this:

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him,

because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. . . . I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”

Here, Jesus immediately knocks down the claim that He had elevated Himself as equal to God by showing His dependence on God. Though He later claims that He and the Father are one (John 10:30), that oneness does not include absolute equality. Rather, He is showing that because of Their oneness, there is perfect communication between Them, with the Father leading the way by showing Him what to do. Jesus humbly claims no absolute equality with the Father but dependence, despite His doing fantastic things like walking on water, healing, and resurrecting a number of people. John 8:26-28 confirms His dependence:

“I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.” They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then You will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”

In this context, He clearly ties His verbal dependence to the Father to the things He said to them. Then in verse 29, He again points to the perfect cooperation between the two. Jesus is perfectly submissive, and the Father is perfectly responsive.

John 14:8-10 is a clincher:

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? 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.”

Commentators believe Phillip is requesting a theophany, a literal vision of the Father. Jesus refuses with a gentle rebuke, confirming once again His oneness with the Father, and that if one has seen the Son, he has seen spiritual character exactly as if he had seen the Father. His humility again comes to the fore in His claim that He does not speak on His own authority and that His

Father does the works. As a human being, Jesus had absolutely no evil pride coursing through Him or interfering with His thoughts.

John the Baptist is another servant of God who clearly understood his dependence on Him. John 3:25-27, 30 provides this example:

Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!” John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease.”

For a person to be humble, he has to understand and fully accept the realization that came from John’s innermost being. If he does not, pride will arise and muzzle humility by means of a character weakness. Here, John’s disciples feel a measure of jealousy because more people were being attracted to Jesus, and the number of John’s disciples was dwindling. John’s reply to them is one of wisdom. He understands that God assigns a place in the outworking of His purpose to everyone He calls. John knows and accepts that he had no right to lay claim to an honor that had not been given to him from heaven. Instead of envying Jesus’ success, John rejoices that both men’s purposes were being fulfilled.

## God’s Response to Humility

True humility cannot be faked for very long. It will always be revealed even to other people by whether one consistently submits to God. However, the great Creator God who looks on the heart knows immediately. It is a quality of great value. God openly expresses His pleasure in those who humble themselves before Him. Why? Because it not only glorifies Him through the way that they live, but it is also very rewarding to those who do so.

In Isaiah 66:1-2, God plainly states that humility attracts His attention:

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the LORD. “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

It is not at all unusual for men to desire and build beautiful and costly edifices to honor God and to worship within them. However, God makes clear that He prefers to be revered and communed with within the hearts of

*(continued on page 14)*

# Hidden from the Hour of Trial

For those of us who attended the Worldwide Church of God in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, one topic was never far from any conversation: that the church would flee or at some point in time be taken to a Place of Safety and hidden from the Great Tribulation that God's Word prophesies will come on the earth (Matthew 24:21-22). At the time, many of us believed that Herbert W. Armstrong would make an announcement to the church, and we would prepare to go to this place.

Mr. Armstrong had visited many of the world leaders throughout the Middle East, and we would wonder if one day he would give King Hussein of Jordan a phone call and off we would go to the ancient city of Petra. This expectation was always hanging around in our lives, and as each holy day approached, we would ask ourselves, "Will this be the day? Will something happen that will precipitate the church being taken away to her place?" (see Revelation 12:14).

Some of the same things that we heard in the news back then are being trumpeted again, and the threat of all-out war in the Middle East seems to be more certain. In 1967, Israel fought the Six-Day War against its Arab foes, and the rest of the world suffered through a three-month oil embargo. Again, in 1973, another oil embargo, this one a consequence of the Yom Kippur War, sent oil prices higher and our economy into recession, raising tensions with the OPEC nations.

Today, with its threats of shutting down shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz, Iran has raised tensions, as well as oil prices, at a time when the world economy teeters on the brink of collapse. For the most part, Iran has ignored threats from the West,

and against further warnings, it intends to conduct military exercises in the Persian Gulf in February. Unlike the crises of forty years ago, Iran now has the technology to weaponize nuclear fuel. Are Iran's leaders afraid that they will be overthrown, just as the leaders of Iraq, Egypt, and Libya have been, and perhaps Syria will be? One wonders how far they will go to preserve their positions.

## *KEPT FROM TRIBULATION*

It has been 26 years since the death of Herbert Armstrong, and many of the world leaders that he visited have since died, like King Hussein of Jordan, or been overthrown, like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. Even the Worldwide Church of God is no longer in existence! So much has happened in the intervening years that we may question if things have changed prophetically.

Do we still believe there will be a Place of Safety? Do we still believe that the church will be taken out of the turmoil of the Tribulation and hidden? For a long time, we held an underlying belief that being part of the Worldwide Church of God meant that we were Philadelphian Christians, which meant that,

according to Revelation 3:10, we would be kept from the hour of trial. Yet, that church organization is gone! So where are the Philadelphians?

How many of us believed that, if we could just make it to the Place of Safety, we were okay? In those days, where was our spiritual focus? Where is it now?

One of the prophecies of Ezekiel—Ezekiel 5:1-3, which we understand to be written to the end-time church—speaks of “somebody” being kept in a safe place. Initially, Ezekiel is commanded to shave his head and beard and divide the hair into three parts, and he is instructed to use a balance to weigh them equally. One third is to be burned with fire, another third is to be struck with the sword, and the final third is to be scattered to the wind—but he is told to “take a small number of them [from the final third] and bind them in the edge of your garment” (Ezekiel 5:3). The prophet divides out four sections of hair, but the one to be bound in his garment is a much smaller portion.

In Revelation 2-3 in the messages to the last four churches—Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—Jesus mentions His coming, but in the messages to the first three, He does not. This certainly seems to imply that the four He warns about His return are still around in some form when He comes. Could the four churches possibly coincide with the four sections of hair?

Whether they do or not, Philadelphia is the only one that God promises to protect: “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). “Keep” here may relate to the word “bind” in Ezekiel 5:3, as this Hebrew word means “to bind,” “to keep in a secret place,” “to guard,” “to look after,” and “to hide,” among others.

## HIDING

This final meaning, “to hide,” bears consideration.

The idea of hiding is not foreign to the Bible, as the Old Testament mentions it over 200 times and the New Testament, 35 times. More often than not, people hide because of guilt, shame, or fear, but hiding can be a courageous act or a wise move. The idea occurs in the Bible very early with Adam and Eve hiding from God in Genesis 3:8. Tamar hid her identity from Judah (Genesis 38:14-15). Many of the prophets found themselves in hiding, for instance, Elijah hid from Jezebel (I Kings 19:1-3).

Was anyone more adept at hiding than David? He is one of the most courageous men who ever lived, yet he seems to have spent a great of his time running and hiding from someone. He often hid from Saul, and later in life, he ran from Absalom.

Even God hides! After killing his brother Abel, Cain lost favor with God, and he knew that God would hide His face from him (Genesis 4:14). God has hidden His

truth from men. Our Savior Jesus was not above hiding to escape the crowds or from danger (John 8:59; 12:36). The day of His return has been hidden so that no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36).

Consider Moses for a moment. Moses was at first hidden by his parents, but after that, he was brought up right under Pharaoh’s nose! Pharaoh had issued an order to kill all the male Hebrew children, yet this child was reared right in his own house. Did Pharaoh know that Moses was Hebrew? Whatever the case, God hid Moses right in front of them! Perhaps this explains why Moses fled for the desert after he killed an Egyptian, if he was afraid that his Hebrew identity would be revealed, and he would face execution (Exodus 2:11-15).

The Place of Safety is where God will hide His faithful children at the end. There are as many ideas about where the Place of Safety will be as there are about when the church will flee there. Some believe it is somewhere in America—perhaps Utah or Texas or Colorado, and even a few weeks ago, someone suggested the North Carolina mountains, which would be nice and convenient for those of us already living in the Carolinas. Some have suggested that God will protect us wherever we are, and God could certainly do that if He chose.

However, examining Ezekiel 5:3 a little further brings out the detail that God tells the prophet to bind the small pinch of hair *in the hem of his garment*. Because my mother worked as a seamstress most of her life, I have seen many hems, and they are very small compared to the size of the garment. In addition, when a person binds or sews something in a hem, it is secure; it cannot come out. We should also note that Ezekiel was not only a prophet, but he was also a priest (Ezekiel 1:3). So, putting this all together, Ezekiel’s small bit of hair is bound as a whole and quite securely in a priest’s garment!

## BIBLICAL PATTERNS

What can we glean from God’s patterns throughout the Bible? Abraham left Haran with a huge entourage: his entire family and everyone else in their employ, along with all their possessions. Jacob did the same when he left Laban. Even in slavery while in Egypt, the Israelites dwelled together in the land of Goshen, and when they left, they all left together in one group with everything they had. Will it occur that way again?

Is it mere coincidence that the Bible frequently refers to God’s people as sheep? Sheep are herd animals; they move in flocks. When I was in high school many years ago, I took a Future Farmers of America class. While studying cattle, we learned that a rule of thumb for inspecting a herd was that, if a cow was off to herself, she might warrant a little more attention because this could indicate that she was sick.

# prophecy watch *Hidden from the Hour of Trial*

We have all seen nature programs in which predators are shown hunting (see I Peter 5:8), and it is obvious that they look for the weakest members of the herd or one that is isolated from the rest. Such an animal alone has little chance of fending off a pack of merciless, ravenous beasts. There is strength and security in numbers.

If this pattern of God keeping His people together holds true in the end time, we can conclude that our High Priest, Jesus Christ, will have His chosen people close to Him, safe and secure in one place.

However, our focus should not be just on making it to a Place of Safety. Notice Ezekiel 5:4 again: “Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.” If this prophecy does indeed describe God’s elect being taken to a Place of Safety, verse 4 shows that part of those who are hidden at first will be removed to face severe testing, probably persecution and martyrdom!

This is downright scary! It reveals that our focus must be, not on making it to a Place of Safety to save our skins, but on being worthy to enter the Kingdom of God at Christ’s return. That is where true, permanent security is.

One of the more disturbing things that we have heard through the years since the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God is about church members judging other groups, declaring that this group is Laodicean, that group is Sardis, this other group has to be Thyatira. In addition, some groups say that, if you are not with us, you are not Philadelphian and so are headed straight into the Tribulation. Yet, a reading of the messages to the seven churches shows that these judgmental people cannot really know which of the seven churches they belong to.

Jesus says that the Laodiceans are blind and do not even know it! Would a true Philadelphian show so little love for his brethren in judging them so harshly? If we were to warn a church member who was showing signs of being spiritually dead, as those in Sardis are described, they would probably disagree! Would a Thyatiran own up to his spiritual corruption?

We have been told for many years that the church in the end time would have all seven characteristics in it. Who can say with any certainty which attitude is dominant in any group? The last time I went to get a haircut, I paid a little more attention to the hair that was cut off, and lying there on the floor; it all looked the same!

## WHO DECIDES?

One more detail about the prophecy in Ezekiel 5 needs to be mentioned: It is Ezekiel, the priest, who

divides the hair. In this case, he seems to be a type of Christ, our High Priest. This squares with what we see in Revelation 2-3, where it is Jesus Christ who judges the churches, and He decides who is who and who goes where.

Recall that in Revelation 3:10 Jesus promises to keep those who persevere from the hour of trial. What are they persevering in? Verse 8 tells us that, though they have only a little strength, they “have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” These are people who take following God seriously and do not give in an inch to this world. Jesus will be looking for these traits in those He chooses to protect from tribulation.

This subject would not be complete without a quick look at Zephaniah 2:2-3. Most people do not realize that the name *Zephaniah* means “Yahweh has hidden or protected.” This idea is a major theme of his preaching.

The timing of the book of Zephaniah is also interesting. He prophesied at the same time three other prophets were prophesying as well: Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Nahum. So there were four of them proclaiming God’s warning message at the same time. Do these four correspond to the four sections of hair in Ezekiel 5 and the four “I am coming soon” statements in Revelation 2-3? Time will tell.

Notice the urgent warning and loving advice God gives through Zephaniah:

[The time for repentance is speeding by like chaff whirled before the wind!] Therefore consider, before God’s decree brings forth [the curse upon you], before the time [to repent] is gone like the drifting chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you—yes, before the day of the wrath of the Lord comes upon you!

Seek the Lord [inquire for Him, inquire of Him, and require Him as the foremost necessity of your life], all you humble of the land who have acted in compliance with His revealed will and have kept His commandments; seek righteousness, seek humility [inquire for them, require them as vital]. It may be you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger. (*The Amplified Bible*)

The time seems to be drawing ever closer. God tells us that His judgment will begin at His sanctuary (see Ezekiel 9:6; Revelation 11:1), and from there, He says in Ezekiel 5:4, the fire will go out to all Israel! God will decide who is hidden from the hour of trial, and perhaps it will be you!

—Ronny H. Graham

# ready answer

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

## Prevailing Winds

*“. . . that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men . . .”*  
—Ephesians 4:14)

It is common for people to take the easy way, the path of least resistance. They allow themselves to be blown along with the prevailing cultural wind, whether in fashion, sports, art, music, politics, or sadly, ethics and morals. Taking no thought to their course or direction, they follow along with the current trends because it is easier to “go with the flow.”

When bad things happen or when they realize that they have ended up somewhere that they never imagined they would be, instead of deeply considering the course of their lives, many merely shrug their shoulders and call it “fate” or “circumstance.” In doing this, they show that they are ruled by the swirling winds of society around them. Rather than exercising control over their lives, they allow those trends to direct their journeys through life. They simply refuse to set a course, man the tiller, and make for a set destination.

At one time or another, we, too, have been affected by what is happening in the world. We have allowed ourselves to be driven by the prevailing winds of this society and its standards. Whether we admit it or not, we have been affected by our culture’s television, movies, fashion, politics, and even religion.

We were all young once. As young people, we wanted to “fit in” with our friends and peers, so we followed along with whatever was “in vogue” at the time. We wanted to be “popular” at school, so we wore the trendy styles of the day. Remember bell-bottom jeans and leisure suits, mullets and big hair, platform shoes and ripped jeans? Enough said.

### Charting a New Course

We have been called to come out of this world (Revelation 18:4). God wants us to find a course contrary to the prevailing and normal way of life that seems right to those in the world. As Proverbs 14:12 tells us,

# ready answer *Prevailing Winds*

“There is a way which seems right to a man *and* appears straight before him, but at the end of it is the way of death” (*The Amplified Bible*). History is strewn with examples of human ideas that did not end well.

In his book *Intimacy with the Almighty*, Charles Swindoll quotes “The Winds of Fate” by American author and poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919):

One ship drives east and another drives west  
With the self-same winds that blow,  
’Tis the set of the sails  
And not the gales  
That tell them the way to go.

The prevailing winds of this Satan-inspired world (II Corinthians 4:4) sweep millions along in its intense velocity. It is beating against us all the time, and the struggle to resist is wearying. Out of sheer exhaustion, some give in to these winds and conform to their whispered suggestions. It is especially easy to succumb to them when surrounded by peers, employers, friends, and neighbors who want us to follow them and their way of thinking. It is just far less stressful to go along.

However, we are not to conform to the course that the world takes (Romans 12:2). Instead, we are to set our sails to follow a different line, obeying God and rejecting the popular trends of this world when they disregard His way of life. This means that we must take the time to consider and decide where we want to end up. What is our destination? Where is our home port? Then, we have to learn to make right choices so that we will one day arrive there.

The force that is in the world—dominant, popular, and widespread—is contrary to God. If we desire to obey God, we must face it and overcome it, having enough strength to endure its ceaseless, insistent pressure to return to its easy lifestyle. How can we prevail against the dominating wind of this world?

In Ephesians 4:14, the apostle Paul encourages us, writing that God has given us gifts of His grace to equip us so “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. . . .” He is referring to a process of spiritual maturity that will keep us solidly grounded and on a steady course to the Kingdom of God.

Two of the phrases Paul uses in this passage deserve expounding by commentator Albert Barnes:

**[That we henceforth be no more children]** . . . children have other characteristics besides simplicity and docility. They are often changeable (Matt 11:17); they are credulous, and are influenced easily by others, and led astray. In these

respects, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be no longer children but urges them to put on the characteristics of manhood [adulthood]; and especially to put on the firmness in religious opinion which became maturity of life. . . .

**[And carried about with every wind of doctrine]** With no firmness; no settled course; no helm. The idea is that of a vessel on the restless ocean, that is tossed about with every varying wind, and that has no settled line of sailing.

As we know, children have short attention spans; they change directions seemingly in an instant. They will begin to play with one toy only to be distracted by another a moment later. A parent will tell them to do something, and the intention to obey escapes them as soon as something else comes up.

While Jesus tells us that, in our conversion, we are to “become as little children” (Matthew 18:3), He is not referring to this kind of simplicity, changeability, and distractibility. Putting these two admonitions together, Christians are to be mature in their convictions and faith, yet open and humble as little children. In this way, they are receptive to God’s truth and the guidance of His Spirit, yet sure and uncompromising in their beliefs.

## Storms of Life

As Paul says in Ephesians 4:14, to get the upper hand, men use trickery, cunning, and deceit to fool others into moving in the direction that they want them to go. Employing crafty and calculating “skills,” they deceive and misdirect the unaware down a path that they never intended to go. They may speak smooth words—what they propose sounds great—but the consequences are destructive. Not all is as it seems.

Appearances can be very deceiving. A piece of fruit may look delicious on the outside, but the inside may be rotten. Consider a lake, for instance, which can seem calm and peaceful from the solidity of the shore, but from a boat on the water, a person feels the power of the currents and the violence of the wind that seems to blow almost a gale. A sea may be tranquil, with gentle breezes and water as smooth as glass, yet suddenly, it can be whipped into a dangerous and violent storm.

Matthew 8:23-27 contains the story of Jesus and His disciples weathering such a storm on the Sea of Galilee:

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples

came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

What did Jesus do while the small fishing boat pitched in the midst of a roaring storm? The winds whipped and churned the sea, and the waves crashed over the ship, creating intense fear in all aboard—except in Him. He was at peace—sleeping!—and His mind was at ease. Jesus’ faith was mature and strong, not able to be “tossed to and fro.” He knew how safe it was to be in God’s protective hands.

When He was awakened, He reprimanded the disciples by saying, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” They had allowed themselves to see only the terror of the storm, forgetting that their Creator—One who had power over all nature—was lying contentedly asleep. They did not reckon that God would not allow His Son to perish like this, since that would ruin His plan. All they saw was the storm. They could not see the malevolent spirit behind the storm and that the storm was intended to blow them off course, to weaken their faith, and to divert them from their planned destination.

What about us? Do we allow the fierce winds that blow around us to toss us violently about, as if we were sitting in a dinghy on a stormy ocean, bobbing on the waves like a cork? Just remember that, when sail is put to the wind, even a dinghy can be successfully steered to its intended destination.

## Tacking Against the Wind

We are frequently admonished to “search” the Scripture to seek out the truth that God reveals by His Spirit. We are urged to know what we believe and why. God wants us to have faith and conviction to the point of even giving up our lives in obedience to Him and His truth.

We must carefully examine God’s Word and learn what is true. And having found it, we should adhere to it always, not yielding an inch of ground when supposedly new teaching comes around from the mouth of smooth talkers. Not all church members have stood firm, as we know from experience. Some, making poor choices about what “truth” they will adhere to, have been blown off course, sailing away from their original destination—the Kingdom of God. They will, of course, end up in a different port.

This may be what Paul is referring to in Ephesians 4:14—that some members of the church in Ephesus were not following Christ’s path. They had become liberal and lax, no longer having the conviction to the truth fixed in their hearts and minds. The doctrines and

truth they once held were no longer resolute in their minds. Their faith was weakening, and in consequence, they began to yield to every new opinion and submit to the guidance of every new teacher.

So, as it is brought out in Ecclesiastes 1:9, “There is nothing new under the sun.” What has happened in the past happens in the present.

We must really *know* the truth of God, believe it, and be fully convinced of it in true faith. In addition, we have to have our glorious destination as our goal and steer a steady course toward it.

When faced with the prevailing wind, a sailor can “beat to windward,” a technique that involves a maneuver called “tacking.” Tacking, also called “coming about,” is turning the boat at an angle to run against the wind so that one travels sideways in order to make forward progress. It takes some work and skill, but one can actually proceed on course to his destination.

It is a matter of control. Instead of being blown freely in the direction of the prevailing wind, one can gain control of his direction. Once again, it is the set of our sails, not the prevailing wind that determines our course. We have a Captain who knows the seas and the winds and how to get us to His port.

Christopher Columbus once said: “By prevailing over all obstacles and distractions, one may unfailingly arrive at his chosen goal or destination.”

This is what we have been taught for years. We are to gain control of our lives, to learn God’s way, to be obedient to His laws and statutes, and to have faith and conviction. This path will lead us to become mature Christians.

All of this is based on God’s truth. Jesus tells us plainly in John 14:6 that He is the truth. There is no falseness in Him. He also says in John 17:17-20:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they may also be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. . . .

We are those about whom Jesus prayed to the Father. We believe because God has chosen that we understand His truth through the words spoken and written for us to hear and see by those who have gone before us. These words of truth build our faith and hope in Christ.

Therefore, we need to have mature faith, not to be like children blown with every wind of doctrine. Let us do all we can to stay on course, using all the tools God supplies and doing our little part in the process. Let us sail towards His Kingdom in faith and not allow the prevailing winds of this world to distract us from reaching it.

—Gary Montgomery

# personal *Living by Faith and Humility*

(continued from page 7)

men. This gets His positive attention, motivating Him to respond in loving kindness. When this occurs, it cannot be anything but good for those who humbly seek Him.

Is any statement regarding humility's value more clearly rewarding than James 4:6-7, 10?

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Salvation is by grace through faith. It is also the key to all obedience and growth in God's way of life. Can anything be more valuable? Humility is a key to obtaining it as a gift from God.

One more passage from the Old Testament will help to show God's favorable and warm respect for the humble person:

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6-8)

Notice carefully the comparisons Micah uses to illustrate the value of humility in God's eyes, especially the ascending value of each illustration. Calves for sacrifices are in the plural, indicating more than one sacrifice at a time when even one calf would have been an offering of considerable monetary value. A thousand rams might be what a king would offer. Obviously, so many rams are a very valuable gift, but we should already be asking ourselves, "Is this the right way to impress God?" Ten thousand rivers of olive oil would equal the value of the offerings of many kings of many nations. Does that meet the standard God sets? One's own firstborn is without doubt the most precious gift of all. Yet, again, the implication is that this is not what God wants.

What follows is one of the truly great statements in the entire Bible. Micah names three great acts of love for God and fellow man that pave the way for a good relationship with Him: 1) To be righteous and absolutely fair to all regardless of their status in life. 2) To show kindness freely and willingly to others. 3) To live humbly in conscious fellowship of the greatness and sovereignty of God. These three actions will work to glorify God so that He

enables those acting thus to neutralize their pride.

Our service to God should not be given to Him with the primary purpose to "get" things selfishly from Him. Our purpose should always be to honor and glorify Him through what He is doing in our lives. Nevertheless, God is most certainly not against providing us with wonderful gifts as we humbly submit to Him with pure motives.

I Kings 3:10-13 provides us with an outstanding example from Solomon's life:

The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days."

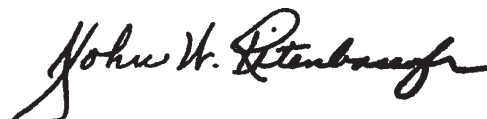
Solomon humbly asked for help to honor God in judging the people of Israel, and he was rewarded with riches and honor.

Proverbs 22:4 also promises riches and honor, as well as life, to the humble individual, but II Chronicles 7:14 promises two additional and immensely important benefits to everyone seeking a humble relationship with God: forgiveness and the hearing of our prayers. "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Godly humility is not difficult to understand, but it is difficult to accomplish because of human nature's ever-present resistance to our great Creator and Savior. This quality requires us to be constantly aware of the need to glorify God, and the fear of God is a necessary and complementary element to help keep us aware.

Among other characteristics in which God is supreme is judgment, so we must also seriously consider His sense of justice. God's justice helps us to perceive the reality that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The next issue's article will explore our need to understand that God means exactly what He says, even though He may at times say it symbolically.

In Christian love,



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## Christians and Evolution

Most Bible-believing Christians are not particularly interested in—and perhaps not even aware of—the fact that February 12 is the birthday of Charles Darwin, originator of the Theory of Evolution. To honor him for his “vast contribution to science,” an atheist named Robert Stephens concocted what he called “Darwin Day,” to be kept on Darwin’s birthday each year. In 2006, evolutionary biologist Michael Zimmerman began what was then known as “Evolution Sunday,” but which is now called “Evolution Weekend” to accommodate those who do not keep Sunday as a day of worship.

Backing Evolution Weekend is an organization called the Clergy Letter Project. This effort encourages clergy from all religious faiths to sign a letter stating that they have accepted “evolutionary theory and have embraced it as a core component of human knowledge, fully harmonious with religious faith.” Now for the potentially dismaying part of all this: 13,000 clergy—mostly American and mostly from Christian denominations—have signed the letter, and about 550 churches have planned to participate in Evolution Weekend this year.

While this may seem to some like the downfall of Christianity, it is not as bad as it looks. However, it does show that secular humanism—pushed as it is in the public schools and universities—is slithering into nominal Christianity and creating in too many minds a false synthesis of evolution and Scripture.

As many expositors have shown, the observable principles and facts of science are compatible with biblical Christianity, but evolution contradicts the Bible at nearly every juncture. Pure science is based on the pursuit of knowledge—call them “facts” or “truth”—but unfortunately, what scientists observe must be interpreted by fallible human beings, all of whom, Christian or secular, are biased and limited in knowledge, experience, and time.

In particular, to be confirmed, the science of origins requires the acceptance of reliable eyewitness testimony—which is available only in the Bible, if one believes it—along with expertise in comparing that testimony with present, observable scientific findings. But humanists do not accept the Bible, dismissing divine testimony and relying on their own suppositions and reason, and thus we have evolution.

In this vein, Dr. Jeffrey DeYoe, a clergyman, states:

If it is through literal devotion to stories such as these [Bible accounts] that we believe we are going to find true knowledge of our Creator, we are going to be sadly disappointed. This is the sin of Creationism (aka Intelligent Design) in Church and Society today: The belief that through the limited storytelling of an ancient people we think we have in our possession everything God wants us to know.

This hardly sounds like something a Christian minister would say!

Of course, creationists do not believe that the Bible contains all knowledge, but what it does contain about science and the origin of all things is true. Christians accept what the Bible says

because Jesus tells us to live by God’s every word (Matthew 4:4) and because “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Timothy 3:16). We can also easily see that Jesus, being the Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), believed and taught the seven-day creation (Matthew 19:4-6) and the account of Noah’s Flood (Luke 17:27).

To believe evolution, then, is to deny Christ, His mission, and His message. In fact, the account of Adam and Eve and their sin has a direct correlation with the reason Jesus had to come as a Man and die to redeem us from our sins. In that account, in Genesis 3:15, is the first prophecy recorded in the Bible, foretelling the coming of a Savior to defeat the serpent, Satan the Devil. Therefore, Christians who believe in evolution have no excuse (see Romans 1:18-20).

Earlier, we saw that 13,000 members of the clergy have signed the Clergy Letter Project statement, but it is really not as bad as that number seems to suggest. While 13,000 men and women of the cloth professing their devotion to evolution seems high, there are well over a half-million clergy in the U.S. alone. Thus, these humanist ministers represent no more than 2.6% of all ministers in the nation.

Additionally, the roughly 550 churches planning to participate in Evolution Weekend is down nearly 50% from the high of 1049 in 2009. There are about 270,000 congregations in America, so 550 churches represent only 0.2% of churches, a quite insignificant number.

Further, we should note the kind of churches these 550 are: the most liberal, leftist, and humanist churches in the nation. Most hail from the liberal wings of the mainline Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches. Seventy-nine of them list Unitarian Universalist as their umbrella denomination, and 74, United Church of Christ. Three are Metropolitan Community churches, a sect built upon homosexuality. Forty-four are not even Christian! Of these, one is Muslim and the remainder claim Reform Judaism, the most liberal branch of Judaism, as their denomination.

Other non-church organizations plan to celebrate Evolution Weekend too. These include the Gardenia Center (“bringing the metaphysical community together”), the Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism, and the Officers of Avalon (“providing a community and network for Pagan first responders”).

How true the adage, “You are known by the company you keep”!

Evolution Weekend is confined, thankfully, to a small number of ultra-liberal churches and secular humanistic organizations. However, we need to be aware that anti-God groups are always pushing to advance their agendas, and clearly, they have made significant headway over the past few generations in America and abroad. Their influence will only increase as Christ’s return nears, so God’s people must stand firm (Ephesians 6:13).

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

## The Miracles of Jesus Christ

### *Healing a Deaf-Mute (Part One)*

Only Mark records Jesus Christ's healing of the deaf-mute man (Mark 7:31-37), though Matthew refers to it generally (Matthew 15:29-31). After His special journey to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, where He healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, Jesus made a circuit of the Decapolis, ten cities to which the Roman conquerors had granted special privileges about a century earlier. He found a tremendous need for healing in that region.

Matthew's account relates that, when Jesus returned from Tyre and Sidon, throngs of people brought their sick—the lame, blind, deaf, mute, and maimed—to be healed by Him. Of these, Mark perhaps selects the deaf-mute man's case to record because of associated incidents that had not occurred on any other occasion.

He recounts that the man was deaf and had a speech impediment. Deafness can isolate and exclude the sufferer from society. Evidently, this man was not born deaf because, if he had been, he would have been unable to speak at all. No mention is made of how he lost his hearing; possibly a disease or an accident was responsible.

His difficulty in speaking indicates that he was not completely mute, but after Christ's touch, he could speak plainly, which may indicate that his handicap cannot be directly traced to a spiritual source of evil (Matthew 9:32).



1. What do the man's two physical handicaps represent? Mark 7:32.

**COMMENT:** His deafness was absolute; he could hear nothing. This greatly limited him, especially in those days when sign language and other communication helps did not exist as prominently as they do today. The poor had no access to speech therapists, and the medical practices of the time offered no hope at all.

His deafness also put him in danger, as people use their hearing more than they realize to avoid harm. Spiritual deafness is no different: When we cannot hear or refuse to hear the Word of God, we endanger ourselves greatly, not hearing the warnings of God's ministers against the enticement and pull of sin and its curses and penalties. While physical deafness is a very limiting disability, it does not normally lead to death, but spiritual deafness is infinitely worse, leading to eternal death.

The man was almost entirely mute except for a speech impediment that kept him from communicating with others verbally. The word "impediment" in Mark 7:32 does not mean he could not make any sounds but that he had great difficulty in speaking. He could make sounds with his mouth, but they came across as gibberish. Mark's account states that Jesus "loosed" the man's tongue, which may indicate that the problem was a birth defect.

Deafness and dumbness are often associated because humans learn to speak by hearing. A person who cannot hear his own voice or the voices of others has difficulty with pronunciation. If a person becomes deaf later in life, he will be able to speak much better than one born deaf or who loses his hearing as a child.

The relationship between the inability to speak and deafness pictures some of sin's effects. Those who are deaf to the Word of God will have great difficulty speaking properly of spiritual matters. Even the most educated sinner betrays an impediment in his speech as soon as spiritual truths are introduced, but when he opens his ears to receive the truth, his spiritual speech will improve greatly

and continually. Just as Jesus physically healed the man to enable him to hear, He must spiritually heal us so that we can understand God's Word (see John 8:47; I Corinthians 2:9-14).

In one sense, a person who cannot speak could be said to have an advantage over others since, "for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). However, we will be judged by our thoughts as well: "For out of the abundance of the heart [the mind] the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

2. What lessons regarding service does the presenting of the deaf-mute man to Christ teach? Mark 7:32.

**COMMENT:** The phrase "they brought to Him" describes others presenting the man to Christ. From this, we can learn several lessons of service. Those who presented the man to Christ were involved in a work everyone should emulate, that is, leading people to Christ as the solution to their needs. This work involves compassion and sacrifice. It is not proselytizing, per se, as it is done most effectively by being a true witness of God's way of life.

We must have compassion for people needing help, as those who brought the deaf-mute man to Christ had, otherwise they would not have gone out of their way to bring him. In addition, bringing others to Christ shows a willingness to pay the cost, as it is a sacrifice of time, effort, and sometimes money—and often brings criticism and ridicule from the world. It may not be an act that brings prestige in the eyes of the world, but it is wonderful in God's sight if His name is promoted and glorified.

The men in this scenario simply took a man to Christ for healing. Our work may be as simple as turning a person's attention to an article or sermon, or in this Internet age, showing him the church's website to make him aware of spiritual solutions to his problems. While these efforts can lead people to Christ, the most effective way is to be a true witness of God's way of life by living righteously (Psalm 37:30; Proverbs 10:20-21, 31-32; Revelation 20:4).

—Martin G. Collins